



Community Garden Handbook

Rules and procedures for establishing a
community garden on municipal property

Last update: February 2025

HALIFAX

PARKS &
RECREATION

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Section 1

Community Garden program



The municipality's Community Garden program allows residents to operate a community garden on municipally owned property. The program is intended for small scale operations by a group, on a non-profit basis, for:

- personal use
- donation to local food causes
- production of a floral or landscape display
- demonstration of gardening or other related instructional programming

This community garden process follows the Halifax Regional Council approved the *Community Garden Administrative Order (2022-007-OP)*.

Before you apply you may wish to consider:

1. looking at other properties in your neighbourhood such as churches, businesses, organizations, schools, private landowners or other public lands (provincial or federal)
2. consider joining an existing community garden

Find out more about existing gardens on municipal land at halifax.ca/communitygardens.

If you have any questions, please contact your Community Developer:

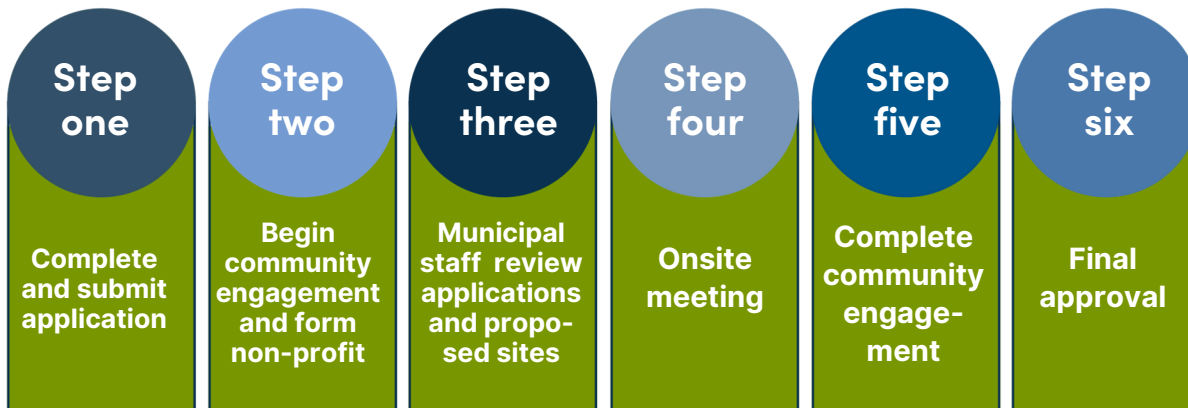
| Community Developer | Serving the areas of: | Phone number | Email address |
|-------------------------------------|---|--------------|--|
| Darren Hirtle | Dartmouth and Eastern Passage | 902.472.1184 | Darren.Hirtle@halifax.ca |
| Kate Moon | Halifax Peninsula | 902.717.4483 | Kate.Moon@halifax.ca |
| Adam Huffman | Bedford, Sackville, Fall River and Musquodoboit Valley | 902.225.6202 | Adam.Huffman@halifax.ca |
| Rachelle M. Turple-Christmas | Cole Harbour and Eastern Shore | 902.225.5806 | rachelle.turple-christmas@halifax.ca |
| Jasmine Du | Clayton Park, Spryfield, Sambro Loop, Beechville, Lakeside, Timberlea, Prospect, Hammonds Plains, Hubbards and area | 902.471.3417 | Jasmine.Du@halifax.ca |

Section 2

The community garden process



The process to consider an application should take about four to eight weeks to complete after the March 30 deadline, depending on the number of applications received.



Step one: Complete the Community Garden program application (available at halifax.ca/communitygardens) and send to the Community Developer in your area (see page 3). Any questions concerning your application should be directed to your Community Developer.

Step two: If you are not a registered society, start the process of forming a non-profit society. You will hold at least **one in-person public information meeting** to:

- inform the neighbourhood of the proposed project
- gauge community support
- identify any issues and how you will address them

Step three: Your Community Developer contact will review the application to ensure it is complete. Your application will then be sent to municipal staff for consideration. They will discuss your application and review the proposed site. The review team may have questions which will be compiled and emailed to you for response.

Step four: An on-site meeting may be scheduled (if needed) with your group and a member(s) from the review team to resolve any outstanding issues.

Step five: Submit the results of your public meeting and neighbours' support.

Step six: Once all steps are complete and the requirements are met, you will receive an agreement from your Community Developer. The contract will lay out all the terms and conditions of your approval and must be signed prior to the start of your garden being built.

