

A Proposed Community Garden in Cahill Park

What is a Community Garden?

A Community Garden is a space for the members of the local neighbourhood to come together in a communal space to garden. Gardening is an activity that brings folks from diverse backgrounds and experiences together. This includes older and younger community members, New Canadians and those born and raised in the neighbourhood.

Community engagement and outdoor activity has both physical and mental health benefits for gardeners. A Community Garden also gives gardeners in shaded dwelling/apartments to engage their children in gardening activities.

The act of gardening is also important in this era of climate change. It supports pollinators, helps reduce a community's environmental footprint by growing locally, enhances greenspace, and the soil's ability to take in carbon and reduce the impacts of flooding in wet areas. A part of a Community Garden's culture is to give back to the community with one key way being through a Plant-a-row, Donate-a-row food bank plot.

How does a Community Garden Operate?

Community Gardens in Ottawa are volunteer-run and include agreements with gardeners, landowners, and other stakeholders (including Just Food and any funders) that outline responsibilities. All Community Gardens have to integrate organic gardening and water conservation practices, and all gardeners must follow all City of Ottawa By-laws and rules laid out in the garden agreement around items such as aesthetics and waste management.

Do we have other Community Gardens in Ottawa?

Yes! The Community Gardening Network has been operating as a community initiative in partnership with the City of Ottawa for 22 years. Since 2006 the program has been managed by Just Food. We currently have 90 gardens from Orleans to Stittsville. The program partners with land connected to Ottawa Community Housing, NCC, faith groups, nonprofits and private landowners. There are also 40 school gardens. And these numbers are growing every year.

What does a Community Garden look like?

Community Gardens can be both in-ground or within raised garden boxes. The Community Garden proposed for Cahill Park is raised boxes, designed using the approved standards set by the City. The community members identified that they wanted to make 100% accessible as opposed to the requirement that 20% of gardening space be accessible through raised boxes in a garden.

All community gardens have to have landowner agreement and all gardeners have to agree to hold to certain standards. These standards are set by the community itself and by the landowner. In the case of the City of Ottawa land, there are additional requirements set out for parks. The Community Garden hosts events such as volunteer days to ensure maintenance and cleaning is done, and can choose to not renew a plot to anyone who did not comply with aesthetic standards laid out clearly in the agreement after repeated warnings.

Below we have added in photos of what other community gardens look like, including ones with the same garden boxes that would be used in Cahill Park.



Carlington Community Garden



Carlington Community Garden - accessible pathways, overall view



Knox Church Community Garden Build (top) | The Haven Community Garden (bottom)

Why is this Community Garden proposed for this location?

Cahill Park is proposed as the location of the community garden for a variety of reasons and based on consultation with a number of stakeholders - including community members, organizations and all relevant City of Ottawa departments.

- There are currently no community gardens in the Cahill / Uplands / McCarthy area, and many interested community members without access to growing space.
- The Hunt-Club Riverside Park has been deemed an unacceptable location by the City of Ottawa.
- Cahill Park has been given initial approval by the City to go towards the planning stage as it marginally impacts the amount of greenspace available for the community to use for picnics, dog walking, and activities such as throwing a frisbee around with friends.
- The location in the park was chosen based on accessibility needs, water access, and for the good gardening conditions (on higher ground, does not flood, has good access to sunlight and water, minimal wind exposure).
- The Community Garden will be 12 - 15 feet away from all private property.



Who approves a Community Garden?

A community garden approval process depends on its location. The proposed community garden in Cahill Park is on City of Ottawa land and so must go through a City of Ottawa process, which includes:

- The community group interested in starting a community garden must work through the Community Gardening Network and attend a workshop called “How to Start a Community Garden”, which outlines rules and responsibilities.
- The CGN Coordinator bring’s community’s request for a garden to the City of Ottawa staff liaison who takes it to various departments, all of whom have to agree with the concept of a community garden in the proposed location.
- Approval of initial plans then leads to a consultation process which includes posting a sign up in the park for 30 days allowing time to work with members of the neighbourhood to address their concerns.
- A finalized plan is then passed through for final approval at City departments.
- Each Community Garden must have a volunteer who will sign a license of occupancy. The garden is then added to insurance under the City of Ottawa’s community insurance program.

If the garden wishes to access funding:

- The community group lays out a plan of action, and develops an application for the Community Garden Development Fund (managed by Just Food) which has to include letters of support from community organizations, a proposed design, a detailed budget, as well as an operational plan, including proposed annual plot fees and water access.
 - This proposed Cahill Community Garden currently has the support of the Hunt Club Community Association (for Coordinating support), the Carleton Condominium Corporation #143 (for water access), and the Community Gardening Network.
- The application is processed through the Community Garden Development Fund allocations committee, which includes three Garden Coordinators of other Community Gardens who the application before giving approval for a set amount to go towards building the new garden.

How do Community Gardens access water?

The majority of gardens have an agreement with an adjacent household, organization, business, or City department to access their tap or standpipe with a metre so that the garden can repay water use. In Cahill Park, the proposed Community Garden has an agreement with CCC#143 to give water access. It includes roles, responsibilities, procedures, and ensures accountability of designated community members who have access to water.

Currently, this agreement includes:

- The water will be metered, tracked weekly, and monthly usage reported to CCC#143.
- The fees will be based on current municipal water and sewage fees.
- Payment will be made by October 31 of every year.
- Only a pre-approved individual will have access to water infrastructure including the outdoor faucet (near unit 179) and indoor valve to turn it ON/OFF.
 - The faucet will be turned ON/OFF from inside the utility room to ensure water is not misused.
- They will fill water containers on site, on pre-approved days. Hoses and infrastructure will be neatly put away.
- Infrastructure from the faucet to the garden is the responsibility of the community garden.
- The water system before the faucet is the responsibility of CCC#143.

How does the Community Gardening Network support Community Gardens?

The Community Gardening Network offers support to all community gardens:

- Provide access to information on development/operation of community gardens.
- Work in partnership with many partners to plan and advocate for community gardening, food access, and good food policies.
- Build and coordinate network supports for all gardens.
- Assist interested groups in searching for suitable land for the development of community gardens, and support garden start-ups.
- Support sustainable, organic gardening practices in gardens, including water efficiency, seed saving, good soil management practices, composting etc.
- Provide workshops and resources on skills required for community gardens, including start-up skills, facilitation skills, organic gardening skills, food preservation skills, etc.
- Offer networking and event opportunities for existing community gardens.
- Assist gardeners in conflict resolution.
- Administer the Community Gardening Development Fund and assist access to other resources.
- Promote the Plant-a-row, Donate-a-row project among gardeners, and encourage pollinator-friendly planting, children's gardens, forgiveness gardens, etc.