



# Community Gardens

Part of the Places & Spaces Parks Master Plan





*All photography and graphics by City of Kitchener staff unless otherwise noted.*



## Related sections

### **Places**

### **Spaces**

Community Health & Wellness

Park Amenities

Park Design Approach

Trails & Lighting

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# Acknowledgement



Places & Spaces is focused on the park service provided to the Kitchener community. Parks and open spaces are integral to communities, providing spaces where people play, explore, and build connections with the environment and with others.

The City is uniquely positioned to provide, care for, maintain, and secure public access to parks and open spaces for all members of its communities. The City of Kitchener recognizes that these public spaces are planned and built on land that is the traditional territory of the Chonnonton, Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee Peoples. We recognize our responsibility to serve as stewards for the land and honour the original caretakers who came before us. Our community is enriched by the enduring knowledge and deep-rooted traditions of the diverse First Nations, Métis, and Inuit in Kitchener today. The significance of this land to Indigenous communities is respected, and we value the role that parks and open spaces can play in Reconciliation.

The City of Kitchener acts as a steward for almost 2,000 hectares of land as part of a parks and open space system. Through the implementation of Places & Spaces, we will work to better understand and address community needs and the barriers preventing use of these spaces, so that all community members in Kitchener might feel welcome, safe, and able to use our parks and open spaces.



A photograph of a person with short dark hair and glasses, wearing a maroon long-sleeved sweater and dark pants, bending over in a garden. They are using their hands to harvest large-leafed green plants, likely chard or spinach. The garden is outdoors with soil and other plants visible. A dark horizontal band is overlaid across the middle of the image, containing the title text.

# Introduction



**This section focuses on the background information and specific details that inform the context for the recommendations made for this topic.**

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## Background

*“A community garden is a group of people that get together to plant and harvest a garden.”*

**Waterloo Region Community Garden Network**

Kitchener has a strong and growing community garden presence in the Waterloo Region. With more than 40 active volunteer-run community gardens on City-owned and privately-owned land all over the city, they are places where people grow non-commercial vegetables, fruits, and herbs. Community gardens on City-owned land make up roughly one hectare (1,000 m<sup>2</sup>) of gardening area for the community with many in Kitchener in operation since the 1990s. Community gardens offer many benefits to gardeners beyond growing food. They support improved health and wellbeing, provide a place for people to connect with their neighbours, and offer opportunities to learn new skills.

Having access to land for growing food is also an essential part of a strong local food system, as are opportunities to learn about growing and preparing food. Community gardens play an important role in food security and independence by giving residents a place to grow fresh, affordable, and culturally relevant food. The essential role of community gardens in supporting food security was made even more apparent in 2020. During the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic, gardens were permitted to re-open as part of an emergency order.

The overall demand for public use of parks and open spaces along with dedicated uses such as community gardens continues to grow as Kitchener's population increases. People continue to use parks more often than they did before the pandemic. This demonstrates that parks and open spaces play an important role in people's daily lives with an increasing need for parks and open spaces to address the importance of including these and other high-quality park experiences. Public parks and open spaces must contain a balance of amenities for everyone, including special areas like community gardens, off-leash dog areas, and programmed sports fields.



This is even more important when considering recent Provincial policy changes to the Planning Act that have made the task of creating new parks and open spaces more difficult. A deliberate approach to locating gardening opportunities on City-owned lands is critical to sustaining a long-term balance of park uses that continue to respond to evolving community needs.

### **A brief history of Kitchener's city-coordinated allotment gardens**

For more than 30 years, from the 1980s to 2016, the City of Kitchener coordinated allotment-style gardens on City-owned land. Allotments provide plots of land for gardeners to grow food for their families and community. These City-coordinated gardens included Williamsburg Garden Plots and Huron Farms Allotment Garden.

#### **Williamsburg Garden Plots (mid-1980s to 2009):**

The Williamsburg Garden Plots began as early as the mid-1980s on undeveloped lands that would become a cemetery. The size of the allotment garden expanded over time. At its largest, this garden area was around 3.2 hectares (32,000 m<sup>2</sup>) containing roughly four hundred 20 by 20 foot (6 m x 6 m) plots (Figure 1).

