

Community gardens in Fredericton get new policy from city hall

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Coun. Kate Rogers, chairman of the community services committee, outside city hall after Thursday's meeting. The committee approved a new policy supporting community gardens in the city.

Photo: Stephen Llewellyn/The Daily Gleaner

City hall is about to apply water and fertilizer to community gardens in Fredericton.

The city's community services committee recently okayed a new policy for community gardens which declares such gardens are a benefit to the city, outlines where they should be located on city-owned land including parks, and requires that reserves 15 per cent of such gardens be reserved for low-income people.

While the policy says the city should offer community gardens help in the form of wood chips and compost, it also states the group running the garden must provide the water.

The policy must still be approved by a full session of city council.

“With the cost of food on the rise, food security and the availability of healthy local food choices have been identified as key issues among the city’s residents,” said Fredericton senior planner Meredith Gilbert, in her report.

“The community is responding to this need directly through the creation of community gardens. Since 2003, seven community gardens have been established in the City of Fredericton, all of which are privately operated by groups of volunteers.”

Coun. Mike O’Brien said he likes the idea of a policy that supports community policies and food security comes up frequently at public meetings.

He said eating healthy is extremely important.

“Whatever we can do to facilitate it in a reasonable manner, obviously, in the right locations, is the right way to go,” said O’Brien.

Coun. Stephen Chase also said he supported the proposed policy.

He said it’s important that community gardens on public lands be centrally located. But such gardens should have very clear terms and conditions, and be properly maintained, said Chase.

Deputy Mayor Eric Megarity said one of the benefits of the existing community gardens in the city is the neighbourhood engagement they create.

Coun. Dan Keenan said the location of such community gardens should be on transit routes so they are accessible to low-income people.

Coun. Kate Rogers, chairman of the committee, said there are lots of potential locations for community gardens in Fredericton.

“I want to make sure that we weigh all of these different factors when we’re making a decision,” she said.

“We have a really wonderful community group here today.”

Under the proposed policy each individual application for a community garden must be properly fenced and maintained and approved by council. Such a garden must also carry \$2 million in insurance, although Gilbert says city staff members are looking at the idea of some kind of umbrella policy for community gardens.

She also said the city should host a workshop for groups who want to establish community gardens to explain the policy, and post a map on the city’s website to show where gardens can be located on city-owned land.

John Coates of the Fredericton Organic Community Garden on Kimble Road, said he was pleased with the approval of the policy.

Madeleine Berrevoets, co-chair of the New Brunswick Community Harvest Gardens, which operates two successful gardens on Fredericton's north side, said her group wants to apply for a community garden in downtown Fredericton as soon as possible.

"We've been waiting for this and working on this for a long time," she said, after the meeting.

"It's great to see it move forward and it's great to see support from the council."

She said at their existing community gardens on the northside, people of different income levels work their plots side by side, talk and make friends.

Berrevoets said the group has money and people standing by and all they need to proceed with their next garden is a piece of land somewhere in the downtown.

She said the group is keenly awaiting the city's map of available land for a community garden. A community garden needs to be easily accessible by people walking, she said.

"Odell Park would be great," said Berrevoets. "Wilmot Park would be great.

"Anything down at the bottom of the hill so nobody is walking up the hill."

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