



Governance and Priorities Committee Report

For the Meeting of September 3, 2015

To: Governance and Priorities Committee **Date:** August 27, 2015
From: Thomas Soulliere, Director of Parks & Recreation
Subject: Relocation of the Neighbourhood Garden of All Sorts (*formerly Michigan Street Community Garden*) to MacDonald Park

RECOMMENDATION

That Council:

- (1) Approve the proposal for a community garden at MacDonald Park, and
- (2) Authorize the Mayor and Corporate Administrator to execute a new License of Occupation with Lifecycles Project Society, for a community garden at MacDonald Park for a period of three years, at an annual consideration of \$1.00, in a form satisfactory to staff, subject to the publication of the statutory notices required by the *Community Charter*.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is to seek Council approval for the relocation of the Neighbourhood Garden of All Sorts (formerly Michigan Street Community Garden) to MacDonald Park, adjacent to Niagara Street.

The original Michigan Street Community Garden was opened in partnership with the Lifecycles Project Society on provincially owned lands in 1999. In 2013, the Province agreed to the sale of a portion of this land, and the lot is currently being redeveloped as part of the Capital Park project.

Following the sale of the lands, the garden group approached the City to discuss options for relocating the garden within the James Bay neighbourhood. Staff has been working with the garden group, James Bay Neighbourhood Association, Lifecycles Project Society, and other interested parties since 2014, to identify and evaluate a potential new site for the garden.

The activities of the past year represent a community-driven effort to identify a location and operating plan that is viable and supported by the local neighbourhood. The new location will provide an opportunity for another community asset to further complement the existing activities at this popular park.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to seek Council approval for the relocation of the Neighbourhood Garden of All Sorts (formerly Michigan Street Community Garden) to Macdonald Park, adjacent to Niagara Street.

BACKGROUND

As outlined in the current Community Gardens Policy, the City supports the creation of community gardens and will assist organizations in locating new garden sites where available land exists, where neighbours have been consulted and are supportive, and where a gardening group demonstrates an interest and commitment. The Community Garden Policy supports the use of marginal park land for community gardens on a case-by-case basis following consultation with the affected community and subject to Council approval.

In 1999, the community worked with Lifecycles Project Society to develop a community allotment garden on Michigan Street in the James Bay neighbourhood on provincially owned lands, known as the South Block. This community allotment garden was approximately 560 sq.m. in size, with 22 garden plots (two of which were accessible) and a cob storage shed. In 2013, the Province agreed to the sale of a portion of the South Block for development purposes. A location for the existing community garden was not in the redevelopment plans.

Following the sale of the land, the garden group approached the City to discuss options for relocation within the James Bay neighbourhood. In order to identify potential sites, staff looked at various park and boulevard areas with the garden group and other interested parties in early 2014. An initial recommendation to relocate the garden to South Park was recommended and approved by Council in July 2014, subject to consultation. Upon further consultation with the community, the garden group and the School District, it became evident that South Park would not be a suitable site for a community garden.

ISSUES & ANALYSIS

To assist the community representatives with the review of potential locations, staff provided information on all City-owned lands in James Bay. Each site was assessed with community representatives through a criteria that included available land area, potential growing conditions, environmental considerations, site access, associated costs, and other land use considerations (including existing trusts, covenants, and references to each site in long-term planning documents), as shown in Appendix A.

Following numerous discussions between representatives of the garden group and the James Bay Neighbourhood Association, the Niagara Street frontage of MacDonald Park was identified as the preferred site. A location map is attached as Appendix B. In July 2015, the garden group partnered with the Lifecycles Project Society and submitted a proposal for review (Appendix C).

The design includes 18 garden plots (3 of which are accessible), four composters, fencing along two sides of the area, and a tool shed. A Garden Design is attached as Appendix D. Staff will work with the garden group to select an appropriate shed for this site, pending approval of the proposal.

As outlined in the Community Garden Policy, the City will install a water hook-up next to the garden. The garden group has also requested chain-link fencing on both the north and south sides of the garden, which could be provided through existing City resources.