A comprehensive plan for the future cemetery was created in 1990 for the entire parcel of land. The first phase of the cemetery development opened for use in 1995. As further stages of cemetery development progressed, the result was the gradual contraction of garden area on the site (Figure 2). Williamsburg Garden Plots closed permanently at the end of 2009 after more than 25 years at this location.





**Figure 1. Williamsburg Garden Plots, aerial photo, 1997. This garden area represents the largest garden footprint on file, approximately 3.2 hectares, estimated to have contained up to four hundred individual plots at 20 foot x 20 foot size**





**Figure 2. Williamsburg Garden Plots, aerial photo, 2007. This garden area was approximately 1.2 hectares containing approximately 190 plots. The City's tree nursery is to the left of the garden.**



**Figure 3. Huron Farm Allotment Garden, aerial photo, 2012.**

**Huron Farms Allotment Garden (2010 to 2016):**

Following the closure of Williamsburg Garden Plots, the garden was moved to another City-owned site near Huron Road and Fischer Hallman Road in the spring of 2010 with the understanding that this, too, would be a temporary location. A future South Kitchener District Park, now RBJ Schlegel Park, was the vision for this location since the 1990s. Work to plan and implement the park vision began officially in 2013 following Council approval.

Huron Farms Allotment Garden was open from 2010 until the fall of 2016 when it closed permanently. The garden was approximately 1.8 hectares (18,000 m<sup>2</sup>) of area containing over two-hundred 20 foot by 20 foot (6 m x 6 m) plots. (Figure 3). Construction on South Kitchener District Park, now RBJ Schlegel Park, began in 2017 in this space.

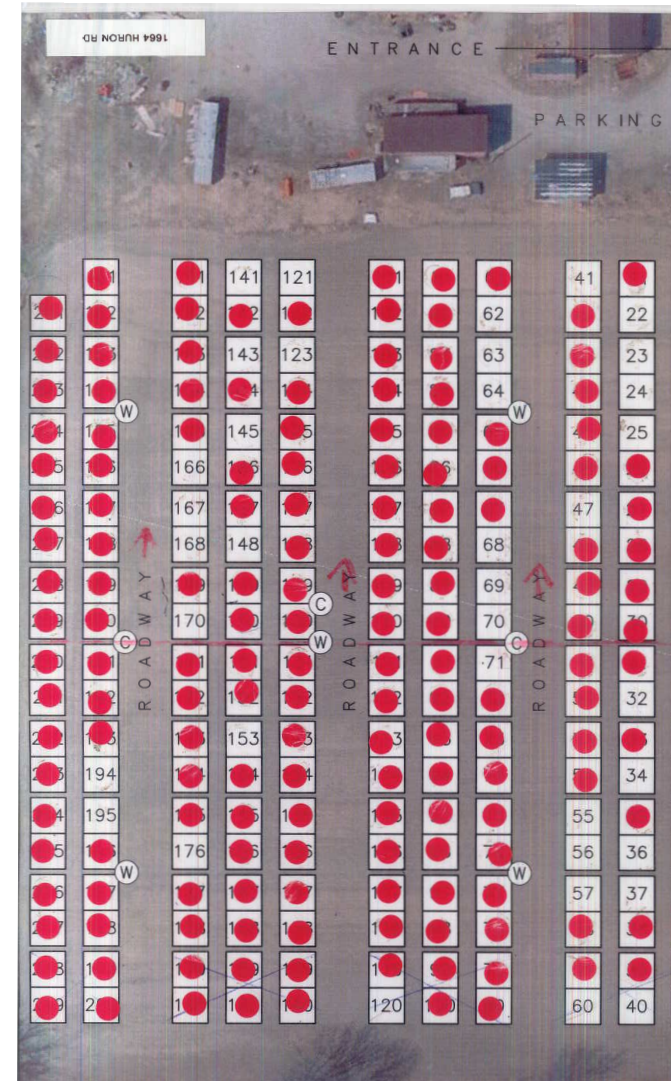


## City-coordinated gardening

Garden registration information was advertised in Kitchener's recreation and activity guide, Leisure. Registration for garden plots opened annually in April. A small registration fee was collected for each plot to offset the City's operational costs. After the garden opened in May, any remaining plots were available for existing plot-holders to rent.

