

HRM COMMUNITY GRANT PROGRAM

INTERPRETATION BULLETIN #3

POLICY STATEMENT COMMUNITY GARDENS

Purpose

In response to growing interest in recreational gardening¹, small-scale food production in community gardens, and the “greening” of buildings and sites, HRM needs to provide clarity to proponents and the general public with respect to the municipality’s direct and indirect role. The following guidelines provide direction to HRM staff, non-profit organizations and community groups regarding the eligibility of community gardens, and other forms of garden, under the *HRM Community Grants Program* and the *Tax Exemption for Non-Profit Organizations Program* (By-law T-200). Inclusion does not, however, constitute an entitlement. Any assistance provided by HRM is discretionary and certain types of non-profit organization remain ineligible. All applications shall be evaluated relative to other applicants within a funding sector, program budget, and the respective program’s policies and procedures. It is anticipated, however, that other municipal departments may also provide technical assistance and in-kind support.

1. Introduction

The contemporary community gardens movement in Canada has developed predominantly within urban city centres. Advocates espouse their role in countering social isolation and alienation, a reduction in vandalism and neighbourhood crime, and a means of community engagement and social relations. These desired social outcomes seek to emulate the earliest forms of communal gardening practised by Aboriginal societies. Early agrarian societies, for example, fostered the cultivation of food using collaboration, mutual support and sharing. Integral to food gathering² and production was the need to respect nature’s delicate inter-dependence and sustain the ecological balance. See: Appendix 1 for further historical background.

Albeit the *HRM Community Grants Program* has not received any submissions specifically for small-scale food production, grants have been awarded to non-profit groups whose aim is to preserve and celebrate the agricultural sector. Namely, the 4H Club Halifax/East Hants, Cole Harbour Rural Heritage Society, the Urban Farm Museum Society, Spryfield, and the Musquodoboit Agricultural Society. HRM also

¹ The term recreational gardening refers to gardens that are not intended as commercial, for profit ventures ie. such gardens that are primarily a leisure pursuit or educational opportunity.

² Within this context the term gathering includes vegetation, wildlife, and marine species.

provides annual assistance to the annual Halifax County Exhibition under the *HRM Festivals & Events Program*. Several community owned and/or operated garden projects have also received assistance. For example, a “Wandering Garden” for Alzheimer’s patients developed by the Ocean View Manor Society, Eastern Passage; therapeutic gardens developed by the Eastern Shore Palliative Care Society, Sheet Harbour, and the Oakwood Terrace Foundation, Dartmouth; leisure gardens for the Salvation Army’s shelter for homeless men, Halifax, and the St. Paul’s Church, Spryfield; and the garden of a residential heritage property leased by the North Star Rowing Club, Dartmouth

2. Operational Definition: Community Garden

A community garden is essentially “*a single piece of land gardened collectively by a group of people*” (Wikipedia). In general, communal gardens have been developed in urban locations to provide “green space” and are distinct in that they typically encourage small-scale food production for personal consumption or donation rather than active recreation, leisure, or beautification.

The operational definition of a community garden used under the *HRM Community Grants Program* (as stated below in Item 3.1) limits eligibility to registered non-profit organizations so as to conform to legislation which prohibits grants to private, business, industry or commercial entities. Hence, the land is to be owned (or leased) by a registered non-profit group, operated by volunteers, and only up to 30% of the garden area may be assigned for personal use (ie. lots for individuals or families).

For the purpose of these guidelines a community garden shall be defined as:

An area of land, including any natural or artificial water course or feature, operated by volunteers of a non-profit organization for the sole purpose of developing and maintaining a garden for small-scale food production and public education. Such gardens may contain edible vegetation such as vegetables, herbs, grains, fruit trees and bushes, plant propagation for the purpose of seed collection or garden stock, or the protection of heritage plant species, in accordance with existing land use by-laws and applicable government regulations. Non-edible plants (eg. flowers, vines, ornamental grasses) may be included if grown for educational or fundraising purposes.

The keeping of livestock, fish or aquatic species, an aviary or apiary are not recognized for funding unless explicitly approved under existing land use by-laws and applicable government regulations³.

The site, ancillary buildings, garden fixtures, and communications directly

related to the garden's operations or educational programming are also eligible for financial assistance. For example, irrigation, site grading and drainage, a greenhouse, cold frames and raised beds, tool shed, pathways, fencing, signage, and public education such as web site development, interpretation signage and publications.

