

Dear resident,

March 30, 2026

Thank you for participating in the engagement regarding the proposed community garden in Exhibition Park. We are pleased to share the survey results with you and announce that, based on feedback, we have decided to proceed with establishing a community garden in the park.

Of the 148 responses received on the survey:

- 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.

More than half of the survey respondents indicated they live in the neighbourhood surrounding the park. Based on these findings, staff feel there is sufficient support in the area to proceed with a community garden in Exhibition Park.

Supporters said the proposed community garden would:

- Contribute to improved food security for nearby residents and the greater community through the GROW Garden donation model.
- Create opportunities to meet neighbours and build community connections and enhancing the current park programming by allowing multiple park uses.
- Make use of space in the park, enhancing the beauty and environment of Exhibition Park for the neighbourhood and community at large.
- Allow for an increase in local volunteerism and community engagement, as Exhibition Park is in a centralized location, where nearby residents can easily walk to the garden and other community members can access via public transportation, bike lanes, etc.

The survey results also highlighted some concerns and questions raised about a community garden in Exhibition Park. These are summarized below along with our response.

Impact on the open lawn area, playground and private property (9 comments)

Some concerns were raised that the community garden will impact current park users or that the space is not appropriate for a garden. Based on a calculation of the park's size, it is estimated the community garden to a maximum size of 500 square meters, which is less than 1% of park's current area.

The location was proposed to the applicants (seven community members on the application) as a suitable space for a community garden. This area

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of the park is closest to the water vault which is integral to the success of a community garden. Park staff conducted an internal review with various City departments to determine if the space was appropriate for a community garden. No concerns were raised as the garden does not interfere with any other infrastructure in the park and is an appropriate distance from existing trees, drainage swale, property lines, playground, sport fields, roadways, etc.

Additionally, some comments referred to issues of off-leash dogs in Exhibition Park. Nearby, Exhibition Park Softball diamond Number 2 is designated as an off-leash area, which only allows off-leash dogs in that section of the park when unoccupied. Dogs should not be off-leash within the footprint of the proposed community garden. Dog owners should familiarize themselves with these spaces and their corresponding policies. Learn more about dogs in parks on Guelph.ca.

Garden aesthetics and maintenance (6 comments)

A few concerns were raised about garden aesthetics and maintenance/upkeep during the gardening season.

All volunteer community garden coordinators enter into a written agreement with the City Parks Department, which includes a requirement for the garden to be maintained to certain standards. If the standards are not met, the garden may be removed and the space returned to its former state (e.g. mown grass). The volunteer garden coordinator will communicate with garden members to ensure they do their part in maintaining the garden, and Parks staff will monitor the garden to ensure that maintenance standards are met. The community garden coordinators are encouraged to maintain the garden and assign weekly volunteers for duties such as weeding, lawn maintenance around the garden, watering and harvesting. Encouraging weekly volunteers to conduct these activities ensures the garden will be maintained not only for the gardeners but other park users to enjoy the rest of the space. Garden infrastructure must be approved by City staff including fencing, rain barrels, and tool storage. City staff will instruct the volunteer garden coordinator to remove any unauthorized built structures.

Each community garden open to the public in Guelph is invited to join the Guelph Community Gardens Network Working Group to share resources, attend monthly meetings and use the ongoing forum for consultation and feedback to support their gardens. These resources have helped build strong relationships between City staff and community garden volunteers to ensure the success of the program.

Vandalism (4 comments)

Some concerns were raised about potential vandalism at the garden or concerns regarding safety. Anyone noticing vandalism in the park is encouraged to notify Parks staff using the online "Report A Problem" mapping tool [ReportAProblemApp](#) so that staff can investigate. Community garden plots will also be monitored by volunteer gardeners.

Garden impacts from local wildlife (4 comments)

Concerns were raised that a community garden will attract pests and wildlife such as rodents that will ruin plants, reduce the garden's success and discourage gardeners.

A fence and raised beds are design elements that can make the garden area less accessible to pets and wildlife, yet still accessible for people. The garden design will be developed collaboratively based on community need and site conditions and may include some of these elements. Additional infrastructure such as composters will only be installed under the approval of City staff and must be maintained to prevent any unwanted pests.

Use of park space for community gardens (3 comments)

Some respondents raised concerns that public space should not be used for a community garden because residents have ample space on their own properties to grow vegetables or other public space is available (e.g. nearby schools, St. Joseph's Health Centre).

