




**CITY OF HAMILTON**  
**PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT**  
**Environmental Services Division**

<b>TO:</b>	Chair and Members Public Works Committee
<b>COMMITTEE DATE:</b>	December 2, 2024
<b>SUBJECT/REPORT NO:</b>	Realigned Gardens Program (PW24031(a)) (City Wide)
<b>WARD(S) AFFECTED:</b>	City Wide
<b>PREPARED BY:</b>	John Vandriel (905) 546-2424 Ext. 3662
<b>SUBMITTED BY:</b>	Cynthia Graham Director, Environmental Services Public Works Department
<b>SIGNATURE:</b>	

**RECOMMENDATION**

- (a) That the community-based garden programs be consolidated, within the Public Works Department, Environmental Services Division, with the other garden programs already managed by the Division. This includes, but is not limited to, the planning, administration, management, and operations of each program, noted in the Historical Background section of this Report;
- (b) That the funding allocated for resources (\$9,000) associated with administering the community gardens portfolio be approved for transfer from the Office of Climate Change Initiatives Division to the Environmental Services Division, Business Programs Section's operating budget; and
- (c) That the request by the Environmental Services Division for two (2) Full Time Employee enhancements and a vehicle at a cost of \$372,493, be referred to the 2025 Tax Operating Budget Process, as follows:
  - 1) One (1) Full Time Gardener I, within the Forestry and Horticulture Section, to undertake the operations and maintenance of the community garden and pollinator garden spaces and provide subject matter expertise as required;

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- 2) One (1) Full Time Program Coordinator, within the Business Programs Section, to undertake administration and coordination of the community garden and pollinator garden programs, including volunteer coordination and cross-Sectional and cross-Divisional liaison;
- 3) One pick-up truck for the Forestry and Horticulture Section, for staff to use to support the community garden and pollinator garden spaces.

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

At the June 3, 2024 Public Works Committee, Report PW24031 Maintenance and Beautification of Birch Avenue Green Space and Gardens report was approved, including the following recommendation:

“That staff be directed to report to Public Works Committee outlining an enhanced community gardens program, to support new and existing community-led efforts for native pollinator gardens which contribute to the key priorities of the Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) and Climate Action Strategy, identifying any additional resources required to oversee the new enhancements.”

Report PW24031(a) fulfils this report-back requirement.

The City of Hamilton owns, oversees, and manages a variety of garden types and programs located on city-owned or city-managed property. These include the following:

- Community gardens in parks;
- Pollinator gardens and patches in parks and the right-of-way;
- Raised planting beds in parks and in the right-of-way;
- Irrigated and non-irrigated traffic islands, medians, bumpouts, and roundabouts in the right-of-way;
- Formal ornamental gardens in parks and city facilities.

These gardens form important elements of Hamilton’s parks and greenways. They serve as gathering nodes that help strengthen neighbourhoods, provide beautification to neighbourhoods, and create healthy and complete communities. These spaces contribute positively to the health of the environment, economy, and social/public realm.

Some of these garden programs are managed entirely by City staff, while others like the community gardens program and pollinator gardens program are community-led, with varying levels of staff support. There is ongoing community interest and desire for community gardens and pollinator gardens, but the upkeep can be a challenge for community members, highlighted by delegations asking for support. In some cases, public demand for these gardens has outpaced the resourcing of staff or existing spaces. While staff want to assist, challenges such as current service levels, resources,

and division of responsibilities are impacting the way these programs are administered. Currently, the community gardens program and the pollinator gardens program are managed by the Office of Climate Change Initiatives, while all other garden programs are managed by the Environmental Services Division. Because these garden programs are managed by different City groups, there are inefficiencies and redundancies. From a customer service lens, the decentralized model leads to ambiguity and becomes difficult to navigate for both City staff and interested community groups.

An in-depth review and analysis of the overall gardens program found that if the community gardens program and the pollinator gardens program are transferred to the Environmental Services Division, a better customer service experience would result for community members. Volunteer efforts by engaged residents can help create and maintain these areas. However, those volunteers need a better service from the City to support and oversee work on City property. The scope of this management and oversight would pertain to City-owned lands that are already managed by Environmental Services (i.e. parks and rights-of-way). Other City-owned spaces like arenas and recreation centres would be included on a discretionary basis.

