

New Community Gardens – Exhibition Park

Summary of feedback

In 2025, community members proposed a new Community Garden for Exhibition Park. Community engagement is the final step in the garden application process prior to making a decision about whether or not to proceed with the proposed garden.

Based on the results below, the community garden has been approved and will move to the next phase, which includes a phased opening starting in the summer of 2026, with full implementation by the spring of 2027. The following is a summary of what we heard during community engagement.

What we did

Prior to the community engagement phase City staff reviewed the community garden proposal to ensure it met minimum requirements. The City’s review consisted of an internal screening with City departments to ensure there were no conflicts with city policy and infrastructure in the park. The screening included review by Public Works, Engineering and Transportation Services, Urban Forestry, Turf and Sports and Parks Infrastructure teams. Based on the review, no major concerns were identified and some minor adjustments were made to the proposal. Following internal approval, the proposal was recommended to proceed to community engagement.

Community members were invited to provide feedback on the proposed Exhibition Park Community Garden via HaveYourSay from February 9 to 27, 2026. The proposal applicants, along with the Guelph Community Garden Working Group, encouraged participation in the survey. The survey tool was shared across several City of Guelph social media platforms and in the City’s engagement newsletter. In addition to the online tool, community members were recommended to contact staff directly with comments. Two citizens contacted staff directly with comments and were also encouraged to complete the survey for further feedback.

What we heard

The majority of feedback indicated that the Exhibition Park Community Garden will be a welcomed addition to the neighbourhood, fostering community cohesion, diversifying the use of green spaces, and providing environmental benefits to the nearby community. Comments also highlighted important considerations for the garden’s design and its role in serving both its members and the broader community. Based on the input from the original applicants and survey feedback, there will be an engaged community ready to steward and grow the proposed community garden. Further details of the analysis below:

- 148 responses were received.

- 78 per cent fully support a community garden; seven per cent somewhat support a community garden; two per cent have concerns about a community garden; 12 per cent do not support a garden in this park at all, and one per cent did not specify their support. See below (Figure 1)