While many of the residential properties in the neighbourhood are large, there are also smaller properties that may not have sufficient space for a vegetable garden. In addition, there are many large trees in the neighbourhood and shade on private lots may be more of a limiting factor than available space. A garden space in the park provides access to more hours of sunlight than some gardeners have on their own properties. Some residents that are renting in the neighbourhood may not have access to the backyard space based on their tenant agreements.

Each year, community members are encouraged to apply to start a new community garden on City-owned property. If a suitable location cannot be found in the applicants desired neighbourhood, applicants are encouraged to work with other property owners such as the school board or private property. For Exhibition Park, the location was deemed appropriate for a community garden after review by City departments responsible for parks.

Community gardens advance the City's strategic goal for a healthy and safe community where life can be lived to the fullest by contributing nutritious local food production, fitness, recreation, positive social interactions, environmental education, and stewardship and strong, engaged neighbourhoods. City parks can provide an ideal space for community gardens. Specifically, the site selection process looks to identify a space within the park with ample sunlight, access to water, flat areas that do not interfere with existing park programming. You can view the criteria for selecting an appropriate site for community gardens in the [Community Gardens Policy](#).

Increased traffic and on-street parking in the surrounding neighbourhood (3 comments)

We anticipate many of the people using the community garden will be from the immediate neighbourhood and will walk rather than drive and anticipate minimal impact on traffic or on-street parking. Existing volunteers from the GROW Garden Project have expressed specific interest in Exhibition Park for the relocation of the garden since it is more accessible to the community. Community garden users are more likely to use sustainable transportation that reduces traffic demand such as walking, biking and carpooling. There may be occasions during the garden season when volunteers gather to work together on tasks like spring planting and fall cleanup and this may result in some temporary additional on-street parking. Since the garden is available at any time when the park is open, and as experienced at other community gardens, we anticipate that garden activity will be spread out during the day, week, and season. Volunteers arriving by car are expected to obey all parking signs, and parking rules will be monitored and enforced where necessary.

Impact on taxpayers (3 comments)

Concerns were raised that the construction of a community garden will cost taxpayers.

Funding for community gardens is the responsibility of the individual garden groups at each community garden site. This includes items such as vegetable plants, planters, tools, fencing, benches and composters. For the purpose of grant applications that individual gardens may be interested in pursuing, the City will share information on the dollar value of the in-kind support provided by city departments supporting the Community Garden Program.

Support from the City of Guelph to community gardens may include the following:

- Wood mulch from city stockpiles generated from trees trimmed or removed by the Forestry department,
- Water barrel donations,
- Communications support; surveys, website, community guide & promotion for garden programs, activities, and social media,
- Support and coordination of the network and resource/best management practice sharing
- Native shrubs and perennials for enhancing the garden

Additionally, operational support from City staff includes:

- Community engagement
- Site preparation (for the first garden season only)
- Access to city water vaults in parks for filling water barrels
- Wood mulch delivery and end of season garden waste removal (items that cannot be composted)

Further information regarding the community gardens and how they are supported by the City can be found in the [Community Gardens Policy](#).

The addition of the community garden does not impact the planning or resources allocated to future proposed park improvements. Construction will be minimal with site preparation including tilling the grass within the area of the garden and potentially fence construction. Most community garden preparation does not impact current park users and does not require any tree removals or changes to sport fields.

Exclusion of park users and community garden programming (2 comments)

Concerns were raised that a community garden excludes park users from engaging with the park due to the perceived inclusivity of a community garden. Each community garden is coordinated by a group of volunteers who are encouraged to invite the community to engage with the garden at multiple levels. Many gardens charge a fee for a plot but offer subsidies to make gardening more accessible. Other opportunities such as volunteering in the garden without a plot can remove financial and skill barriers to participating in community gardening. Additionally, many community garden groups offer events and get together to encourage community building outside of the standard gardening activities.

Proposed location

Concerns were raised that the location is not suitable for a community garden in Exhibition Park. Other locations in the park were considered during a preliminary review of the community garden application by staff and were ruled out based on the park design. The two options shown during the public engagement were considered the most feasible of all preliminary options due to the access to water and sunlight and to avoid interference with other park infrastructure. Several comments shared concerns with interference with the sports fields. The Sports and Leisure Grounds department was consulted on the application for Exhibition Park and determined that the two options presented will not interfere with the sports fields.

Next steps:

We appreciate the community feedback on this important project. We will be moving forward with a new community garden and the space will be prepared by Parks staff for use by August.

If you indicated in the survey that you would like to participate in the garden, you will receive an email with the community garden's contact information. Otherwise, if you have further questions or would like more information about community gardens, please feel free to contact us or email communitygardens@guelph.ca.

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cc (Councillors Phil Allt and Michele Richardson, Gene Matthews – General Manager, Parks)