While the proposal documentation references a potential need to remove two trees in order to accommodate the garden, subsequent discussions amongst the garden group, James Bay Neighbourhood Association, the Lifecycles Project Society and City staff, resulted in a slightly altered site plan whereby no trees will be impacted.

As per the Community Garden Policy, it is the responsibility of the garden group to conduct public consultation and outreach for the proposed garden site. Engagement by the garden group on this location has included:

- Multiple meetings with representatives of the James Bay Neighbourhood Association;
- Canvassing with letters to surrounding neighbours on Montreal, Niagara, and Dock Streets;
- Meeting with James Bay Community School Coordinator;
- Meeting with representatives of the James Bay Garden Association;
- Meeting with representatives from White Eagle Hall;
- Contacting the James Bay Athletic Club;
- Various letters of support; and,
- Community outreach with an information table at the James Bay Community Market.

Attached as Appendix E is a record of correspondence on this file. This includes a letter from James Bay Neighbourhood Association; email correspondence from members of the public following a public meeting; and, one letter of opposition to the project.

On August 17, 2015 City staff arranged a follow-up meeting with members of the James Bay Neighbourhood Association, representatives of the garden group and Lifecycles Society. The meeting provided an opportunity for a thorough review of key aspects of the proposal to ensure all parties were supportive of advancing the proposal for the MacDonald Park location.

In order for the community garden to proceed, a License of Occupation is required between the City and the Lifecycles Project Society, the legal entity responsible for developing and maintaining the community garden.

OPTIONS & IMPACTS

Staff have identified two options for Council to consider regarding this application.

Option 1

Approve the proposal for a community garden and enter into a new license agreement for Macdonald Park. (Recommended)

The garden group, James Bay Neighbourhood Association and Lifecycles Society have conducted a thorough outreach to the community over the past year. The proposal meets the existing policy and when operational the garden is expected to add to the vibrancy and engagement within this community. The location adjacent to Niagara Street will have a negligible impact on existing uses of this area of the park. The staff resources required to execute a new agreement for this project and assist with the garden start-up are minimal.

Option 2

Decline this proposal, and direct staff to continue working with the garden group to explore alternate sites for the garden relocation.

The City has the option to not enter into an agreement for this location and to request that the community continue exploring locations, with assistance from City staff.

2015 – 2018 Strategic Plan

Staff recommend Option 1. This proposal supports the objectives of the Strategic Plan:

- Objective 2: Engage and Empower the Community
- Objective 8: Enhance and Steward Public Spaces, Green Spaces and Food Systems

Impacts to 2015 – 2018 Financial Plan

The costs for provision of a water hook-up and some fencing will be provided by the City within the approved operating budget. The garden will be maintained by the applicants as such, there are no operational impacts to the City. The agreement will be for a nominal sum of \$1.00 per year.

Official Community Plan Consistency Statement

The recommendation is consistent with Goal #17 of the City's Official Community Plan (OCP), that "Victorians have access to skills, knowledge and resources to produce and process their own food in urban areas".

The OCP supports increasing the number of allotment gardens, commons gardens, edible landscapes, food-bearing trees and other types of food production activities, on both public and private lands.

CONCLUSIONS

The proposed relocation of the Neighbourhood Garden of All Sorts (former Michigan Street Community Garden) to the Macdonald Park location represents a community-driven effort to address an unanticipated situation. The proposal is consistent with existing policy, the Official Community Plan, the 2015-2018 Strategic Plan, and is supported by the James Bay Neighbourhood Association and local community.


Respectfully submitted,


Alla Johnson
Senior Parks Planner


Thomas Soulliere
Director, Parks and Recreation

Report accepted and recommended by the City Manager:

Date:


August 28, 2015

List of Attachments

Appendix A – James Bay Site Review Matrix
Appendix B – Proposed Garden Location Map
Appendix C – Community Garden Proposal
Appendix D – Proposed Garden Design
Appendix E – Record of Correspondence