

Report from Parks, Recreation and Culture Services, Business Planning and Strategic Services

Date of Report: January 24, 2017

Date of Meeting: February 1, 2017

Report Number: PRCS-B010-2017

File: 68.31.99

Subject: Community Garden Funding

Recommendation

That Budget Standing Committee receive this report for information.

Background

On January 18, 2017 the Budget Standing Committee approved the following motion:

“Staff be directed to report back on the feasibility of adding \$50,000 to the PRCS budget from the Civic Project Fund for one year for community gardens before tabling the budget.”

Community Gardens Policy

In 2015 Council approved a Community Gardens Policy (Appendix 1) to establish a protocol for entering into lease agreements with Community Garden Coordinators on City-owned parkland and other municipal property (where appropriate) and to outline the roles and responsibilities of City staff and the Community Garden Coordinators. Community Garden refers to an area of land managed and maintained by a group of individuals for the purpose of cultivation of plants for personal consumption. Community gardens on City-owned land are not available to grow commercial produce or plants; however donation of produce is permitted and encouraged.

Existing community gardens in St. Catharines

There are a number of community gardens on private property in St. Catharines. There are currently two gardens on City property, at Torosian Park and Centennial Gardens. There was one request in 2016 from Links for Greener Learning to establish a community garden on City land, which is currently in the final stages of review.

Edible landscaping in City horticulture inventory

In 2015 edible landscaping was included in the courtyard in front of the Centennial Library. With its success the gardens were continued in 2016 and are intended to be part of the City's horticulture inventory. Staff have also integrated some edible plants, such as cabbage and herbs into the landscape at City Hall. This practice will be continued at City Hall and as part of future plans for other downtown landscapes. In 2016 the Pearson Park carpet bed featured an edible sundial to promote the value of

gardens and a vegetable garden was introduced at Jaycee Park. The total harvest in 2016 donated to Community Care from City horticulture beds was 375 lbs.

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Community Garden Costs

The cost to implement a community garden is specific to each site; details can vary such as the design, existing access to water service, size of the garden and the number of plots. Water is a significant operational cost, which also varies based on the size of the garden and seasonal needs; and gardens can evolve over time with additional amenities as we have seen with the development of the garden at Torosian Park, such as fencing, storage buildings, and additional plots.

All costs related to a community garden under the existing Policy are the responsibility of the Community Garden Coordinator. It is anticipated that funding provided by the City would support the community's ability to implement more or improved gardens for public use. It is recommended that community groups present garden proposals demonstrating estimated costs and how the potential funding would be allocated.

Allocation of funding to the Community in 2017

If the desire is to have allocated funds implemented in 2017 from the Civic Project Fund, it is recommended that Council's approval of funds identify:

- The community group(s) to receive funding, the amount of funding for each group, the intended use of those funds, and any financial contributions expected of the community group;
- That funding is to be from the Civic Project Fund; and
- Direction to staff that a funding agreement be executed prior to the release of funds.

Allocation of funding to the Community beyond 2017

Budget Committee discussions have considered that beyond 2017 funding could come from the SCCIP program. Most of the SCCIP program streams are exclusively for arts activities, with the exception of the Culture Builds Community program. This stream supports a broader range of cultural activities, and could include community gardens, however applicants must provide rationale that the project meets the program's goals and criteria, including:

- Engages residents in an experience that encourages participation, creativity and innovation;
- Prioritizes public access, including engaging under-served local communities;
- Culminates in a public event;
- Has other sources of funding.

A typical community garden may not be successful in requesting funding under the Culture Builds Community program, unless there is a significant community

engagement component. There are many creative opportunities to support community gardens from SCCIP, and City staff can work with community organizations interested in applying.

Alternatively, the SCCIP program could be amended to better support community gardens; if this is the desired direction staff recommend that the Arts and Culture Advisory Committee be consulted first.

Alternative funding model/source

Funding for community gardens may be better aligned to a grant administered through the Green Advisory Committee. The Green Advisory Committee's budget for 2016 was \$38,000, and \$38,000 is included in the draft 2017 operating budget.

Other funding considerations

If this funding becomes an annual initiative staff recommend implementing a competitive grant, aligning the intake with that of requesting land for a garden (late summer each year to establish a garden for the following year), regardless of funding source. Given the community oriented nature of community gardens it is recommended that, if such a program is approved, the community group be responsible for raising 50% of the project costs.

Financial Implications

If funded from the Civic Project Fund, the reserve would be reduced limiting future use for other initiatives.

If funded from the Green Advisory Committee budget, the committee would have fewer funds available for other projects.

Relationship to Strategic Plan

The approval of this funding would support Council's Strategic Plan action 7.5 under the Environmental Sustainability pillar: Support partnerships to expand the community gardens network across the City.

Prepared by: Amy Tomaino, Manager of Business Planning and Strategic Services

Submitted & Approved by: Phil Cristi, Director (Acting)