Garden plots were open annually from the long weekend in May until the long weekend in October. City staff would prepare the beds in the spring, and gardeners were expected to clean the beds before the seasonal closure. Water was supplied to gardeners by hand valves located at many points between garden rows. Hoses were not permitted; registrants were expected to carry water with a watering can or other vessel to their plots (Figure 4).

The City-coordinated allotment garden was a key piece of the overall garden network in Kitchener and was not relocated after Huron Farms Allotment Garden was closed. This closure represented a significant loss of community gardening space for Kitchener.



**Figure 4: Huron Farm Allotment Garden allocation map and water service locations, 2011.**



# NOTICE

## Garden Closure Notice

Please be advised that to facilitate the construction of the South Kitchener District Park, the Huron Farms Allotment Garden will be closing in the Fall of 2016, likely resulting in a shortened garden season.

Stay tuned for updates over the coming months on the City of Kitchener Community Garden webpage regarding joining an existing garden or starting a new community garden.

We would like to thank all Huron Farms gardeners for your patience during this transition.



City of Kitchener Community Garden webpage:  
<http://www.kitchener.ca/en/DoingInKitchener/CommunityGardens.asp>

South Kitchener District Park webpage:  
<http://www.kitchener.ca/en/DoingInKitchener/SouthKitchenerDistrictPark3.asp>



## Community gardens in Kitchener today

### Resident-led, City-supported

In addition to allotment gardens, the City has a long history of supporting volunteer-run garden groups on public and private land. In both cases, volunteers have organized local gardeners season after season. Gardens on public land are supported by the Neighbourhood Development Office in Community Services where a Project Coordinator assists each garden's operation and relationship with the City.

### The LoveMyHood Matching Grant

Community groups interested in starting a new garden can apply for the LoveMyHood Matching Grant program facilitated by Community Services. This grant supports new volunteer-led community gardens each year as well as other resident-led placemaking projects on City-owned and private land. This program enables volunteer garden groups to have agency over their own garden while meeting City standards. Different garden layouts and community gardening models are explored with each grant application.