For the purpose of these funding guidelines a community garden shall allocate no more than 30% of the land area to individual lots (allotments) and shall not produce goods for the purpose of sale. Notwithstanding the restriction on sales, produce grown by a non-profit entity or private party, or goods manufactured using produce from the garden⁴, may be sold provided that all revenues are retained by the non-profit group and re-invested into the operation of the garden and/or the society's altruistic aims.

For example, a community garden might grow produce for a local food bank, community feeding program (eg. breakfast program or soup kitchen), or shelter for the homeless. Or, produce from a community garden might be used in goods which are sold to raise funds to be re-invested in the garden's operations. HRM would not, however, provide a grant to private allotments for food for private consumption or sale.

3. Applicant Eligibility

Applicants to the *HRM Community Grants Program* shall be a registered non-profit organization and have been registered 12 months prior to the application deadline. The intent is that such groups will have established a constitution and by-laws, a membership and Board of Directors, a schedule of meetings including an annual general meeting, a separate bank account and financial records, minutes of meetings, and communications to the membership and general public.

4. Project-Specific and Capital Grants

The *Community Grants Program* awards modest cash grants to eligible non-profit organizations. The program is publicized throughout the region through an annual call for applications (usually in January). There are eight (8) funding sectors and two types of grant; a "project grant" of up to \$5,000 and a "capital grant" of up to \$25,000. See: [HRM Community Grants Program Guidebook](#).

5. Eligible Expenses

Project grants are awarded for programming initiatives, Examples of such costs in relation to gardens include but are not limited to:

⁴ For example, preserves, pickles, dried flower arrangements, wreaths, vegetables, herbs or fruit.

- soil (one-time only, intended to ensure clean material)
- interpretation panel
- signage
- storage bins, recycling bins, compost bins, garbage bins, rain barrels, donation collection bins, cold frames
- production of educational materials (excludes reprints)
- web site development
- self-promotional materials (one time only, group must re-print)
- equipment⁵ (roto-tiller, lawn mower, wheelbarrow) - preference will be given to equipment lending programs for larger or specialized items
- benches, picnic table
- construction materials (eg. wood for cribbing, raised beds or trellis)
- professional fees for accredited consultants are eligible. For example, soil and water quality testing, especially if edible produce is to be grown. Applicants should refer to the program guidebook or contact staff for further details.

Capital grants are awarded for buildings and infrastructure, large-scale or specialized equipment. Examples in relation to gardens include but are not limited to:

- capital grant towards the purchase of land
- site grading and drainage
- water supply and/or irrigation system
- greenhouse
- accessibility upgrades (ramps, railings, adaptive device)
- walls, fencing, gates, pathway
- exterior lighting
- storage shed

The program does not provide salaries or wages, core recurring operating expenses (eg. insurance, postage, stationary, rent etc).

The program does not fund events, meetings, receptions, conferences, trade shows, research, scientific experiments, travel, personal equipment or clothing.

6. Property Ownership and Leasing

Community gardens are diverse in terms of users and operating models. For example, individuals, public institutions, private cooperatives, or non-profit owners. The operator may own or lease the property or some portion thereof. Legislation does not permit a municipal grant for an individual or business entity. Therefore, municipal funding must

⁵ Excludes small hand tools and supplies such as garbage bags, twine, netting, plant pots or trays, instruments to measure wind, rainfall or temperature, test kits (eg. soil or water), garden ornaments, plant material (bulbs, trees, bushes, flowers, seed), soil, mulch, gravel, fertilizer.

be to a non-profit entity.

The intent is to avoid investing municipal funds in private entrepreneurial enterprise or creating the potential for individual financial gain. Grants for small business are available from other levels of government. Restricting sales activity also reduces the probability of attracting a Commercial tax assessment on the land.

Ineligible:

- Private property
- Government property (including municipal)
- Public and private school property
- Business, commerce or industry

Eligible:

- Community-owned and operated property
- Property leased by a non-profit group for a minimum term of 5 years (copy of lease to be provided). If property is leased there may be limitations on eligibility for capital funding such as grading, water supply etc that increase the value of private property⁶.