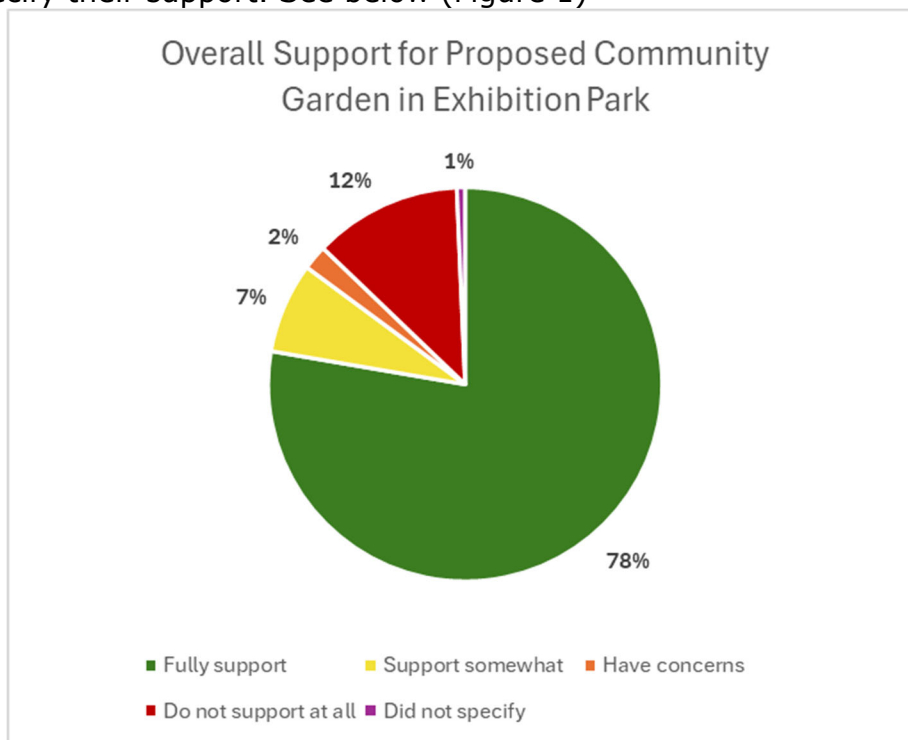


Figure 1: Overall Support for Proposed Community Garden in Exhibition Park

- Of the 115 (78 per cent) respondents that fully support the proposed community garden; 75 per cent left a comment regarding their response. Most comments reflected on the positive impacts a community garden brings to a neighbourhood such as the social, environmental and health benefits. Food security was often cited in respondents' comments and how the garden would help to provide healthy, low-cost foods to the neighbourhood and community at large via the donation model of the garden. Many comments reflected the importance of Exhibition Park's centralized location and how a community garden is much needed in a highly visible, accessible and much-loved park in Guelph. Comments included how the garden will enhance the park, adding to an already vibrant and engaging public space.
- Among the 11 (seven per cent) respondents that somewhat supported the garden, or the three (two per cent) respondents that had concerns about the community garden, eight left a comment regarding their responses. Some concerns raised included potential vandalism of the garden, encroachment on other park users, maintenance of the garden, fencing to keep out pest animals and attracting pests to the park. One respondent left a comment that they were concerned that the established community garden membership at the GROW Garden Project could reduce availability to new gardeners in the neighbourhood.

- Of the 18 (12 per cent) respondents that do not support the garden, 72 per cent left a comment regarding their concerns. These concerns included impact on the current park users, lack of garden maintenance resulting in poor aesthetics and attracting pests, increased vandalism to the park, parking congestion, cost to the taxpayers, perceived exclusion of all park users, and that a community garden is not suited for City parks.

Proximity and use of Exhibition Park

- The majority (74 per cent) of respondents live within the Exhibition Park neighbourhood (see Figure 2).
 - 14 per cent of all respondents (11) back onto Exhibition Park. The majority (52 per cent) of the respondents that back onto the park fully support the community garden.
 - 59 per cent of all respondents (88) live in the same neighbourhood of Exhibition Park (but do not back onto the Park). Most (78 per cent) fully support the proposed garden in the park.

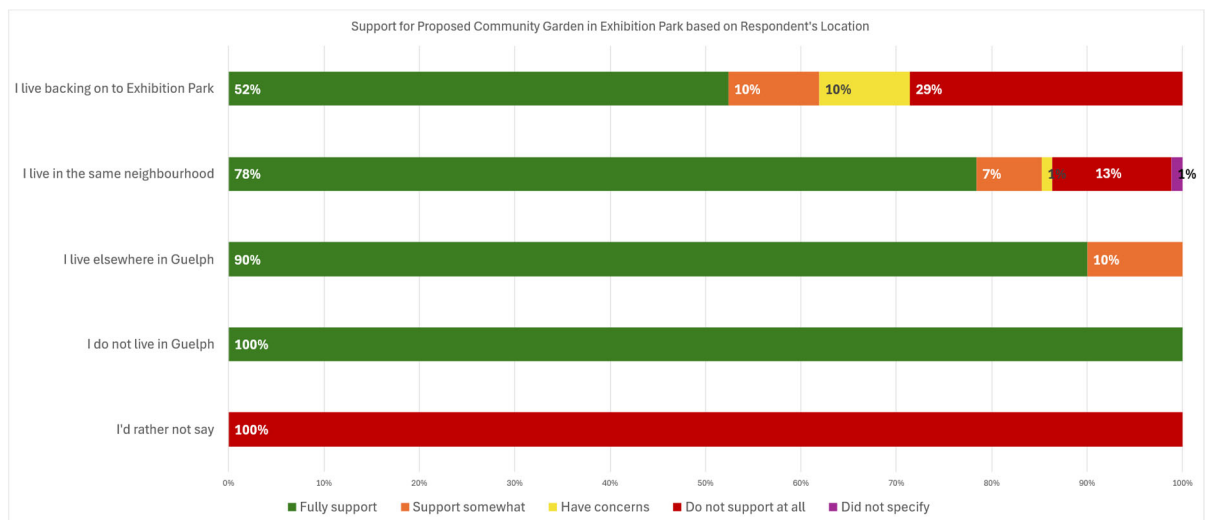


Figure 2: Support for Proposed Community Garden in Exhibition Park based on Respondent's Location