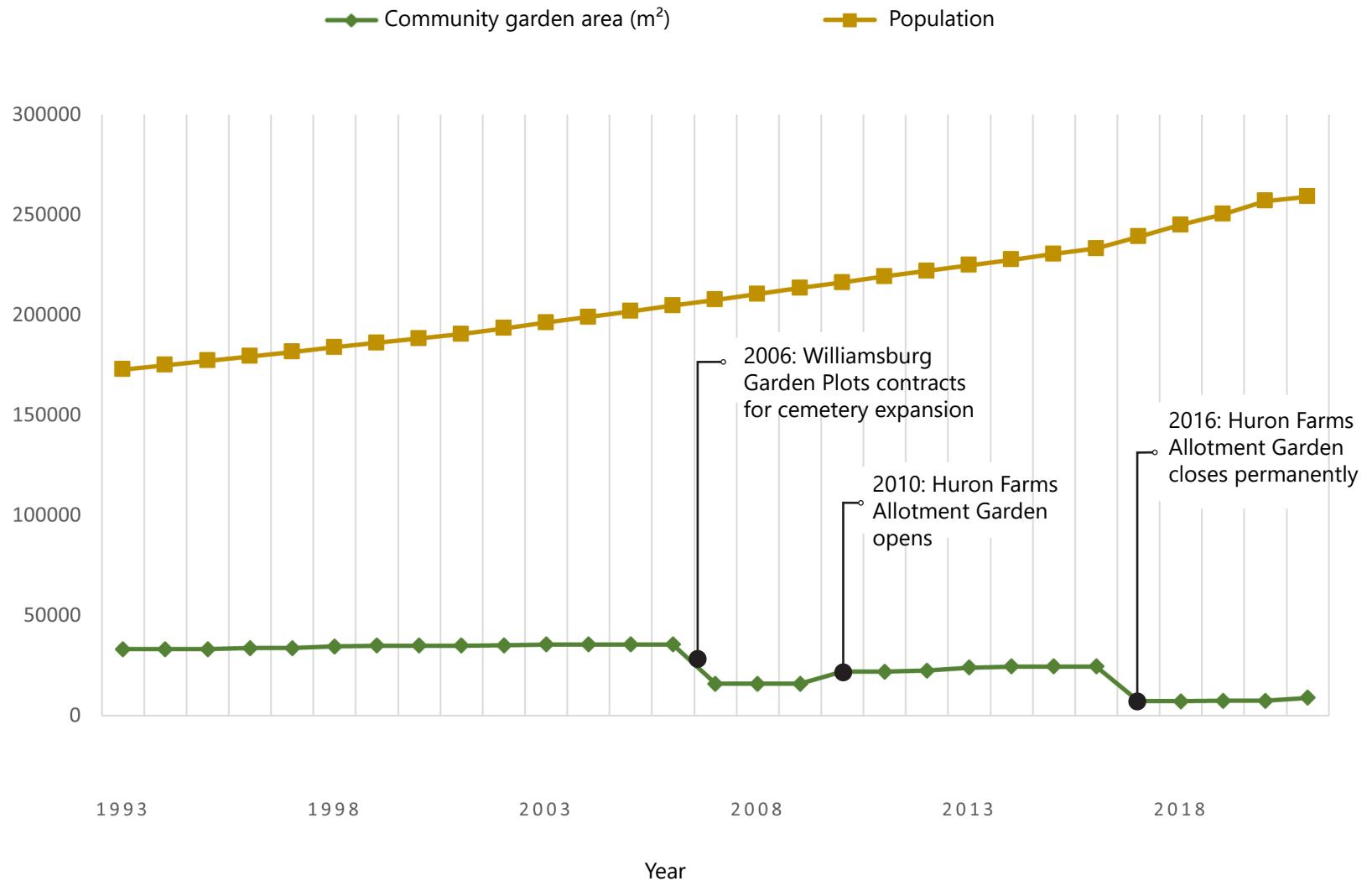
This grant program continues to grow the community garden network in Kitchener with 11 new volunteer-run

gardens on City land since the 2016 closure of Huron Farms Allotment Garden, representing an increase of approximately 4000 m<sup>2</sup> of garden space in eight years. This flexible program allows the garden network to grow in direct response to evolving community needs.

Resources and guides for food growing in Kitchener are available through the City, Region, and partner organizations:

- [The Waterloo Region Community Garden Network](#)
- [Food System Roundtable of Waterloo Region](#)
- [LoveMyHood](#)
- [Region of Waterloo](#)

## Community garden area on City-owned land and total population 1992-2021





## Increasing pressure on parkland

As Kitchener becomes more urban and densely populated and as the cost-of-living increases, demand on parks and open spaces continues to increase. People without private outdoor spaces rely on access to public spaces. Parks also help the environment, increase biodiversity, and are valued as shared community spaces.