7. Eligible Types of Garden Project

Non-profit organizations have undertaken a wide variety of garden-related projects. The following is not an exhaustive list but is meant to direct potential applicants to the appropriate funding sector of the *HRM Community Grants Program* and each sectors respective eligibility criteria and funding priorities:

- **community garden:** for small-scale food production and public education. Typically developed as a collaboration between private individuals, institutions, a non-profit group, or some combination thereof. A community garden might include private lots (allotments). This type of garden (food production, food bank, community feeding program, environmental education) is eligible under the **Environment** sector of the *HRM Community Grants Program*.
- **therapeutic garden:** are developed to enhance the health and well-being of

⁶ Typically, consideration will be given to the terms of the lease agreement. For example, if a private owner leases the land at no cost to the tenant group the value of this in-kind contribution might offset the value of any grant and realize no net gain to the private owner. Such requests will be considered on a case by case basis. Applicants are encouraged to confirm eligibility prior to submission. The *Community Grants Program* will not pay rent or any proportional share of real property tax charged to the tenant.

residents and visitors. Includes indoor gardening such as a greenhouse, atrium, or container garden. Commonly developed in association with hospitals, nursing homes, seniors residences, shelters for homeless persons, residential addictions treatment facilities, and palliative care facilities. Such amenities might also be referred to as “healing gardens” or “restorative gardens”. The focus is on health in relation to environmental design. This type of garden and/or program is eligible under the **Recreation & Leisure** sector of the *HRM Community Grants Program*. Excludes gardens used for religious/faith practice or a congregational purpose, memorial gardens or cemeteries.

- **sensory gardens:** feature plants that stimulate the senses using texture, scent, and colour. May include garden features that create sounds (eg. fountain). Typically used with young children or persons with special needs.
- **active living gardens:** may be designed to encourage communal gathering and active leisure pursuits such as walking, jogging, or snow shoeing on enclosed pathways, outdoor fitness stations with stationary equipment, or small-scale social events within a garden setting. This type of garden is eligible under the **Recreation & Leisure** sector. Excludes active transportation routes or trails⁷.
- **heritage gardens:** intended to protect or restore gardens that are integral to the cultural history of a specific heritage building or location. Typical examples include gardens that are of historic significance in relation to an historic building, design style or period, horticultural movement; a heritage farm or interpretation centre. Note: these gardens are not simply ornamental/aesthetic; they are of historic significance in their own right and maintained or restored using archival references and where possible authentic materials and techniques, plant species and ornamental features. This type of garden is eligible under the **Community History** sector of the *HRM Community Grants Program*. Must be a registered heritage property.
- **landscape art and art gardens:** permanent or temporary transformation of an outdoor environment into a functional or aesthetic space. May use site-specific natural elements (earth, stone, water) or plant material is arranged by colour, texture, height etc to form a representational image or abstract composition. This type of garden is eligible under the **Arts & Crafts** sector of the *HRM Community Grants Program*.
- **gardens as exhibit sites:** use of a garden as the venue for a permanent or temporary installation of artwork or artifacts. For example, a sculpture garden or to display a collection of historic artifacts that may be related to the location. This type of garden is eligible under the **Arts & Crafts** sector or **Community**

⁷ Trails are funded under a separate HRM funding program ie. the Regional Trails Network.

History sector of the *HRM Community Grants Program*.

- **leisure garden**: gardens that are integral to the services provided by a non-profit organization such as but not limited to an emergency shelter, supportive housing, affordable housing, day care, community-owned park or playground etc. Excludes cemeteries. Note: due to high demand for capital funding for building construction or repairs, and the program's emphasis on public safety and code compliance, aesthetic gardens tend to be lower priority. This type of garden is eligible under **Emergency Assistance** (eg. shelters), **Affordable & Supportive Housing** (eg. independent living, mental health consumers, disabled persons, residential addictions, transitional housing, nursing home), and **Recreation & Leisure** sectors. (Eg. day care, park, playground, campground, seniors centre, community hall)
- **site "greening"**: vacant lots or land rehabilitation to create usable public space or to protect the land from erosion. Eligible across all funding sectors. Funding sector varies with the intended use of the land.

8. Municipal Property Tax

A property owned and operated by a registered non-profit organization may apply to HRM for assistance with payment of property tax. Different levels of assistance are provided by type of program or service and subject to the program's budget capacity. Information is posted on the HRM web site under Grants Program.

Note: legislation is intended for property ownership, not leasing. Applicants are encouraged to confirm eligibility prior to submission.

The annual call for applications is made each September with a deadline of November 30th.

Appendix 1.

Historical Background

Early Aboriginal societies in Nova Scotia (eg. Mi'kmaq) secured food through hunting, fishing, and gathering wild edible plants and the fruit or sap of trees. For example, nuts, seeds, berries, edible roots, maple sap, the fruit of trees, bushes and vines, vegetables, wild rice, fungi, and herbs. Supplies were also dried for future consumption or exchange. These "hunter and gatherer" communities were nomadic and travelled seasonally to secure resources during their peak growing season or along the migratory routes or breeding locations of wild animals and fish stocks. Typically, these early societies were holistic, highly collaborative, and fostered mutual support and sharing⁸. Knowledge was transmitted orally through generations with an emphasis on sustaining a balance between human society and the natural ecosystem. These principles are integral to contemporary community gardens that foster public ownership, access, communal management, and self-directed or shared learning.

