

To: Electoral Area Services Committee
From: Gillian Berger, Communications Coordinator

Date: 2020-05-12
File No: 0870-25-Deroche

Subject: Community Garden at the FVRD Deroche Office

RECOMMENDATION

OPTION 1: THAT the Fraser Valley Regional District Board direct staff to work with the Province of BC to explore options for Actively Creating an Exceptional Society (ACES) to manage a community garden on the Crown land parcel located at the Deroche Community Office;

AND THAT staff be directed to develop an agreement with ACES regarding management of a community garden located at the Deroche Community Office.

OPTION 2: THAT the Fraser Valley Regional District Board direct staff to work with Actively Creating an Exceptional Society (ACES) to identify alternative locations for a community garden.

STRATEGIC AREA(S) OF FOCUS

Support Environmental Stewardship
Support Healthy & Sustainable Community

PRIORITIES

BACKGROUND

In April 2020, the FVRD Board approved a motion from the Electoral Area Services Committee (EASC) to prepare a report that outlines the viability of establishing a community garden at the FVRD's Deroche Community Office. Staff were directed to work closely with the Directors Bales and Stobbart to identify community interest and non-profit groups that might be willing to work toward this goal.

DISCUSSION

Community gardens take different shapes and forms, depending on the needs and desires of the community. However, most community gardens these have common features:

- ② occupy both public and privately-owned land, but are managed publicly, by a coalition of community members and organizations or government agencies.
- ② focus on community development, beautification, food production, ornamental plants, education, or therapeutic purposes, and
- ② are publicly accessible.

There are many benefits associated with community gardens. They create healthier, sustainable and more resilient communities by:

- ☐ addressing food security issues,
- ☐ decreasing greenhouse gas emissions,
- ☐ fostering a sense of community and positive social interaction,
- ☐ providing education about the importance of agriculture and food systems,
- ☐ connecting people to nature and
- ☐ protecting and promoting open space.

Assessing Community Demand, Support and Access

The first step in establishing a community garden is to determine whether there is a need and support for one. Stats Canada data indicates that Area G is 90% single-family dwellings, while Electoral Area C is 75% single-family dwellings and 20% mobile homes.

Community gardens are typically located in urban centres where land is at a premium, and residents do not have many opportunities to connect with nature or grow their own food. In rural areas, where access to nature is less restricted, and more people have access to larger parcels of land for gardening, community gardens can act as gathering places bringing a community together. They also offer an opportunity to share knowledge and resources. In both urban and rural settings, the success of a community garden is based on the demand and willingness of a community to support it. Local governments can assist community groups to assess demand through their community planning processes.

It is important to consider how the community group will provide other members of the public with an opportunity to participate in this community garden, avoiding the situation where access is limited to only those participating in that specific community group.

As part of the May 12, 2020, Electoral Area Services Committee meeting, EASC will be considering a funding request from the Actively Creating an Exceptional Society (ACES) regarding a community garden. ACES is requesting Grant-In-Aid funding for the development of a community garden at the Deroche Community Office that will be developed in collaboration with the Deroche Farmers Market, a weekly event held throughout the summer months.

Management of the community garden

All community gardens involve collaboration and partnerships. A key indicator of success is ensuring an agreement is in place which outlines the rights and responsibilities of each party.

Local governments can indicate a range of commitments to community gardens: from high-level resolutions that support gardens in principle to specific policies that designate land for community

gardens, regulate development, and allocate resources for gardens. Community gardens can also be integrated into many types of planning processes, including official community plans.

Community groups generally assume responsibility for the management of a community garden – deciding on membership requirements, allocating lots, setting and collecting annual fees, agreeing on communal upkeep and maintenance, etc.

Land Use

The FVRD Deroche community office located at 10220 N Deroche Road occupies two parcels of land (illustrated below) that are zoned P-2, Public Service, which is defined in Bylaw 559 as “providing for public activities or public functions within facilities established by a government, and includes public parks, public playgrounds, and public utilities or any other facilities established by a government.”



The parcel outlined in yellow is fee simple land owned by the FVRD. The zoning is P-2 Public Service and would allow for a community garden on this parcel.

The parcel outlined in blue is Crown land, for which the FVRD has a lease until 2032. The terms of the lease stipulate the land can only be used for park purposes. Permission from the Province would be required to create a community garden on this parcel.