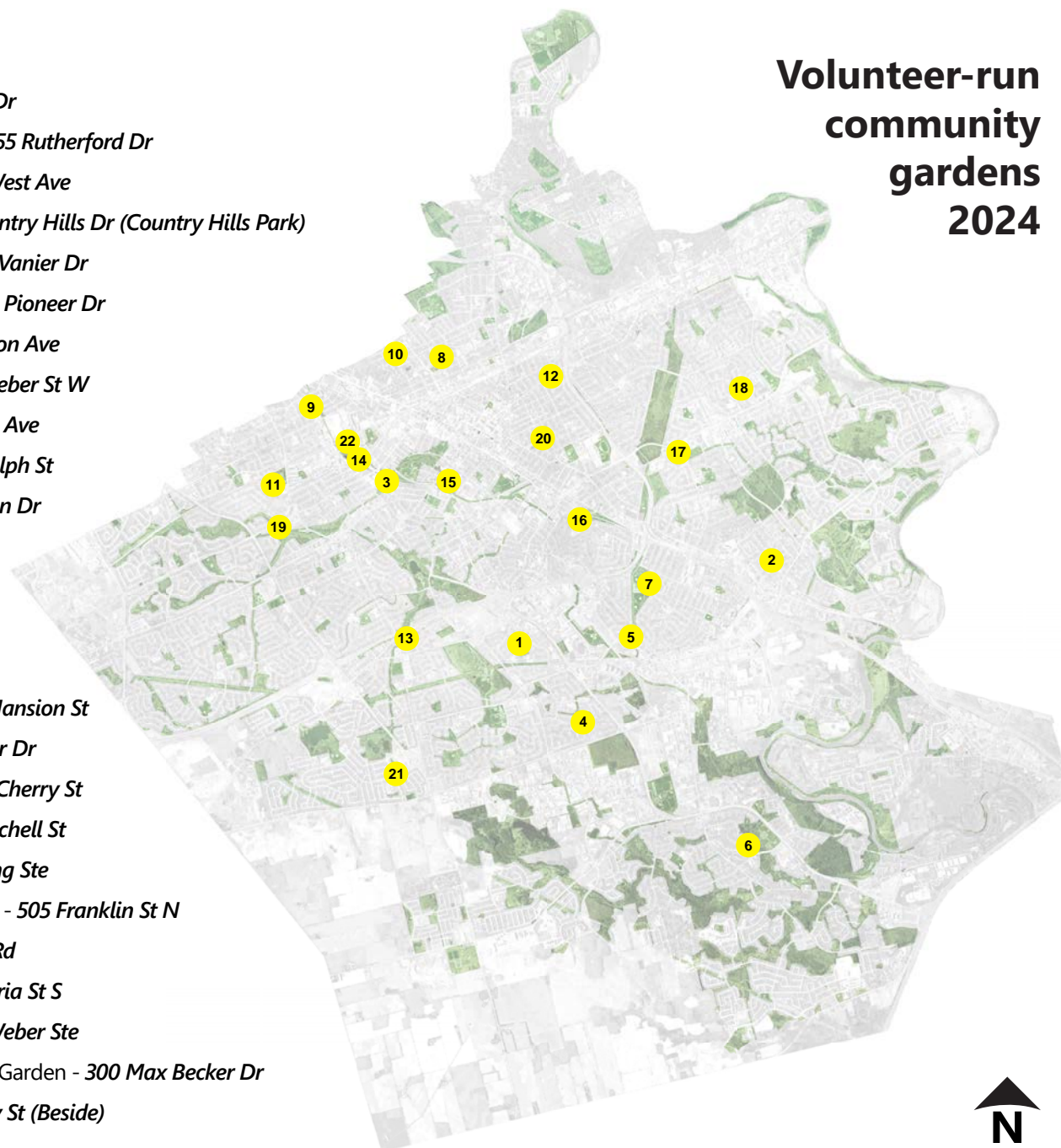
Unfortunately, there are new Provincial policy and physical challenges to creating new park spaces. Before the Provincial government introduced new planning legislation in 2022, there was a relationship between the estimated population in a development and the public park space required in that development. Today, because of these changes to Provincial policy, the total area of park land is no longer tied to the population. Instead, it requires park land to be calculated as a percentage of the lot size. As a result, the greater the density of the neighbourhood, the less public park space is available per person. Removing shared park land for a dedicated community garden use can impact the whole community by limiting access to open park space and reducing the City's ability to meet its target of park land area per person in each neighbourhood.

Further, not all park space is suitable for a community garden. Distribution of parks, park classification, soil quality, water availability, underground utility conflicts, amount of space, and existing park project plans all need to be considered when choosing space for a new garden. While parks continue to be considered as locations for new volunteer-run gardens, parks cannot be the only option. Planning gardens in harmony with other park activities is critical and access to parks and open spaces for all must be maintained.

