



REQUEST TO APPEAR AS A DELEGATE

TOWN OF NIAGARA-ON-THE-LAKE

(PLEASE PRINT CLEARLY OR TYPE ON THIS FORM)

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- ☒ ☐ **Non Agenda Delegation** - a presentation which addresses topics that do not appear on the Council or COTW Agenda and for which no report has been prepared for Council by Staff must be submitted no later than 12 p.m. on the Thursday prior to the COTW or Council Meeting
- ☒ ☐ **Agenda Delegation** - a presentation which specifically addresses a COTW or Council Agenda item.

☒ **I have never spoken on this issue before and the key points of my presentation are as follows:**

I am asking Council to consider creating a community or allotment garden for NOTL residents. The benefits are many as outlined in my presentation. Town commitments include identifying the property to be used, arranging for water, assisting in establishing the organizational structure to be used and determining insurance issues. A short discussion on Newark Neighbours and my personal recommendation.

If an applicant wishes to address an issue they have previously spoken to as COTW or Council, they will only be permitted to do so if they bring forward significant new information. Specific details on how this information is new must be identified below and is subject to approval by the Town Clerk. Council will be advised if significant new information has not been provided.

- ☐ ☒ **I have spoken on this issue before, and the specific new information I wish Council to review is as follows:** (attach a separate page(s) if necessary)

I wish to appear before Council on _____

(
Meeting time is 6:00 p.m. unless otherwise noted)

DATE

Note: Your request must be made no later than 12:00 p.m. on the day of the schedule meeting.

I wish to appear before Committee of the Whole on August 23, 2021

(Meeting time is 6:00 p.m. unless otherwise noted)


DATE

☐ Community & Development Services ☐ Corporate Services ☐ Operations-Parks & Recreation/Public Works

Note: Your request must be made no later than 12:00 p.m. on the day of the schedule meeting.

I have read and understand the Delegation Protocol on the back of this form and acknowledge the information contained on this form, including any attachments, will become public documents and listed on Town Meeting Agendas.

I also understand presentation materials must be submitted with this delegation form and electronic presentations must be emailed to clerks@notl.com no later than 12:00 p.m. on the day of the schedule meeting.


Signature

August 16, 2021

Date

Presentation Requirements: No ☐ Yes (description) Hard copy for distribution, PowerPoint for presentation

Proposal to Niagara-on-the-Lake Town Council re providing space and start-up capital for a community garden

Executive Summary

Background

2 types of community gardens

- a) Community gardens as established by a group that works the entire garden together
- b) Allotment gardens where an individual rents a specific garden plot

Currently there is a community garden at the Community Centre benefitting Newark Neighbours and a community garden at BY's Honey Farms on Concession 6.

Why in Niagara-on-the-Lake?

Smaller and well treed lots in the area make vegetable gardens difficult to grow

Benefits

- 1. Healthier eating
- 2. Improved mental and physical wellness
- 3. Community engagement
- 4. Education for young and old
- 5. Repurposing of green space
- 6. Town reputation
- 7. Can help address food insecurity

Commitments from the Town

- 1. A suitable plot of land
- 2. Water supply and cost
- 3. Long term Town commitment
- 4. Establish a program – who is responsible for what
- 5. Establish the rules
- 6. Timing
- 7. Fencing
- 8. Liability Insurance
- 9. Ongoing

Mechanics

- 1. Annual fee
- 2. Composting
- 3. Common areas
- 4. End of season
- 5. Use a co-op approach for decision making, communication and managing the site

Newark Neighbours

Summary personal recommendation

If the Town endorses the idea; select a suitable site, including water source; sort out any insurance issues and allow a garden group to be formed within a reasonable timeline. The garden group determines number of interested participants, creates site plan, enrollment form and garden rules and manages enrollment. A decision is made on fencing (yes/no, cost and funding) as well as cost of water and rental rates. Garden group manages moving forward.

Proposal to Niagara-on-the-Lake Town Council re providing space and start-up capital for a community garden

Detail

I am asking Niagara-on-the-Lake-Town Council to consider repurposing a plot of town owned land for the development of a community garden for use by residents of the Town.

Background

Community Gardens are often seen in urban areas with high population density and/or areas with a significant population dealing with food insecurity.