- The proposed community garden at Exhibition Park has the potential to increase visitation to the park with 42 per cent of respondents indicating they would visit more often. A small number of respondents (nine per cent) indicated they would visit less often (see Figure 3)

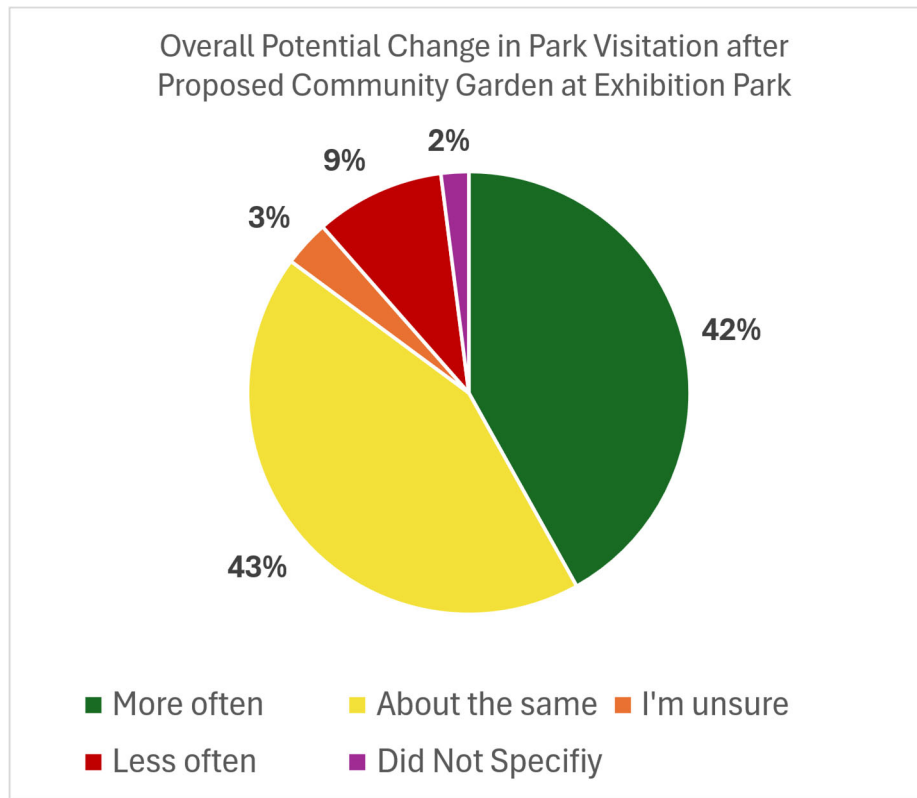


Figure 3: Overall Potential Change in Park Visitation after Proposed Community Garden at Exhibition Park

- The 13 per cent of respondents who stated they would visit less often identified that they currently visit the park often. A reason for visiting less often was not provided in their survey responses.
- Overall, there is positive trend that those who identify as rarely or sometimes visiting the park would likely visit more often if the community garden was built (see Figure 4)