## Volunteer-run community gardens 2024

1. Alpine Community Garden - *175 Kingswood Dr*
2. Centreville-Chicopee Community Garden - *155 Rutherford Dr*
3. ComeUnity Roots Community Garden – *98 West Ave*
4. Country Hills Community Gardens – *365 Country Hills Dr (Country Hills Park)*
5. Courtland-Shelley Community Garden - *329 Vanier Dr*
6. Doon Pioneer Park Community Garden - *150 Pioneer Dr*
7. Fourth Ave Community Garden - *72-80 Wilson Ave*
8. George Lippert Community Garden – *200 Weber St W*
9. Gildner Green Community Garden – *29 Eden Ave*
10. Guelph Street Community Garden – *250 Guelph St*
11. Gzowski Park Community Garden – *10 Chopin Dr*

12. Mansion Greens Community Garden – *281 Mansion St*
13. North Six Community Garden – *222 Chandler Dr*
14. Old Willow Green Community Garden - *160 Cherry St*
15. Queen's Greens Community Garden – *21 Mitchell St*
16. Rockway Raised Bed Herb Garden – *1405 King Ste*
17. Sprout: The Stanley Park Community Garden - *505 Franklin St N*
18. Tecumseh Community Garden - *140 Indian Rd*
19. Victoria Hills Community Garden – *785 Victoria St S*
20. Wallenberg Park Community Garden - *160 Weber Ste*
21. Williamsburg Common Ground Community Garden - *300 Max Becker Dr*
22. Willow Green Extension Garden – *160 Cherry St (Beside)*







# Data Sources

This section highlights the relevant sources of information and research used to develop recommendations for this topic. A total of 12 data sources, including engagement, have informed the Parks Master Plan recommendations. For more detailed information on each data source, please refer to the Places booklet.

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**Legislation**



**Equitable engagement**



**Engagement with the broader community**



**Engagement with City of Kitchener departments**



**Engagement with partner organizations**



**Comparative analysis**



**External research**



**Policy**



**City of Kitchener strategies**



**Region of Waterloo strategies**



**Best practices**



**City of Kitchener staff experience**





# Findings



Several themes emerged across topic areas, engagement audiences, and data collection methods. The following section reflects major themes that cut across several datasets from engagement methods. Findings relevant to more than one theme are reflected in each. For more detailed information on the overall engagement effort, please refer to the Places booklet.

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## Accessibility

Barrier-free design means that regardless of ability, a person's opportunity for full participation is possible. Barrier-free access to garden plots and water sources as well as paths of travel to gardens surfaced as key to enabling accessible community gardens. While efforts to address this are underway, many existing volunteer-run community gardens are not yet barrier-free.

*Our neighbours who need the space the most need to be able to get to it easily and for those who are living with a disability need to be able to participate.*







## Environmental sustainability

Community feedback showed strong support for an increase in local food production, and sustainable production. Both are important parts of food security and independence.



## Inclusion

Public feedback showed flexibility in understanding a wide variety community garden models and approaches. This pairs well with the LoveMyHood program which supports creativity in volunteer-led community gardens.

Community gardens can bolster community and cultural connections as well as food security and have a positive impact on newcomers to Kitchener, and Canada.

To support food security, learning about different gardening methods, canning, cooking, and seed saving was requested. Similarly, greater access to community gardens without wait lists was needed. While wait lists persist, creative solutions include:

- Assigning garden plots based on need (e.g., food security and cultural connections to food).
- Giving lower priority to those who have access to private gardens.
- Planting fruit and vegetable plants in public spaces outside of community gardens.

More than three quarters (78%) of public survey respondents felt it is very important to explore new ways Kitchener might better support reliable access to food, particularly in a way that supports those who need it most. In all cases, youth involvement was encouraged.



## Health and wellbeing

Community gardens were identified as a practical means of supporting community food security, social wellbeing, and cultural connectedness which are all aspects of good health and wellbeing.



*With the rise of inflation and food insecurity, something needs to be done in order to ensure the health and wellbeing of ALL Kitchener residents, including housed and unhoused. If we can offset at least a little bit of the need it's worth it.*





## Partnerships

Effective food security strategies depend on thoughtful relationship development and engagement. It is important for the City to listen to and implement ideas in collaboration with volunteers, community members, and partners.



## Information

There is a desire for more information regarding where, when, and how to join or create a new community garden. Meaningful outreach to those who would benefit most was also highlighted through engagement.

Community gardens are a unique opportunity to share knowledge about gardening practices and food preparation. Respondents shared a strong interest in the City offering more food and gardening skills workshops, for example, canning, planting, composting, food security, pruning, cooking, or seed saving.