Report PW24031(a) recommends program alignment that includes City staff organizational restructuring and the addition of specific personnel to respond to the current demand for these programs. If approved, the recommendations Report PW24031(a) would provide a clear path forward in administering and managing this portfolio in a sustainable and cost-efficient way.

**Alternatives for Consideration – N/A**

**FINANCIAL – STAFFING – LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

Financial: Operating funding requests for two (2) Full Time Employees and one pick-up truck at \$372,493 are to be referred to the 2025 budget process.

As the program grows, staff will identify costs for operating impacts to capital work and identify operational deficits through future budget processes after new staff have had an opportunity to review operational needs.

Staffing: A total of one (1) Full Time Employee (FTE) position will sit in the Business Programs Section and one (1) Full Time Employee(FTE) position will sit in the Forestry and Horticulture Section.

Legal: N/A

## **HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

Currently there are several different types of gardens located on City property, or City-managed property that fall within the portfolio of Environmental Services or the Office of Climate Change Initiatives. These are outlined below:

### **Community Gardens in Parks**

These are food-producing gardens, with plots that are rented by community members for their personal use. The operational aspects of the community gardens program is currently the responsibility of staff in the Office of Climate Change Initiatives, who coordinate intake of interested residents, receive payment, coordinate upkeep and services, and participate in design of new locations. The Hamilton Community Garden Network through the Neighbour2Neighbour Centre also provides resources and support, and direct residents to the Office of Climate Change Initiatives if there is interest in a community garden on City-owned land. The Centre also keeps a database of all community gardens on both City-owned and non-City-owned land. The gardens on City property are supported by staff in the Forestry and Horticulture, and Parks and Cemeteries Sections through supply of mulch, rototilling of soils in the spring, and irrigation (hose connections) servicing. When this arrangement started, the program was manageable with current staff levels, but with increasing locations and size of gardens City-wide, this service is difficult to deliver with current resources. Currently, there are community garden locations in Dundas (Olympic Park), Central Hamilton (Churchill Park, Victoria Park, Gage Park), and in Stoney Creek (Ward 10 Community Garden), among others across the city. The demand for these gardens year over year is high, with nearly all community gardens fully subscribed with wait lists, leading to demand outpacing supply.

### **Pollinator Gardens and Patches in Parks and in the Right-of-Way**

These are areas that are planted with native flowering plants, with the goal to support pollinators such as bees and butterflies. The program is administered by staff in the Business Programs Section who manage intake requests, while Parks staff oversee approvals and inspections. Volunteers maintain these gardens and help secure funding, and the Hamilton Naturalists Club, through the Pollinator Paradise Project, provides educational resources to interested parties. Currently, there are a few examples across the City with the aim of further expansion as part of the Biodiversity Action Plan. These gardens can be smaller areas (patches) that are planted directly into the ground and require only minimal upkeep (such as periodic weeding and removal of dead material in the spring), or they can be larger spaces, possibly planted into containers, and require a bit more effort for upkeep. De-pave projects can also take the form of pollinator gardens, which are typically located next to the road allowance and/or an existing building. The Office of Climate Change Initiatives administers the allotted funding through Planning and Economic Development to Green Venture who leads the

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programming and installation work. Once the allotted funding is exhausted, the administrative work by the Office of Climate Change Initiatives will also end.

#### Raised Planting Beds in Parks and in the Right-of-Way

These can be more naturalized, or formal plantings. Horticulture staff maintain some of these spaces, while others like planters on Pearl Street are maintained by residents. Examples of City-maintained spaces include the concrete planter boxes at the entrances of Victoria Park, or the Children's Garden at Gage Park. Raised planting beds can be legacy items in parks, or can be created as part of park designs, through a master plan redevelopment process.

#### Irrigated and Non-irrigated Traffic Islands, Medians, Bumpouts, and Roundabouts in the Right-of-Way

These gardens represent a core program for Horticulture staff, and are located across the City, either in the centre of roadways in median areas, or in bump-outs/boulevards on the side of roads, or roundabouts. All these spaces are planted and maintained by Horticulture staff. Volunteers are precluded from helping in these areas as there are strict traffic, and health and safety protocols required to perform the work (i.e. plant, weed, and remove materials in these areas). The gardens can include trees, shrubs, perennials, or annual plantings. Some locations have irrigation systems, and some do not.