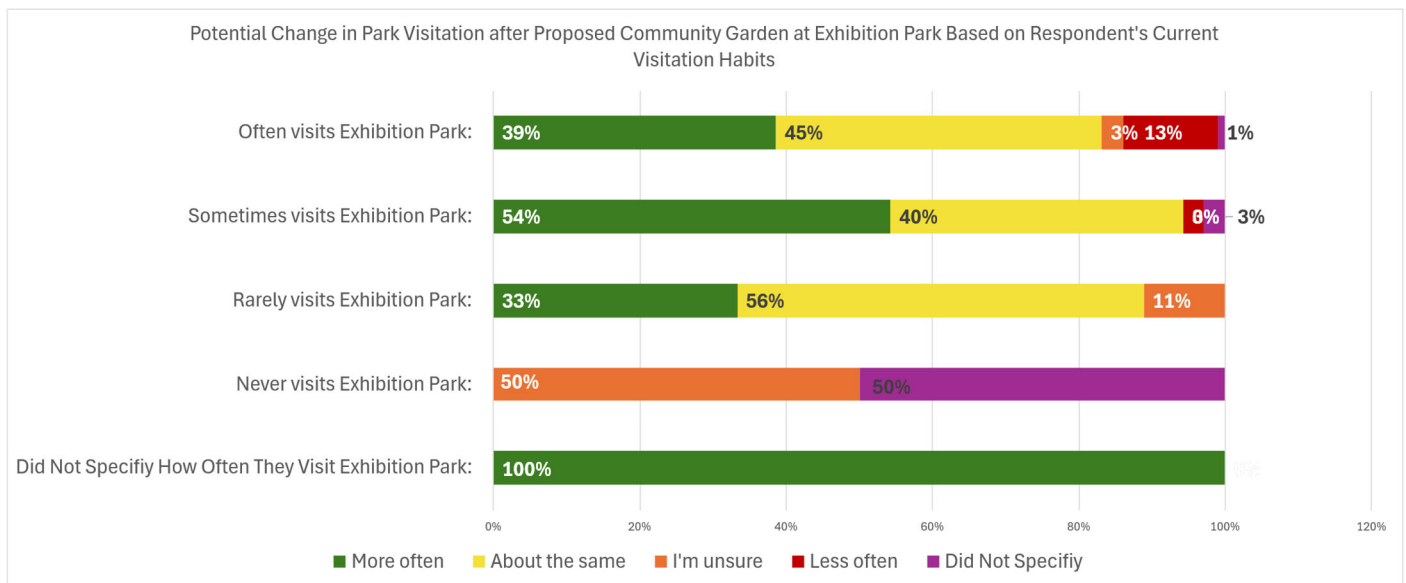


Figure 4: Potential Change in Park Visitation after Proposed Community Garden at Exhibition Park Based on Respondent's Current Visitation Habits

Preferred location options

- 13 per cent (19 respondents) preferred Option 1, 34 per cent (50 respondents) preferred Option 2, and 40 per cent (59 respondents) did not have a preference between the two proposed locations. 13 per cent (19 respondents) did not support either option.
 - Of the 19 respondents that prefer Option 1, seven provided comments. Some commented on Option 1 allowing for more sunlight, opportunities for expansion, less interference with the sports fields, visibility from the roadway and being parallel with the sidewalk as pros to the first option.
 - Of the 50 respondents that prefer Option 2, 29 provided comments. Many comments identified that Option 2 has more sun exposure and is slightly larger to allow for better growing. Other comments identified that the flow for walking through the park, further into the park and more accessible. Comments also noted that the garden could potentially expand into Option 1, with a 'L' shape garden in the future.
 - Of the 59 respondents that did not have a preference between Option 1 or 2, 13 provided comments and feedback. The comments included ensuring that the option selected has the most sun, fencing to protect against other park user interference, has the best access to the garden without interfering with the sports fields and off-leash dog areas. Some comments provided alternative locations and designs including near the other end of the park and implementing a 2-storey vertical garden. There were some concerns about how the garden location would impact trees.
 - Of the 19 respondents that do not support either Option 1 or 2, 9 provided comments. Comments included that there are other community gardens

available in the City, the use of taxpayer money for a new garden, and the preference for more gardens at school yards. There were also concerns that the park isn't suited for a garden due to the sports fields and how busy the park is, how close it would be to the roadway and the potential for rodents to be drawn to the area.

