



Planning, Building and By-law Services

Prepared for: Council-in-Committee

Report: PBBS-17-2026

Meeting Date: April 13, 2026

1. Title

Town-Led Community Gardens

2. Recommendations

That: Council receives Report No. PBBS-17-2026 for information purposes and;

That: Council directs staff to prepare the necessary by-law.

3. Relation to Council's Corporate Strategic Plan

Priority: Environmental and climate change resiliency
Initiative: 5.4

4. List of Stakeholders

Fort Erie Public Library (Central Branch)
Community Outreach Program Erie (COPE)
Town of Fort Erie Residents

5. Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to seek Council direction to prepare a by-law to authorize the Town to enter into an agreement with one or more community organizations for the operation and maintenance of municipally led community gardens.

6. Analysis

On August 11, 2025, Town of Fort Erie Council approved the municipality's first Climate Change Action Plan (CCAP), which establishes a framework to mitigate the impacts of climate change and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The CCAP identifies a range of actions and initiatives to support environmental sustainability, including the implementation of community gardens throughout the Town. To support the delivery of these initiatives, funding has been allocated through a dedicated reserve to advance actions identified within the CCAP.

Community gardens are widely recognized for their environmental, social and economic benefits. They contribute to local food security, promote sustainable food systems, support community engagement, and provide educational opportunities related to healthy eating and

environmental stewardship. As such, the establishment of community gardens represents a meaningful and community-focused action which aligns with the Town's Environmental and Climate Change Resiliency strategic priority and the objectives of the Town's CCAP.

Following Council adoption of the CCAP, staff have developed a Community Garden Policy Framework, attached as **Appendix 1**, which outlines the proposed structure, roles, and operational expectations for this initiative. Under this framework, the Town will be responsible for the design and construction of the gardens, while partnering community organizations will oversee the ongoing maintenance and day-to-day operations, supported by volunteers.

Through interdepartmental collaboration, staff identified a preferred site for the community garden, which is to be located at 400 Central Avenue, in front of the Fort Erie Railway Museum. A conceptual design for the site has been prepared by staff and is attached as **Appendix 2**.

On March 15, 2026, the Town launched a public outreach and media campaign to invite expressions of interest from local organizations interested in partnering to manage and maintain the community gardens. The application period closed on March 31, 2026, and the Town received submissions from two community organizations: Community Outreach Program Erie (COPE) and the Fort Erie Public Library (Central Branch). Both submissions demonstrated strong alignment with the objectives of the program.

The Fort Erie Public Library has proposed engaging both youth and adult volunteers through its existing Seed Library drop-in program to support planning and maintenance activities, as well as introducing a monthly children's gardening club focused on growing vegetables, healthy eating, and food education. Community Outreach Program Erie (COPE), has indicated its ability to provide volunteers two-days per week and has expressed interest in allocating a portion of the harvest to support its food program, thereby helping provide fresh, locally grown produce to individuals and families in need.

Based on the complementary nature of the two proposals, staff are recommending a collaborative partnership between the two organizations for an initial two-year term. At the conclusion of each term, the Town will reissue an expression of interest to the community to provide opportunities for additional organizations to participate in the program.

Moreover, the Town has also undertaken outreach through its Economic Development and Tourism Services division to local businesses, seeking both financial contributions and in-kind donations of materials and supplies to support the implementation of the gardens. This initiative has been met with positive support, with contributions helping to offset project costs and advance implementation. Donors will be publicly recognized through the Town's social media channels, with additional on-site signage provided for those contributing above a specified threshold.

Furthermore, the Town has applied to the TD Friends of the Environment Foundation for grant funding to support the project. Funding decisions are anticipated in April 2026.

To formalize the roles and responsibilities of participating organizations, an agreement is required to authorize the operation and maintenance of the community gardens. A draft agreement is attached as **Appendix 3**.

Subject to Council's direction, staff are targeting installation of the community garden in advance

of Earth Day 2026, with planting activities anticipated to commence in late May 2026.

7. Financial, Staffing and Accessibility (AODA) Implications

An initial allocation of \$10,000 has been approved from the Climate Change Action Plan (CCAP) reserve to support the implementation of the community gardens. The Town has also applied for funding through the TD Friends of the Environment Foundation, with funding decisions anticipated in April 2026. In addition, the Town has received both financial contributions and in-kind donations of materials and supplies from local businesses, which have helped offset initial project costs.

There are no significant staffing impacts associated with this initiative, as the day-to-day operation and maintenance of the gardens will be overseen by partnering community organizations and volunteers. To support the initial construction and installation of the gardens, staff will undertake an internal call for volunteers across departments to assist with implementation, where feasible.

From an accessibility perspective, the design of the community gardens has incorporated features to support accessibility and inclusivity. Raised garden beds will be installed to improve ease of use for individuals with mobility considerations, In addition, ground surfacing materials will be installed around the garden beds to provide a stable and accessible surface, and the gardens have been strategically located in close proximity to the adjacent parking area to enhance ease of access for all users.

8. Policies Affecting Proposal

The Town's Climate Change Action Plan

9. Comments from Departments, Community and Corporate Partners

N/A

10. Alternatives

Council could choose not to proceed with the proposed by-law to authorize agreements with community organizations for the operation and maintenance of the community gardens. However, this would limit the Town's ability to implement the community garden initiative as outlined in the Climate Change Action Plan and may delay or prevent the establishment of the garden for the 2026 growing season.

11. Communicating Results

N/A

12. Conclusion

The Town's community garden initiative is a project that helps achieve the Environmental and Climate Change Resiliency strategic priorities, goals of the Climate Change Action Plan and promotes local sustainability objectives. Through a collaborative approach with local organizations, the gardens will provide opportunities for community engagement, environmental education, and enhanced food security, while promoting accessibility and inclusion.

By authorizing staff to prepare a by-law to enter into agreements with the selected organizations, Council will enable the Town to move forward with the timely implementation of the gardens, with construction completion targeted for Earth Day 2026 and planting anticipated to begin in late May 2026. This approach ensures the gardens are operational in time for the 2026 growing season, providing benefits to the community while fostering long-term stewardship and volunteer opportunities.

13. Report Approval

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14. Attachments

Appendix 1 – Town-Led Community Garden Policy Framework
Appendix 2 – 400 Central Avenue Community Garden Conceptual Design
Appendix 3 – Community Garden Management Agreement