



Increasing Barrier Free Access to Food Security Through Community Gardens:

The Role of Niagara Region Municipalities in Advancing Policy and Reducing Barriers

A position statement prepared by United Way Niagara and the Niagara Community Garden Network. Published June 2021.

Endorsed by the Niagara Food Security Network members, comprised of more than 100 individuals and community organizations including Niagara Region Public Health and Emergency Services and the Niagara Poverty Reduction Network.



United Way & The Niagara Community Garden Network

- United Way Niagara invests in projects, programs and supports that increase food security for vulnerable populations
- United Way is home to the Niagara Community Garden Network and provides core funding to deliver the programs
- United Way works alongside the Network to advance advocacy efforts and community garden programs
- We believe investing in long term solutions to food security is critical
- The Niagara Community Garden Network (NCGN) is a collaborative network of food security leaders and residents working together to build thriving community gardens
- Our mandate is to help provide our communities access to affordable, healthy food and the resources to grow their skills and engage their community through gardening
- We believe everyone deserves to easily access nutritious and affordable healthy food
- We believe growing and sharing food can transform communities and address environmental, health and social issues

Benefits of Community Gardens are Far Reaching



- Promote healthy, inclusive neighbourhoods
- Supports overall physical & mental health and wellbeing
- Offer opportunities for education & skill development
- Provide economic relief to gardeners
- Build improved social connectedness, community and sense of purpose
- Offer environmental benefits
- Improved nutrition & food security



**EVERYONE HAS THE
RIGHT TO FOOD**

Food Security is a Basic Human Right

Food security is a basic human right, yet almost 60,000 people in Niagara are food insecure, experiencing limited access to nutritious, affordable and [culturally appropriate food](#).

The Government of Canada states “income-related food security is an important public health issue in Canada and is a key social determinant of health.”

Community Gardens as a Food Security Solution

- Community gardens act as a promising strategy to decrease food insecurity because of their ability to provide lower-income households with access to nutritious food
- Often serving for our most marginalized and vulnerable populations
- Effective part of a range of strategies to build resilience and stability in our communities







Working Together

A community garden that is led by the community it serves, and supported by local government is more likely to meet its needs and be successful in the long-term, each community with unique and diverse needs, and contributing their unique strengths and assets.

Local governments can play a supportive and enabling role as part of a range of strategies to build greater resiliency and stability in our communities.



Residents who recognize a need or interest in starting a community garden can work to bring neighbours together to create a common vision. They can help plan, build and maintain the space.



Local governments can develop supportive policies, offer staff assistance in planning and design, provide access to land, financial supports, insurance and offer other resources (such as mulch, soil, water access).



Community organizations in our Niagara Community Garden Network can provide support through consultation, training, advocacy, community engagement, coordination, and ongoing support.

The Community Garden Network Approach

- Mutual support
- Collective impact
- Asset based approach
- Diversity, equity + inclusion
- Food security and justice focused
- Prioritizing vulnerable populations and neighbourhoods
- Skill development
- Social engagement and building community





Public Health Partnership & Ontario's Evidence Brief

United Way and the Garden Network partner with Niagara Region Public Health and Emergency Services to advance food security and access.

We believe that by working across sectors, we can create significant change for vulnerable people.

We also believe Niagara's municipalities are ready to implement best practices to strengthen our food security system.

Public Health Ontario's recent Evidence Brief: [*Municipal and Community-level Interventions to Promote Sustainable Food Systems*](#) states

“municipalities are positioned to intervene in their local food system, and can enact policies and programs that build a culture around local food initiatives.”





How Niagara municipalities can support community gardens

“Local governments do have a significant role to play in the process:
by removing policy barriers;
enacting supportive policies;
providing support related to water access, land tenure, and composting;
by signaling their support of community gardens in government communications; and by dedicating staff time to interact with community gardening groups.”

- Dig It: A Practical Toolkit, How Local Governments Can Support Community Gardens



Community Gardens Policies + Recommendations

Now is the time to act.

Niagara's municipalities can create policies that empower our citizens and provide them with barrier free access to food through community gardens.

The best practices and policies we encourage and recommend Niagara's municipalities to develop specifically relate to:

1. Land use for community gardens, urban agriculture and food security projects
2. Waiving or reducing fees or providing a stipend as a result of fees imposed by the municipality
3. Provide options for holding certificates of insurance
4. Commitment to community gardens with reasonable annual investment
5. Ongoing program evaluation and development



Sample Annual Investment and Commitment

City of St. Catharines 2021

CITY OF ST CATHARINES 2021 FRAMEWORK

Source	Additional # of Plots	Community Garden Improvement & Enhancements	Estimated Cost
Community Gardens Capital Cost Program	20+	Provides matching funding for capital costs of improving existing or starting new Community Gardens on City-owned and privately-owned land	\$8,000
Community Gardens Enhancements Program	10+	Provides funding to existing Community Gardens on City-owned land to enhance and expand.	\$ 5,000
Community Gardens Incubator Program	20	Provides a partnership between the GAC and Community Group as well as funding for start-up capital costs of new Community Gardens on City-owned land.	\$18,500
Community Gardens Grow at Home Program	50	Provides 50 Grow at Home kits to some of the most vulnerable members of the community.	\$6,500
Flower Pot Program	N/A	Continue offering flower pot program to local	\$5,000 (*Note: Essentially zero cost program as costs are



Calls to Action

1. To assign appropriate staff to review your current policies and research best practices
2. Consider how gardens can be integrated into land use by-laws, park master plans, healthy living strategies, sustainability resolutions, climate action strategies, neighbourhood plans. We recommend staff work with us to create an inventory of suitable public land that may be appropriate for use for community gardens, especially in high priority areas
3. To waive any fees imposed by the municipality
4. To provide options for holding insurance that create minimal barriers
5. To provide a reasonable annual investment in budgets for gardens
6. To work collaboratively with us on an ongoing basis to develop supportive policies, to evaluate and develop community garden resources and supports
7. A timely implementation of policy recommendations and best practices that will reduce barriers for community gardens and improve access to healthy, affordable and appropriate food, thereby reducing food insecurity



Thank you.

Questions?

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