Interest in participating

- 34 per cent of respondents (or 50 community members) are interested in participating in the garden if approved with an additional 37 per cent (or 55 community members) answering 'maybe/I don't know' (see Figure 5).
 - Of the 50 respondents that indicated interest in participating, 72 per cent left a comment regarding their participation. These responses were analyzed and summarized under four interests: "Build", "Grow", "Learn" and "Steward". Some of the community members (9 responses) are interested in helping to "build" the garden and help with design and preparing the site with donations (e.g. sign making, infrastructure) while many others are looking to "grow" by having a plot in the garden (20 responses). One community member (1 response) identified they are looking to "learn" more about growing and how to participate while the majority are interested in being a "steward" for the garden by watering, weeding and other ways of tending (29 responses).
 - Of the 55 respondents that indicated 'maybe/I don't know' to participating, some indicated that they were unsure if they had the ability to commit to participating (e.g., time) or requested additional information to understand how they could participate including plot size, equipment availability, types of volunteer opportunities and more information on the time commitment.
 - Of the 38 respondents that had no interest in participating, 50 per cent still fully support the community garden. Those that are not interested in participating, six comments were provided, including comments on the location of the garden. one comment provided support for compost education for the garden (but would not be participating).

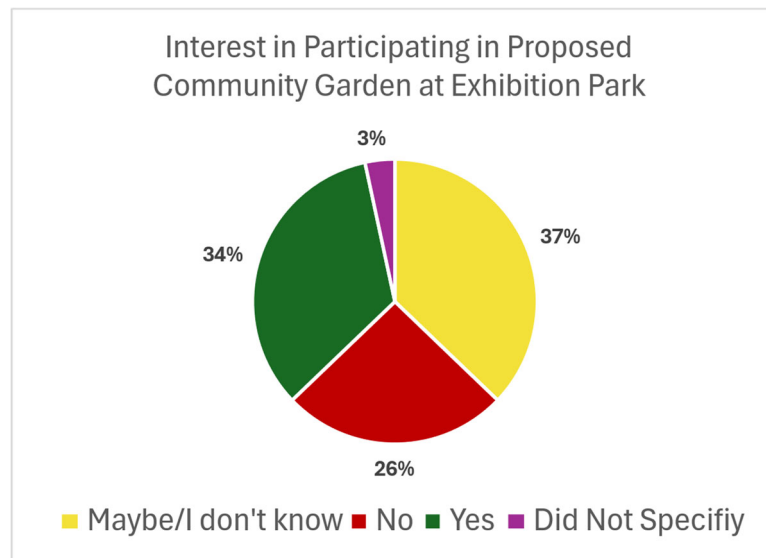


Figure 5: Interest in Participating in Proposed Community Garden at Exhibition Park

Design enhancements

- 43 respondents (29 per cent) provided input on the design of the garden. Many highlighted the need for fencing or enclosures are to protect the garden from animals and theft and other security measures.
- Ideas for infrastructure recommendations including raised beds to increase accessibility, recommendations for size of plot, clear signage along with communal message boards, shade structures, tool storage, natural materials over metal, vertical farming, seating areas. Ensuring there is easy water access, well-prepared compost plans, ideas for what to grow including a mix of fruit and vegetables along with native pollinator plants.
- Some ideas for other infrastructure in the park including a gravel path opposite the sidewalk and encouraging some educational workshops and working with the University of Guelph. There was a comment to maintain the current garden plan and to prioritize plots to the neighbours nearby. Some comments included moving the garden to a different location in the park or moving outside the park to a schoolyard.

Recommendation and next steps

Given that most of the responses were positive, with 78 per cent fully supporting the project to continue and 50 community members intending to participate, it is recommended that a community garden proceed in Exhibition Park and be prepared to open partially in summer 2026, with full implementation planned for spring 2027.

The City's Community Stewardship Coordinator will work with the community garden group representatives to review and refine the garden design to ensure it aligns with the vision and addresses some of the concerns raised by community members. Many of these concerns are typical for new community gardens and can be addressed through proper planning and design.

We are formally sharing and announcing the plans through a public notice, information on [HaveYourSay](#) and the guelph.ca/community_garden page, and an email letter to those who identified they were interested in learning more. We will also connect with the applicants to setup the Volunteer Garden Coordinator position for the garden. This will be followed by the final development stages of the project, including the garden design, soil testing, agreements, and site preparation.