#### Formal Ornamental Gardens

These gardens prioritize ornamental plant displays, typically in parks such as Gage Park and Sam Lawrence Park. The gardens can contain native pollinator plants, but this is not necessarily the goal of these garden areas. Most of these spaces are managed (planned, planted, and maintained) by Horticulture staff. However, there are examples of formal gardens that are not maintained by City staff, such as the rock garden in Dundas Driving Park that is completely under the care of a dedicated group of volunteers, or the gardens at Birch Avenue greenspace as was outlined in Report PW24031. The size and extent of these gardens can vary by location. Some contain irrigation, while others do not.

#### Summary

The current programs are managed by different staff and volunteer groups and lack centralized oversight. The community gardens and pollinator gardens programs that are public-facing and community-driven sit outside of the Environmental Services Division, while the other garden programs sit within the Environmental Services portfolio. As such, it is confusing for residents to access help, and for staff to manage requests for new locations. A consolidated and enhanced garden program that brings the community

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gardens and pollinator gardens portfolios under the management of Environmental Services would ensure that the City is responsive to the growing public demand for these types of spaces. It would optimize City processes, remove the barrier-to-entry for residents, and would demonstrate the City's commitment to sensational customer service, all while enhancing its biodiversity goals.

## **POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND LEGISLATED REQUIREMENTS**

A realigned gardens program model aligns with the following 2022-2026 Council Priorities:

Priority 1: Sustainable Economic and Ecological Development, Outcome 4: Protect green space and waterways

Priority 2: Safe and Thriving Neighbourhoods, Outcome 3: Provide vibrant parks, recreation and public space

Priority 3: Responsiveness and Transparency, Outcome 1: Prioritize customer service and proactive communication and Outcome 4: Modernize city systems

A realigned program model also aligns with the recommended actions of the recently approved Biodiversity Action Plan and the Climate Action Strategy.

## **RELEVANT CONSULTATION**

This report has been informed by input from City staff who have direct involvement in managing the garden programs in their current state:

Business Programs Section (Environmental Services Division, Public Works);  
Forestry and Horticulture Section (Environmental Services Division, Public Works);  
Parks and Cemeteries Section (Environmental Services Division, Public Works);  
Office of Climate Change Initiatives (Planning and Economic Development).

The comments and ideas of those who participated in the consultation process are directly reflected in this Report and served as foundational input into its recommendations.

## **ANALYSIS AND RATIONALE FOR RECOMMENDATION**

The City of Hamilton's garden programs form critical elements of its parks and greenways system and contribute to the City's aspiration of "making Hamilton the best place to raise a child and age successfully". They serve as gathering nodes that help strengthen neighbourhoods, provide beautification to neighbourhoods, and create healthy and complete communities.

An enhanced and consolidated program model and structure would see the community garden and pollinator garden programs brought into Environmental Services' portfolio, aligned with the other garden portfolios. This will require sustained operational support, particularly as the demand for these types of spaces increases over time. Program resources are also needed to respond to community expectations for support. The recommendations of the Council-approved Biodiversity Action Plan and Climate Action Strategy (Action 9.1) both emphasize the need to increase opportunities for pollinator species to flourish. Community members want to create these spaces, but they need support from the City to ensure success in the long term.

To provide an informed recommendation, staff first undertook an in-depth review of the garden programs in their current state. The analysis was examined from both a customer service lens and a City operations lens.

#### Customer Service Lens

Currently, there are multiple channels for residents to connect with the City when interested in getting involved in a garden program. Various site pages on Hamilton.ca, Councillors offices, and the Customer Contact Centre, or the Hamilton Community Garden Network (external to the city), among others, all intake requests on an ad hoc basis. The absence of a centralized intake system to process requests can be confusing for interested parties to navigate, compromising the City's customer service.

Multiple intake channels also lead to unclear staff responsibilities, which can result in inconsistent messaging to residents related to program timelines, program requirements, expectations, and key contact personnel.

#### City Operations Lens

The analysis also revealed gaps and inconsistencies in the City operations current state of the garden programs. The work related to the community gardens and pollinator gardens programs is divided amongst work groups. Some programs do not have a formalized, documented process, and roles and responsibilities between work groups are unclear. For example, the request intake system for City-run community gardens is done by City staff in the Office of Climate Change Initiatives, but residents seek this information through the Hamilton Community Garden Network, and the City does not keep its own formalized database for community gardens. Staff in Horticulture and Parks know where these gardens are, however, asset management efforts are challenging with multiple points of contact. This can lead to a heavy reliance on specific staff with knowledge/history of community gardens.

