

RESIDENTIAL BOULEVARD GARDENING GUIDELINES

RECOMMENDATION

That the February 8, 2023, report CO01216, Residential Boulevard Gardening Guidelines, be received for information.

Requested Council Action	Information Only		
ConnectEdmonton's Guiding Principle	ConnectEdmonton Strategic Goals		
CONNECTED This unifies our work to achieve our strategic goals.	Climate Resilience		
City Plan Values	LIVE. THRIVE. CREATE.		
City Plan Big City Move(s)	A community of communities Greener as we grow	Relationship to Council's Strategic Priorities	Community safety and well-being Arts and culture Climate adaptation and energy transition
Corporate Business Plan	Transforming for the future		
Council Policy, Program or Project Relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Bylaw 18825 - Public Tree Bylaw ● Bylaw 12800 - Zoning Bylaw ● Bylaw 14600 - Community Standards Bylaw ● Design and Construction Standards - Volume 5, Landscaping ● Greener as We Grow ● Bylaw 5590 - Traffic Bylaw ● Community Gardens, Front Yards in Bloom and Partners in Parks 		
Related Council Discussions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● CO01217 Urban Farms and Gardens on Public Land, Community and Public Services committee, August 22, 2022 ● Alternative Landscape Options for Boulevard and Turf, City Council, April 4, 2022 		

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Previous Council/Committee Action

On April 4, 2022 Council passed the following motion:

That Administration begin a project for residential boulevard gardening guidelines to encourage low maintenance, citizen-led plantings, gardening, and beautification that contributes to neighbourhood vitality and climate resilience, from May to October 2022 and provide a report back with the results including resident feedback and suggested improvements.

Executive Summary

- The Residential Boulevard Gardening program was launched on July 28, 2022.
- The program aligns with the City's strategic plan through growing a sense of community and offering solutions for climate change resistance in transitioning away from traditional turf.
- Processes developed for the program support a variety of low impact gardens on City boulevards in residential areas.
- Program development and implementation involved stakeholder engagement and exploring opportunities to align Residential Boulevard Gardening with other City programs. In the program's first season, 200 gardens were approved on City boulevards.
- Feedback gathered from program participants through a season-end survey will be evaluated and considered for future program improvements.

REPORT

The Residential Boulevard Gardening program, launched on July 28, 2022, allows residents to garden on City-owned boulevards. These boulevards are already maintained by residents adjacent to their property in accordance with Bylaw 14600 - Community Standards Bylaw and Bylaw 5590- Traffic Bylaw. Since the program launched, 200 gardens shown in Attachment 1, have been approved, through the newly developed boulevard gardening declaration process.

Residential Boulevard Gardening Options

Administration developed two application processes to support residential gardening on City boulevards as outlined in Attachment 2:

- **Declaration:** An online application process that allows for simple and instant approval of most gardening projects. Basic information is collected from the applicant such as who is gardening and where the garden is located. The applicant must agree to the terms and conditions of the program. Insurance is not required but is recommended. Gardens in this category are considered low impact and may include low-growing plants, flowers, small planters, or alternatives to turf such as clover or creeping thyme.

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- **Licence of Occupation (LOO):** A process that allows for more complex garden installations through the issuance of an agreement between the gardener and the City. Applications require detailed plans of the gardening project, which are individually assessed against specific conditions, including evaluation of the boulevard and surrounding area. Gardens in this category are more complex, may require excavation, or involve larger planters and larger vegetation such as shrubs. Additional guidelines for the LOO option are being worked on and will be ready for spring 2023.

These application processes allow Administration to:

- Measure participation in the program
- Understand what areas in the City have high or low uptake
- Share guidelines and safety considerations with residents, such as underground utility presence and protection of boulevard trees
- Plan for regular City maintenance work with minimal disruption to boulevard gardens

Interest in more complex gardens was limited, with six gardening applications falling into the LOO category.

Program Alignment

The Residential Boulevard Gardening program aligns with the City's strategic plan by contributing to neighbourhood vitality and climate resilience. Neighbourhood vibrancy is promoted through resident-led beautification projects in all neighbourhoods around Edmonton. Climate resilience is supported as turf on boulevards transitions to more diverse plant varieties which increases pollinator habitat, decreases run-off during large storm events and decreases the use of traditional turf grass maintenance equipment such as gas powered lawn mowers.

Continued Residential Boulevard Gardening Development

Administration will continue to gather resident and operational feedback for continued program improvement. Feedback is collected and actioned throughout the season as well as through the season-end survey. In 2022, Administration performed mid-season changes based on feedback, including expanding allowable gardening practices, permitted methods and types of mulch. Participation in the program will be monitored and can help with future program development. Success of the program will be measured by the number of applications that are submitted each season.

With the program fully developed and entering the second season, there will be increased promotion through social media and other gardening programs offered by the City, including Front Yards in Bloom. Social media use and photo contests for boulevard gardens could be an opportunity to involve the community in promoting boulevard gardening.

Administration is exploring options to expand the program in 2023, including whether to further simplify the application process and allow more complex gardening under the declaration process while still maintaining boulevard tree health and resident safety. Opportunities to garden in City-owned areas adjacent to residential properties that are not classified as boulevards, such

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as along walking paths or the edges of alleyways will be reviewed to ensure accessibility and operational success.

Budget/Financial Implications

Administration used existing staff and resources to develop and coordinate the 2022 program. As the program continues, Administration anticipates that the number of boulevard gardens will increase. Should the program continue to grow or require enhanced support, such as further engagement activities, Administration could explore options to reallocate funds or return with an additional funding request for Council's consideration through a future supplemental operating budget adjustment.

The LOO process for boulevards had an existing Council-approved fee that was in place prior to work starting on the new Boulevard Gardening Program. Administration waived fees for the landscaping LOO for the 2022 and 2023 gardening seasons while the LOO program is reviewed.

COMMUNITY INSIGHT

Development and implementation of the Residential Boulevard Gardening program involved both internal and external engagement. Meetings were held with stakeholders including EPCOR and the Edmonton Federation of Community Leagues to identify opportunities for future collaboration.

Season-end Survey Results

Information-gathering from surveys helps shape the program and will continue at the end of each season. A survey was sent out to all program applicants at the end of the 2022 gardening season. Questions focused on the overall program feedback, options for gardening and challenges participants may have experienced. Some highlights of the survey results are:

- Most respondents are satisfied to garden within the rules of the declaration and do not intend to pursue a complex garden, with 70 per cent either not interested at all or only having some interest in the LOO option.
- Communication and clarity of rules was a challenge for some applicants.

Administration is already working to address the results as follows:

- Updates to the Boulevard Gardening web page
- Updates to approval notification processes
- Education tools to help clarify rules and approved gardening practices.

GBA+

The program has been built with goals to make additional space available on City-owned boulevards for gardening activities. The space can allow for individuals that may not have access to any other gardening space. The program allows for multi-unit buildings such as condos to apply to the program and distribute the space to the residents.

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A jurisdictional scan was conducted to identify program trends that may increase accessibility for all residents. Terms and conditions for boulevard gardens are in place to reduce risk of creating mobility challenges or safety hazards for pedestrians and road users.

ATTACHMENTS

1. Map of Boulevard Garden Approved Applications
2. Boulevard Gardening Declaration Guidelines