The earliest written accounts about the agrarian practices of Canadian Aboriginal peoples (eg. Huron) are those of Jesuit missionaries from France. These early accounts describe the cultivation of crops and domestication of livestock in regions now called Ontario and Quebec. In some areas large acreages were farmed whose main crops were corn, beans and squash. The three were planted together in small hills. The corn provided a natural support for the beans while squash plants provided shade to the corn's roots and discouraged weeds⁹. This description of early horticultural practises demonstrates efficiency, compatibility, and conservation. Contemporary examples include mulching to reduce water consumption and prevent soil erosion, companion planting etc.

The settlement of Halifax by Europeans in 1749, saw the development of gardens as a way to beautify the local surroundings in a manner reminiscent of immigrants' country of origin. Typically, these early ornamental gardens were the privilege of a leisured or wealthy class. By the early 1800's, for example, the Governor of Nova Scotia, senior military personnel, and wealthy merchants maintained elaborate gardens. Albeit these early gardens have not survived, HRM hosts one of Canada's pre-eminent public gardens - the Halifax Public Gardens which was originally conceived to advance

⁸ K.Sveiby, "Aboriginal Principles for Sustainable Development", Sustainable Development, v.17, 2009.

⁹ "Cultivating Canadian Gardens: The History of Gardening in Canada". Exhibition. Library and Archives Canada.

horticultural education.

Founded in 1836, the Nova Scotia Horticultural Society was formed to promote the study and practice of horticulture and botany. In 1837, a five and a half acre portion of the Halifax Commons was made available to the society, at no cost, by the Commons Commissioners to establish a garden to demonstrate horticultural techniques and a collection of botanical specimens¹⁰. Supporters promoted the garden as beneficial to physical and mental health, especially for people working in local factories, with a botanical collection to stimulate learning and exchange, and as a gathering place of beauty to promote civic pride and identity.

In 1847, the garden expanded with the donation of private land and a building constructed, now referred to as Horticultural Hall, to accommodate the society's meetings, store root vegetables, and provide instruction in "...the scientific methods of plant cultivation and crop preservation"¹¹. By 1851 the site included a greenhouse and a barn.

It is interesting to note that in addition to free access to public land the Nova Scotia Legislature provided annual operating grants. Funds were also raised by the Horticultural Society through membership "shares", the sale of plants and produce, and an annual bazaar. However, although described as the "People's Garden", entry to the Horticultural Society's grounds were in fact restricted to society members and their guests with only limited access to the general public.

In 1866, the Horticultural Society's garden was expanded to emulate the arranged pathways, flower beds and trees of a formal garden admired by the Chair of the Commons Commission while on vacation in Paris, France. After only a year the ornamental plants were replaced by a crop of hay, intended by the Commissioners to be sold. Viewed by some as a set-back, the hay field was subsequently replaced as part of a successive enlargement of the site to its present sixteen acres. As the garden developed recreational activities were added such as a lawn tennis court, indoor skating rink, and bandstand for free musical performances.

In 1984, the Halifax Public Gardens was designated a National Historic Site; its significance is as a rare surviving example of a Victorian Garden in Canada. Albeit the original intent of the Gardens for horticultural education was subsequently eclipsed by Victorian notions of civility, social class and the privilege of leisure, its inception clearly encompassed the philosophical ideals espoused by contemporary community gardens. The Halifax Public Gardens is owned in trust and sustained by local government with free public access. Horticultural practices reduce the use of chemical pesticides and encourage public education through free *Heritage & Horticulture* public tours,

¹⁰ The Halifax Public Gardens. The Friends of the Public Gardens. 2008. pg.10-11.

¹¹ Ibid, p.14.

interpretation, and a bi-annual *Open House at the Greenhouse* event. HRM also participates in *Communities In Bloom*, a program that fosters friendly competition between Canadian communities to beautify civic spaces.

Gardens staff have re-introduced edible plants by incorporating them in ornamental garden beds while HRM parks staff grew vegetables in municipal street planters that were donated to a local food bank. Several HRM recreation facilities have undertaken pilot projects with local volunteers and non-profit groups to establish community gardens on municipal property. These gardens attracted participants of all ages from diverse ethnocultural and socioeconomic backgrounds. Municipal planning strategies also call for the inclusion of green space as conducive to public health and “liveable” communities and a growing interest in food security. The latter perspective advocates for the integration of food production, transportation, food availability and affordability, and waste disposal in a comprehensive and inter-connected manner.