Section 3

General liability insurance



Halifax Regional Municipality requires anyone operating on property owned by the municipality to carry a general liability insurance policy with limits equal to the risk of their activity. It is for that reason, that any community garden group participating in the municipal Community Garden program is now required to provide proof of commercial general liability insurance with limits of not less than \$1 million and with Halifax Regional Municipality named on the policy as “additional insured”.

Purchasing liability insurance may be a barrier to some groups. However, there are options:

1. Community garden groups may purchase their own insurance through any Insurance Broker or insurance company. Some groups may already have a liability policy in place and only need to add the Halifax Regional Municipality as an additionally insured. A copy of the certificate of insurance must be provided to your Community Developer no later than May 1 of each season
2. If your group does not have insurance, nor can afford it, you can join the Halifax Regional Municipality group insurance plan. The insurance plan is free to join, however, it does have a \$1,000 deductible that is the responsibility of the community garden group.

A community garden liability insurance policy provides the required liability insurance that will cover any insurance claims or incidents which may arise in operating a community garden. The policy is not intended for garden operations outside the scope of the *Community Garden Administrative Order* such as apiaries, commercial garden ventures, greenhouses or sheds larger than 10'x12'. Any community garden with an apiary must have a registered beekeeper and liability insurance from the [Nova Scotia Beekeepers Association](#).



Section 4

Community engagement



Before you can start your community garden, you will need to make sure the community supports the project. Every effort must be made to inform the residents that border the immediate location of the garden and the surrounding neighbourhood within a one block radius. There must be at least one in-person meeting that neighbours can attend to discuss the project. You can supplement your engagement by using means such as Facebook, online polls, posters within the community, email, etc.

The minimum requirements for community engagement are:

1. hold at least one in-person public information meeting
2. collect and submit the signatures letter (see page 7)
3. submit the results of your community engagement to your Community Developer

Collecting the signatures for the **signatures letter** can be done door-to-door or at the public information meeting. In going door-to-door, it provides you and opportunity to talk to the neighbours and gauge their support or opposition to the idea of the community garden. Speaking to neighbours directly allows you to explain the project to them, gather their support, clarify any misunderstandings and resolve any issues.

The signatures letter must include the following:

- proposed location of the community garden
- copy of the site plan

When you submit the signatures letter, please note which of the neighbours own property immediately adjacent to the garden location.



Sample signature letter

Dear neighbour,

As you may know, our neighbourhood is working to establish a community garden located at _____.

We are asking for your support for this location for the garden. You are invited to come and participate in this garden by being a part of the organizing society or just to come and garden!

Please make note of the details below about the project:

- please look at the attached site plan. It shows you exactly where the garden will be located
- this community garden will have _____ garden beds allowing _____ number of people to garden on the site
- our garden group will maintain a waiting list if there is more interest than plots available

Your signature indicates that you have read and understand the above details of the project and that you support the community garden. If you have any concerns, please contact _____ at _____.

| Printed name | Signature | Civic address |
|--------------|-----------|---------------|
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Section 5

Rules for using municipally owned property



What areas are not for community garden use?

The municipality will not accept applications for community gardens that would be located on sport fields, boulevards and middle medians (areas between streets). Community gardens are not permitted on any municipal right-of-way. Ask your Community Developer for help when searching for a location. Look for city owned spaces next to community centre's, parks, etc.

The Halifax Regional Municipality's Right-of-Way

Use of the right-of-way is reserved for motorists, cyclists and pedestrians. The right-of-way also serves as a corridor for utility infrastructure. To ensure the safety of the public travelling on our roadways and sidewalks as well as the safety of those participating in the gardening activities, and to provide a safe working environment for our utilities to maintain vital public infrastructure, community gardens are not permitted within the right-of-way.

By-law P-600, Respecting municipal parks

The establishment and operation of a community garden must comply with *By-law P-600, Respecting municipal parks* (i.e. vending, use of motor vehicles). A copy of the by-law will be provided to the applicant organization and must be reviewed prior to completing and submitting an application for a community garden.



Requirements for building a community garden

Raised garden beds and cribbing around the garden

The organization shall not carry out any major excavation or disturbance of the land. Only the regular turning and working of the surface area for the preparation of raised garden beds is permitted.

Raised garden beds are to be made out of untreated wood or another material such as brick or stone. This helps maintain an aesthetically pleasing look for all residents in the area. Pressure treated lumber or lumber using creosote (rail ties) for cribbing around the garden is not safe and therefore not permitted.

