



Committee of the Whole Report

For the Meeting of November 25, 2021

To: Committee of the Whole **Date:** November 22, 2021
From: Thomas Soulliere, Director of Parks, Recreation and Facilities
Subject: Community Garden Licences of Occupation and Delegation Bylaw

RECOMMENDATION

That Council:

- A) Authorize the renewal of licences of occupation for five-year terms for the following community gardens, subject to the publication of notices as required by the Community Charter, on terms satisfactory to the Director of Parks, Recreation and Facilities and in a form satisfactory to the City Solicitor:
1. *Montreal Street Community Garden* in James Bay (155,165,175, 185 Montreal Street and 210 Dobinson Street)
 2. *Rockland Woodland Garden* in Rockland (1059 Craigdarroch Road)
 3. *Neighbourhood Garden of All Sorts* in James Bay (212 Niagara Street)
 4. *Cecelia Ravine Community Garden* in Burnside (471 Cecelia Road)
- B) Direct staff to amend the Delegation Bylaw to enable the Director of Parks, Recreation and Facilities to approve licence agreement renewals for all existing community gardens, in a form satisfactory to the City Solicitor.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is to seek Council approval for the renewal of licences of occupation for four community gardens.

The Community Gardens Policy outlines the process for the creation and management of community garden sites on City-owned lands. These gardens help facilitate positive community experiences, including educational and social opportunities for residents. Community association and non-profit organizations play an active role in designing the garden features, organizing events, providing signage, and developing place-making features.

The number of community gardens has remained relatively consistent, with additional gardens also being approved on an annual basis. Since the introduction of the community garden program, Council has approved all requests for licences of occupation which have been presented. These arrangements are generally not complicated given the extensive public engagement required in advance. Meanwhile, the report drafting and presentation process for such approvals from Council has been identified as an area for potential streamlining. To better utilize limited administrative staff capacity, Council is asked to consider delegating authority to approve the renewal of existing licences to leadership staff.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to seek Council approval to execute licences of occupation for four existing community gardens: Montreal Street Community Garden, the Neighbourhood Garden of All Sorts, Cecelia Ravine Community Garden, and the Rockland Woodland Garden.

In addition, staff seek Council direction to amend the delegation bylaw enabling the Director of Parks, Recreation and Facilities to approve future renewals of licence agreements for community gardens.

BACKGROUND

The City's Community Gardens Policy (Appendix A) outlines the process for the creation and retention of community garden sites on City-owned lands. Licence agreements may be renewed for multiple terms provided the project continues to meet the criteria of this policy.

These four community garden licences are the last licences on a three-year term. The term for community garden licence agreements has been updated in recent years to five (5) years. Once these licence renewals are executed, all existing 16 community gardens on City land will be renewed on a five-year term. The location of each garden is shown in Appendix B.

Renewing or expanding an existing community garden currently requires Council approval. The City treats community gardens licenses as a disposition of land, meaning that a public notice must be published whenever the City is about to enter a licence to dispose the land for a particular use.

In November 2019, Council approved an amendment to the Delegation of Signing Authority Bylaw (see Appendix C). The purpose of this bylaw is to streamline City processes by delegating execution of certain agreements on behalf of the City to staff. Approval to enter into such agreements currently requires Council direction.

ISSUES & ANALYSIS

Montreal Street Community Garden

The Montreal Street Community Garden located in James Bay has been in operation since 1977. It is the City's oldest allotment garden and currently, it hosts 54 individual plots. The Community Gardens Policy specifies that a community garden licence agreement must be held by a non-profit society. To comply with the revised policy, the Montreal Street Community Garden, and the James Bay Neighbourhood Association (JBNA) developed a partnership agreement whereby the JBNA would oversee the new licence agreement. The partnership agreement and licence of occupation have been in place since October 2017.

In 2021, the Montreal Street Garden, in partnership with the City of Victoria Parks' Department, has successfully replaced 50 per cent of the garden's existing grass pathways with wood chips thanks to the City's bi-annual garden materials distribution. The community garden's pollinator pathway was highlighted in the City's Boulevard Garden Walking Tour in the fall of 2019.

Rockland Woodland Garden

The Rockland Neighbourhood Association (RNA) oversees the Rockland Woodland Garden. The Woodland Garden is a commons garden focused on native plant gardening, which covers 420 square metres and has existed since 2007. In 2020, the RNA reported that 8-10 regular gardeners volunteer in Woodland Garden, from March through October. The Rockland *Blue Bell Bash Work Party* involved volunteer gardeners digging up thousands of invasive blue bell bulbs and replaced with native plants including camas, fool's onion, and fawn lily.