Broadly defined, there are 2 types of gardens. As an example, Toronto distinguishes between Community Gardens and Allotment gardens. A Community Garden is established by a group of individuals at a location they may have identified (including park land) or assisted by the City. With limited assistance from the City and within City guidelines, they manage their own garden – either with plots within or all members work the entire garden. An allotment approach is run by the City and individuals contract with the City to rent a plot annually, with waiting lists maintained. Toronto currently has over 100 Community gardens and 11 Allotment Gardens.

Currently there is a community garden at the Community Centre with output directed to Newark Neighbours. BY's Honey Farms on Concession 6 have also established a garden this year. 45 plots were created; fifteen 10 x 10 foot and thirty 10 x 20 foot. Roughly 40 are currently being maintained. Some were rented and abandoned – perhaps the heavy clay soil was a deterrent. I believe the tenants are generally satisfied but supply of water has been a real challenge at times, especially in the spring when seedlings were most fragile. Vehicle access when the field is wet is difficult and parking on the side of the Concession is dangerous with no shoulder. Ticks are also a concern in the long weeds.

St. Catharines has 3 community gardens on city property but insist on garden tenants being a not-for-profit corporation and carrying \$5 million in liability insurance. This can be onerous for a group of residents to comply with if they are not already affiliated with a not-for-profit or service group. As a result they are focused on those with food security issues.

Why in Niagara-on-the-Lake?

Given the high percentage of local lands devoted to agriculture it might not be apparent that there is a desire for a garden. However we are seeing smaller lots in new developments as well as more apartment/condo units, which needn't restrict residents from having a garden. Additionally the older treed lots don't necessarily lend themselves to vegetable gardens which require ample sun.

Benefits

1. Healthier eating and eat locally. You are eating and sharing what you grow. The garden would be pesticide free and reasonably organic.
2. Improved mental and physical wellness. Raising a garden can be incredibly satisfying; from watching your plants grow, to tasting that first tomato, to serving a dish that came entirely from your garden. It's also hard work on your plot and you are getting fresh air and sun at the same time!
3. Community engagement. An excellent opportunity for residents from all over the Town to make new acquaintances and work together. Further, my experience is that gardeners will willingly share advice and suggestions as well as the output of their gardens. Gardeners are social - every visit to the garden can be an event if others are also there. And with a bit of physical assistance at times, one can garden to a decent age, which can be a benefit in our community.
4. Education. Too many children don't necessarily understand where their food comes from or what is involved in growing food. This would be a chance for parents to involve them at an early age both to learn hands-on and also to better appreciate the effort that can go into bringing food from farm to table. A number of the adults involved at BY's Farms also willingly admitted they had little experience and wanted to learn.

5. Repurposing of green space. I anticipate this garden would take what is now a little used grassed area and develop it to be more environmentally friendly. And a community garden need not be just vegetables; flowers would help support our bee and bird populations.
6. Enhance the reputation of the town as forward thinking and an environmental supporter in providing a healthy resource for its residents.
7. Addressing food insecurity - see my note on Newark Neighbours below.

Commitments from the Town

1. Access to a plot of land with the following characteristics:
 - a. reasonably flat
 - b. full or near full sun
 - c. close to a suitable area for parking (doesn't have to be paved)
 - d. safe and central location to allow potential access by as many residents as possible
 - e. safe (soil tested and underground lines identified) and at least reasonably fertile soil
 - f. use of area wouldn't negatively impact other activities in the area (e.g. walking, dog walking)

BY's have allocated about 60 feet x 200 feet for 45 plots.

I don't know who owns the football field next to Vineridge Academy (the former high school) but something similar would probably be ideal.