Garden soil

The organization shall inform the municipality on the source and quality of the soil/mulch before it is used on the site. The organization must ensure all topsoil brought to the site is free of any foreign objects, contaminants, subsoil, roots, sods, rocks or other unwanted materials including raw manures. Topsoil is to be screened through a half-inch screen and shall consist of loose, friable fertile loam (textural class). Topsoil shall be a light mixture to sustain vigorous plant/root growth and with sufficient humus to prevent over-compaction. Topsoil shall have a minimum 2 per cent organic carbon content and a pH between 5.7 and 7.2. **Note:** The municipality reserves the right to request a soil analysis.

Soil analysis

The garden group may wish to undertake a soil analysis to know what nutrients the garden's soil may be lacking. For more information on a soil test, contact [the provincial Analytical Lab](#).

Gardening equipment

The use of heavy excavation equipment is not permitted. Small motorized gardening equipment, such as a Rototiller, is permitted for annual soil turning and must be operated by an experienced individual. Proper clothing, proper footwear and safety equipment is required when operating such equipment.

Fences

A low fence to keep out animals is acceptable but must be approved first. Visibility and accessibility to the garden must be maintained. All fencing supports must be visible for safety.



Requirements for building a community

External structures: Small storage sheds and greenhouses

The Community Garden program has allowances for garden groups to have external structures on site such as a shed or greenhouse. To qualify for an external structure your group:

- successfully operated a garden on municipal property through the Community Garden program for at least a year
- send a written request to your Community Developer with reasons why the external structure is needed
- send an updated site plan with the written request

Each qualified written external structure request will be reviewed by municipal staff before approval can be confirmed.

External structures:

- cannot have running water, electricity or a permanent base
- cannot be larger than 10'x12' (max. 120 sq ft)

In the event permission is granted for an external structure to be installed as part of the Community Garden program, the Halifax Regional Municipality is not responsible for, nor liable for, the design, installation, construction, maintenance or removal of external structures associated with community gardens. In addition, the garden group should be aware that loss of any type to the participants, external structure or its contents including but not limited to theft, fire, vandalism, spillage or damages of any kind (including personal injury) are the responsibility of the garden group. The municipality is not responsible for loss, damage, theft or vandalism of any structures or equipment.

End of the project and restoring the garden site

Either party may end the agreement without cause by providing ninety days' written notice of termination to the other party. The garden group shall be responsible for the clean-up and any rehabilitation of the garden site at the end of the project.

Compost bins

A composter must be a closed bin design to keep animals and pests out. Every gardener should be aware of the compost bin located on site.

Disposal of organic waste/onsite garbage

As a community gardener, you are a steward of both your plot and the garden. Each gardener should compost what you grow and dispose of your garden wastes/weed in a safe and responsible way (i.e. using a compost bin). Please do not throw waste or weeds on the pathways, in the fields close by or just beyond your plots. No waste receptacles for non-organic waste (garbage) shall be permitted on the garden site. The Garden Group shall remove all garbage from the garden site immediately.

Requirements for building a community

Site selection

When selecting a site for a community garden you must consider the look of the site and ensure your garden will compliment it. You must also consider security and how it will be provided for the site. Site plans (see example below) are required upon submission of application, if you wish to expand your garden you must send your Community Developer a new site plan and a written request, requesting the expansion. The Community Developer will have the final decision on the site plan which will be determined after a site meeting with the municipal employees.

Site maintenance

When designing the layout of your community garden, please keep enough space for a lawn mower to move between your garden beds. Your society will be responsible for maintaining the area between the garden beds. The municipal contractors who cut the grass are not required to cut between your garden beds.

Cannabis

Cannabis is not permitted to be grown in any community garden on municipally owned property.