In the summer of 2020, the RNA hosted an outdoor Jazz Concert in Rockland Woodland Garden wherein a jazz trio played a set for over 50 socially distanced attendees. The RNA also created a virtual tour of the Rockland Woodland Garden in the garden's peak bloom season for the public to enjoy safely from home.

Neighbourhood Garden of All Sorts

The Lifecycle's Project Society oversees the Neighbourhood Garden of All Sorts (NGAS) located in James Bay. Built in 2015, this allotment garden has 17 individual plots and one commons plot in an area of 425 square metres. A volunteer pool of 15 committed gardeners help to maintain the garden. In 2018, gardeners at the NGAS reported challenges with the current site, including the lack of light due to tree canopy, shoots stemming from tree roots, and high winds and cool air coming from the ocean. In 2019, City staff made an exception to the 16-year pruning cycle and conducted minor pruning to the limbs causing shading. NGAS members have not brought forward an Expression of Interest to pursue a potential relocation at this time.

The Cecelia Ravine Community Garden

The Burnside Gorge Community Association (BGCA) oversees the Cecelia Ravine Allotment

Garden. The garden was built in 2012 and covers 450 square metres. The garden consists of 23 allotment plots, which operates at full capacity with a waitlist. One plot is used by the Burnside Gorge Community Association, and two commons plots are open for community harvest. A total of 30 to 40 volunteers, including allotment gardeners, are responsible for the ongoing maintenance of the gardens.

Garden volunteer projects completed in 2020 included resurfacing pathways with woodchips and the removal and rebuilding of eight aging plots. Despite cancellation of work parties due to the pandemic, there were more than 300 volunteer hours logged in the garden in 2020. In 2019, BGCA had established a learning partnership with SJ Burnside, connecting youth from their alternative ed programs with gardens, which has been put on hold with the pandemic. A medicinal herb plant walk was hosted in October 2020. In 2020 and 2021, the Burnside Gorge Community Association was also a host organization of the neighbourhood distribution days for the City's seedling distribution program, *Get Growing, Victoria!*

There are no changes proposed by either the operator or the City for the renewal of these agreements, other than to establish a 5-year term, consistent with other community garden licences.

Delegation Bylaw

The number of community gardens has significantly increased in recent years, and this trend is expected to continue. An amendment to the Delegation Bylaw is proposed to enable staff, via the Director of Parks, Recreation and Facilities, to approve licence renewals. This change would reduce the staff time required to prepare Council reports and allow for a more expedient renewal process for a low-risk activity. License renewals do not typically involve significant changes, requests or complexity.

OPTIONS & IMPACTS

Accessibility Statement

There are no proposed changes to the layouts of the existing gardens at Montreal Street Community Garden, Rockland Woodland Garden, Neighbourhood Garden of All Sorts or the Cecelia Green Allotment Garden.

2019 - 2021 Strategic Plan

Community gardens support Objective 8 (Enhance and steward public spaces, green spaces, and food systems).

Impacts to Financial Plan

There are no additional financial costs to the City in renewing the four licence agreements for the existing community gardens in James Bay, Rockland, and Burnside Gorge.

Official Community Plan Consistency Statement

Community gardens help support goals identified in the Food Systems section of the Official Community Plan, including specifically:

- Objective 17.5: Encourage food production activities in visible and suitable public places to foster a connection between people and the process of growing, harvesting, and eating fresh produce; and
- Objective 17.7 Support the establishment of at least one allotment garden per neighbourhood, co-located with community facilities or services where possible, and more in neighbourhoods that feature a high proportion of rental or attached housing, where feasible.

CONCLUSIONS

Staff recommend Council support renewing the licences of the existing community gardens at Montreal Street Community Garden, Rockland Woodland Garden, Neighbourhood Garden of All Sorts and Cecelia Ravine Community Garden.

In addition, staff recommend Council approve an amendment to the Delegation Bylaw to enable the Director of Parks, Recreation and Facilities to approve the renewals of licence agreements for existing community gardens.

Respectfully submitted,

Alex Harned
Food Systems Coordinator

Thomas Soulliere
Director

Report accepted and recommended by the City Manager.

List of Attachments

Appendix A: Community Gardens Policy

Appendix B: Maps of Garden Locations

Appendix C: Delegation of Signing Authority Amendment Bylaw