The absence of a centralized intake system also means staff in different City groups may be doing work of a similar nature, which can lead to duplication. For example, work completed by staff in the Office of Climate Change Initiatives may have different

processes for doing the same work as staff in Environmental Services. Opportunities exist to find efficiencies to support these programs.

Finally, the current decentralized state results in differing standards across programs depending on which group manages the specific garden program. This can lead to negative public perception due to inconsistencies in program management and compromise customer service.

### Recommendation

Based on the in-depth review of the garden programs in their current state, staff recommend that these programs be centralized within the Environmental Services Division. A centralized program will reduce redundancies and inefficiencies and will provide enhanced clarity, consistency, and oversight as these programs expand and evolve over time. A centralized program will also allow staff to provide enhanced customer service to those interested in the city's garden programs – particularly the community garden and pollinator garden programs, thus implementing the recommended actions of the Biodiversity Action Plan and the Climate Action Strategy.

Transferring the community gardens and pollinator gardens portfolio to Environmental Services will relieve staff in the Office of Climate Change Initiatives of managing that portfolio so that they can fully utilize their intended staffing roles. It is the intent of the Office of Climate Change Initiatives to keep their Full Time Employee complement as-is since the garden portfolio was only a portion of the position. With the recommended shift of the operational aspects of community gardens to the Environmental Services Division, Office of Climate Change Initiatives staff will focus on amplifying the links between climate change, local food security, and the need for urban food and pollinator gardens in City parks and beyond, as set out in actions found in Hamilton's Climate Action Strategy. City garden locations will be leveraged as part of broader efforts to undertake neighbourhood-focused outreach and to provide neighbourhood-level support for a variety of local climate mitigation and adaptation actions.

Report PW24031(a) recommends one FTE in the Business Programs Section, and one FTE in the Forestry and Horticulture Section to resource the program to meet community expectations:

The new position in the Business Programs Section would oversee the following:

- Oversee the management of the community gardens program, pollinator gardens and patches program, and liaise with volunteer groups on formal planting beds in parks that are not maintained by City staff such as the Dundas Driving Park rock garden;
- Develop a new streamlined intake request process and respond to new requests for the community gardens, and pollinator gardens and patches programs;

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- Liaise with City stakeholders to develop, document, and maintain a streamlined and consolidated database for tracking requests and land availability across the City, including liaison with the Neighbour2Neighbour Centre;
- Liaise with external stakeholders, community volunteers, and members of the public with requests and inquiries;
- Coordinate the delivery of supplies to garden locations;
- Act as the primary liaison between City staff and external stakeholders on all inquiries related to all garden programs, including the community gardens program currently led by the Office of Climate Change Initiatives;
- Coordinate with City staff and community groups to lead the programming and outreach of community-led events and City-led initiatives, such as teaching gardens, and pollinator species education and awareness;
- Coordinate with staff from the Environmental Services Division and other Divisions to assist in the implementation of the recommended action items of the Biodiversity Action Plan and the Climate Action Strategy, as they relate to all garden programs, with a focus on expanding and enhancing the pollinator gardens portfolio.

The new position in the Forestry and Horticulture Section would oversee the following:

- Undertake seasonal preparation of community gardens and pollinator gardens, as required, including, but not limited to:
  - Delivering supplies (mulch, soil, compost, plants, etc.) to locations within the program across the City;
  - Activating and de-activating servicing (water servicing, etc.);
  - Performing work associated with new enhanced garden spaces (clearing of sod, rototilling, fence installation, etc.);
- Perform necessary maintenance and operations of community garden and pollinator garden locations to ensure level of service needs, including, but not limited to:
  - Fielding requests from City staff, as needed;
  - Repairing and replacing supplies and equipment associated with community gardens and pollinator gardens;
  - Coordinating with outside contractors on the maintenance of servicing and other City-owned assets;
- Provide subject matter expertise to outside stakeholder groups and to City coordination staff as needed.

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**ALTERNATIVES FOR CONSIDERATION**

N/A

**APPENDICES AND SCHEDULES ATTACHED**

N/A