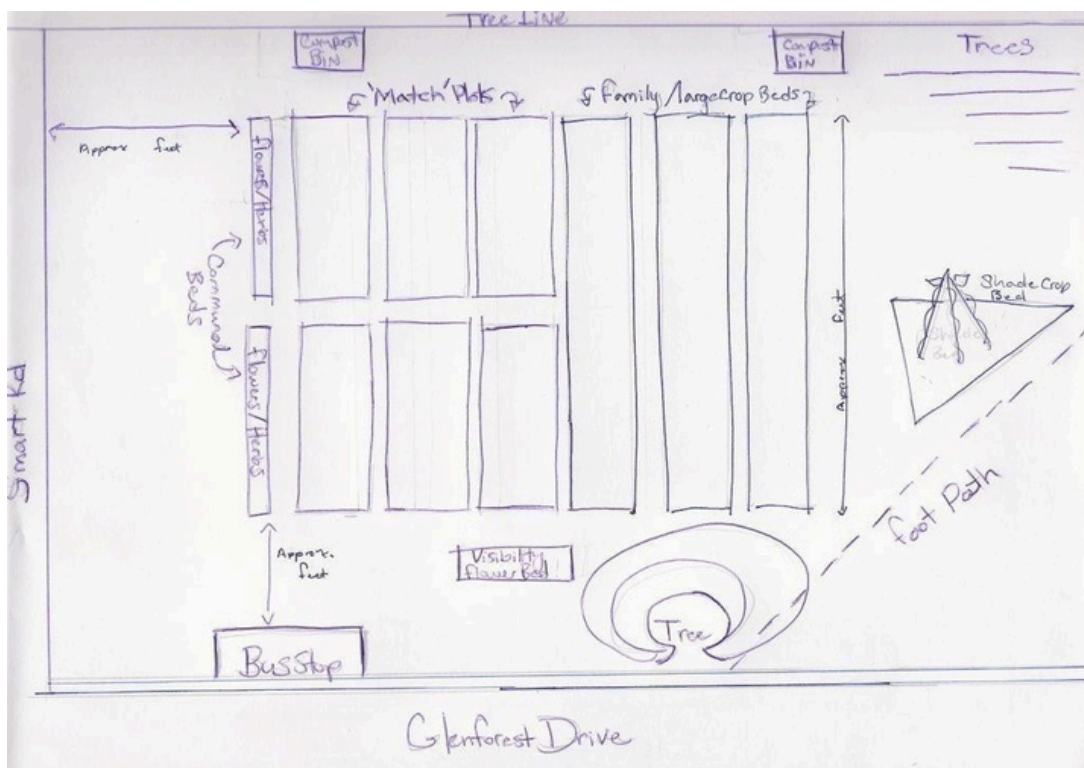
Section 6

Creating a site plan



To enable a timely and complete review of a proposal for a community garden, a detailed site plan is required. This plan forms a substantial portion of the information used to determine eligibility of a community garden. Establishment of the community garden must follow the approved plan. The plan may or may not be professionally drawn but must be legible, drawn to scale and contain the following:

- location of proposed garden beds, showing the number of garden beds you want
- approximate location of existing property lines
- general location of existing structures (buildings, play structures, etc.)
- general location of existing landscape features
 - planting beds, trees, pathways, benches, lighting, fencing, parking areas, etc.
- general location of any existing watercourses (streams, rivers, etc.)
- approximate distances between property lines, structures and landscape features
- dimensions of the proposed garden area, where you will be planting
- dimensions and location of any proposed fencing, composting bins, small garden sheds or greenhouses, pathways or other similar features to be installed in support of the proposed community garden
- location of the proposed water source
- please note what area will be used as a “common area” for all to garden and use



Section 7

Operating the community garden



The Community Garden agreement between a “garden group” and “the municipality” stipulates the rights, responsibilities and rules to be followed within the community garden. Once you have completed all the requirements and municipal employees approves your application, you can start your garden once this agreement has been signed.

How long will this agreement last?

Your garden group is responsible to maintain, manage and operate the site as per the rules and operating procedures and the definition of a community garden outlined on the application. The agreement is for three years, with an option to renew.

Funding

Your garden group is responsible for all expenses associated with building, operating and maintaining the garden site, this includes the provision of water to the community garden.

Expanding existing (approved) community gardens

If you wish to expand an existing community garden, please send the proposed changes (written description, reasons for the expansion and a new drawing of the proposed site) to your Community Developer. They will review and check with the program review team. Changes to the original plan require the written approval by the municipality prior to installation. The municipality reserves the right to end the agreement if the operating procedures are not followed.

Risk management

The Halifax Regional Municipality is not responsible for loss, damage, injury or any other type of incident or claim arising from the creation, operation, products or site of the garden in this open space. The municipality has the authority to stop any activities they see which are unsafe. The garden group should have a risk management plan to promote safety and to minimize any risk to its volunteers and participants.

Common area in your design

Your garden group is required to maintain at least one area that is open for anyone to garden in. You should plan to encourage the involvement of groups such as schools, youth, seniors and residents who do not have an assigned plot.

Assigning individual plots/plot holders

If the community garden contains individual plots, a first-come, first-served waiting list must be maintained. Membership in the garden group and the opportunity to be assigned a plot must be open to any resident of the municipality.

A plot holder is a member of the garden group who has shared or full responsibility for gardening at least one garden plot within a community garden. Plot holder agreements are recommended to inform plot holders of their responsibilities, share your rules and procedures to the resident who wishes to garden at your site.

Membership/plot fees

Your community garden will be located on municipally owned property. Therefore, we require you to keep any membership fees below \$30 per person for the season.

All money collected must go back into the Community Garden program. Proper records shall be maintained following standard financial practices.



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