2. Water. Currently at BY's Farms water is sourced by tenants from large tanks using buckets or watering cans. I like this "manual" approach, whether from a tank or tap, because people are less likely to overwater as might be the case if hoses could be hooked up. Perhaps a well with simple hand pump could be dug. Either way the water supply should probably be secured to prevent mischief. Rain barrels should also be set up but as a supplemental source only. The cost of water, if any, has to be established.
3. An ongoing commitment from the Town. If individuals know they can go back to the same plot in future years they will invest in improving the soil and/or enhancements like raised beds.
4. Determine the program. To minimize staff time after start up, a hybrid approach might be best. The plan would be to rent individual predetermined plots within the garden, but have the tenants work with a formal garden group. This group could take responsibility for the entire garden within Town guidelines, collect rents, manage costs, try to resolve issues and report back to the Town periodically. If cash collection is a concern the Town could still manage applications and rent collection.
5. Create a contract for tenants or have the garden group establish guidelines including restrictions on plot use – no sheds, no overnight stays, no restricted plants, weed control, no pesticides, etc.
6. Timing. Tenants would need to start signing up no later than January/February to allow time for ordering seedlings or seeds as required. The actual layout (I assume a simple grid with 3-4 foot walkways between plots) could be done in March or latest early April to allow site preparation by tenants before planting.
7. Fencing. I'm torn on this. A perimeter fence can make a garden look, well, fenced in and can be costly. But to lose your efforts to night theft, mischief and larger invasive animals could also be frustrating. Additionally having consistent, lower fencing between each plot would certainly keep the area neater. I would suggest holding off on this decision until a potential location is chosen and perhaps a service group could help with funding if needed.
8. Liability insurance – To be determined. If access is restricted to tenants, would a waiver system work as part of the application? As mentioned St. Catharines requires \$5 million in liability insurance for any group operating on City property, while the Toronto websites make no mention of requiring insurance.
9. Ideally, once the program is set up there shouldn't be a large ongoing involvement from the Town except perhaps expansion of the site if a waiting list exists.

Mechanics

1. Tenants would pay an annual fee, either directly to the Town or through the garden group, to rent their plot. Plots would initially be allocated on a “first come first serve basis” with first right of refusal to rent the same plot the following year. BY’s Farms charges \$50 for a 10 x10 foot plot and \$80 for a 10 x 20 plot. Toronto charges roughly \$100 for one of their allotment plots. Queenston Neighbours Garden in St. Catharines charges \$20 per plot and does not get charged by the City for water but their target market is primarily focused on those with food security issues or lower income tenants.
2. Create a composting location on site for any pruned material as managed by the group. Alternatively, gardeners must take it away. Whatever the solution – it must be neat.
3. Common areas - borders, paths between beds, etc. to be maintained by the garden group. Either grass to be cut and/or mulch to cut down on weeds and insects.
4. Plots would have to be stripped of any plant material and hardware (other than raised beds, if built) at the end of the season. Perhaps implement a \$50 refundable deposit which is used if an individual doesn’t adhere. Alternatively if a tenant renews in advance their hardware can stay.
5. I see all the tenants being part of an informal co-op which would help with decisions, communication and organize common area or season ending tasks.

Newark Neighbours

There currently exists a small community garden servicing Newark Neighbours. From my time on the Board and as a volunteer, there were often challenges matching food client appointments with fresh food available at a point in time. Further, a lot of the produce coming from a market garden doesn’t have the shelf life that a similar item from a supermarket might have, even if refrigerated. So rather than expanding supply, a solution might be to make plots available at no cost to any Newark Neighbours clients who were interested. Confidentiality can be dealt with in assigning plots and Valumart gift cards, which are currently issued, could be used to buy seedlings, or vouchers could be purchased from one of the local nurseries for seedlings. Rather than thinking of this as “Work for Welfare”, enrollment would be optional, allows a client to grow what they like, possibly develop new skills and frees up the existing community garden produce for those who can’t have their own plot.

My “ideal” recommendation

I like to keep things simple. After the town has identified a suitable piece of property, including water supply, create a community garden group. This group would determine level of interest from the community and establish proposed rules of operation. Based on responses, the potential number of plots could be determined and a proper lot plan laid out. If fencing is required, quotes would then be obtained. The Town would determine if they have capital available or if funding is required from another source. A decision would be required on the cost, if any, of water. Determine rental rates with any excess funds returned to the Town at the end of the year. The garden group would manage the operation, including rent collection, disbursements, communication and maintenance. Quarterly reports could be submitted to the Town.

Conclusion

I don’t think this project need be overly complicated to initiate as it isn’t a new or unique idea. Resources are available on-line and in person locally, to assist in establishing and maintaining a community garden. Agreements and policies can be cribbed from those already in place elsewhere. I am happy to be involved at any level to help bring this proposal to reality. Further, this is not meant to undermine the garden established by BY’s Honey Farm. It would be a feel good initiative for residents at a time when so much around us can feel negative.

Thank you for giving this your consideration.

Julian Trachsel