Considerations for locating a community garden on FVRD owned parcel

The only available space to locate a community garden on the FVRD-owned parcel is on the east side of the building on top of the septic field. Consideration should be given to the following:

- ☐ health and safety concerns of growing organic food on top of a septic field,
- ☐ potential damage to the drainage system from garden crops with extensive or deep root systems,
- ☐ ensuring continued unrestricted access to the septic tank,
- ☐ potential negative impact to the drainage system from increased soil levels from either building raised beds or amending the soil,
- ☐ ensuring that access to the Deroche Farmer's Market storage container is not impeded,
- ☐ ensuring that access is equitable and that the entire community is given an opportunity to participate in the community garden,
- ☐ water access as the water pump is located on the other side of the building, and
- ☐ installation of a community garden would restrict the use of this land for other activities such as storing the FVRD's emergency response supplies in the event the Deroche community office is designated as a backup emergency response centre.

Considerations for locating a community garden on crown leased land

Locating a community garden on the Crown land parcel directly in front of the Deroche community office avoids the issues associated with the septic field and storage access, and has the added advantage of providing more space and increased sun exposure. However, this location also has issues that need to be considered:

- ☐ permission must be obtained from the Province, which can be a lengthy process,
- ☐ the community sign must not be impeded or blocked by garden plants or structures,
- ☐ water access could require hoses to be stretched across the parking lot and public walkway causing tripping hazards, and
- ☐ a power line runs underneath the turf to the community sign.

Regardless of where the community garden is located, consideration will need to be given to storage requirements for tools and supplies, and potential impacts on the current users of the Deroche Community Office.

Alternative locations for a community garden

As identified as part of the April 28, 2020 Board meeting, there is the possibility for staff to work with a community group in order to identify alternative locations on private land in the Deroche area for a community garden. There are currently some discussions underway with local farmers to canvass interest of having a community group operate their community garden on surplus farm lands.

Locating the community garden on private farm lands, and not on FVRD owned or leased land, would avoid any of the health, safety, risk management and liability concerns outlined below.

Health and safety considerations

As with any public facility, the health and safety of the public and users are of prime concern. Risks to public health and safety can take several forms – personal injury, theft, property damage, and potential illness from contaminated produce. In some community garden models, governments opt to provide insurance coverage under their own policies. In other models, the community group managing the garden is required to carry insurance.

Another safety issue to consider is the potential to attract dangerous wildlife. Bears and cougars are known to be in the area. A community garden featuring berries, fruits and vegetables is an attractant. Sturdy fencing may be required to keep wildlife out, and garden practices designed to reduce wildlife visits, such as removing bird feeders, managing compost, and harvesting promptly, should be followed.

Risk Management and Liability

Staff have engaged the FVRD's insurer, the Municipal Insurance Association of BC (MIABC), in discussions regarding the risk management and liability associated with having a community group operate a community garden on FVRD owned or leased lands.

The MIABC has confirmed that the best way of proceeding is for the FVRD to enter into an agreement with the community group, which would indemnify and hold harmless the FVRD from potential losses. The community group would be required to obtain their own liability insurance policy, naming the FVRD as an additional insured to their policy.

MIABC has also advised that unless the FVRD is providing hands-on direction and control of the community group volunteers, any loss or claim that occurred on FVRD owned or leased lands would not be covered.

Therefore, the recommendation from staff would be for the FVRD to enter into an agreement with the community group, indemnifying the FVRD and requiring the community group to obtain their own liability insurance policy.

COST

Once the community's needs have been assessed and commitment is confirmed, a detailed cost analysis can be undertaken, and funding options explored. The size of the garden, location, whether it is to be wheelchair accessible, etc. all play a role in determining start-up costs.

The Board may want to consider adopting a community garden policy that outlines its level of commitment to community gardens. Many local governments support community gardens in principle but stipulate they must be developed at minimal cost to the local government, whereas other local governments contribute water, staff resources, tools and more.

CONCLUSION

Establishing a community garden is a multi-phased approach involving many partners. If the Board wishes to pursue the establishment of a community garden on the Crown land portion of the Deroche Community Office property, FVRD will need to obtain permission from the Province of BC. Should permission not be granted, the FVRD can still assist the community with exploring alternative locations.

COMMENTS BY:

Jaime Reilly, Manager of Corporate Administration:

Reviewed and supported.

Kristy Hodson, Acting Director of Finance:

If this project is to proceed, ACES would be required to apply each year for a Grant-In-Aid, as there is no guaranteed funding.

Jennifer Kinneman, Chief Administrative Officer:

Reviewed and supported.