# Recommendations

This section summarizes the recommendations specific to this topic that are informed by the broad and local context, data sources, and findings. Each recommendation begins with a number representing the order in which its implementation is prioritized. For a comprehensive list of all recommendations made for this master plan update and the implementation framework, please refer to the Places booklet.

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## 12: Ensure community gardens are barrier-free

**Expand the Corporate Accessibility Fund mandate and budget to enable grant projects to meet accessibility requirements identified by Inclusion Services and the Grand River Accessibility Advisory Committee (GRAAC).**

As part of the City's responsibility to provide barrier-free access to gardens on City-owned land, a consolidated capital budget should be created to support legislated AODA requirements as they relate to LoveMyHood Matching Grant, and other grant-funded projects planned in parks and as identified by Inclusion Services and the Grand River Accessibility Advisory Committee (GRAAC). There are significant costs associated with creating barrier-free garden spaces including paved surfaces and raised garden beds. These costs are frequently beyond the budget limits of a grant and are often addressed reactively. A staff team should be established to determine the annual value of the fund and how it is administered for consideration and approval.



## 21: Grow a city gardening hub

**Explore a cross-departmental pilot program to re-introduce a City-coordinated garden located in an area of need as identified through engagement. Program to support food security through opportunities for gardening, food literacy programming, community gathering, and demonstration.**

It is important to recognize the City's role in the future of Kitchener's community gardens. Both Williamsburg Garden Plots and Huron Farms Allotment Garden were temporary solutions to meet gardening demand until those spaces were developed for other purposes. All engagement audiences shared a strong desire for more urban community gardens and related supports such as bookable kitchens or meeting rooms. While the City offers grants to volunteer-run gardens, a significant and growing unmet need remains for more garden spaces. The solution is not to replicate the same temporary model as before but to explore alternatives that will support partners and volunteers and offer permanent, city-wide access to gardening,

connections, and learning opportunities. Engagement with the community and prioritizing equity through implementation is foundational to the program's success.

The objectives for this program include but are not limited to:

- Reviewing and analyzing locations for the City-coordinated garden, considering:
  - Overall park provision and acquisition priority
  - Proximity to community facilities and supporting services (e.g., approved bookable kitchens or meeting rooms, transit, parking)
  - Soil quality
  - Water availability through a dedicated water service line near the garden area
  - Available gardening space
  - Demand
  - Need
  - Absence of underground utilities or other underground barriers.
  - Park classification
- Detailing specific programs that can be delivered including goals and outcomes (e.g., learning about seed-saving, growing practices, food preservation)

- Identifying resource needs, support roles, and impacts for consideration and approval by Council.
- Engaging and partnering with the local community to establish preferred sites and programs.
- Partnering with community services to use and program the space

A City-coordinated garden could also showcase demonstrations of alternatives to allotment growing models and support collaboration between City facilities and departments while directly responding to community desires identified through engagement. Equity should be prioritized through the program development, implementation, and evaluation of the pilot project.

Support for community gardens in Kitchener requires multiple approaches and partnerships to achieve long-term solutions. The benefits of community gardening are known; Kitchener must proactively plan for community gardening and support greater agency over food security choices for its residents. Finding a balance between garden space and park space is essential.

## 28: Align new grant infrastructure with park capital planning

**Where possible, align grant-led placemaking projects in parks with capital project forecasts to optimize budgets and infrastructure that support their implementation and maintenance.**

Infrastructure and garden startup requirements (e.g. dedicated waterline connection and soil testing) are costly and use grant funding quickly. Parks Design & Development completes several park renovations per year. Where a desire for a community garden exists at a park that will receive a renovation, capital project funding can cover these community garden startup costs as part of the scope of park improvements. Supporting volunteer-led community gardens this way where possible can maximize their grant funds. Further, designing for the holistic inclusion of community garden spaces in park spaces through renovation projects will enable the gardens to be well integrated into the overall park space.



# Recommendations summary

## **12: Ensure community gardens are barrier-free**

Expand the Corporate Accessibility Fund mandate and budget to enable grant projects to meet accessibility requirements identified by Inclusion Services and the Grand River Accessibility Advisory Committee (GRAAC).

## **21: Grow a city gardening hub**

Explore a cross-departmental pilot program to re-introduce a City-coordinated garden located in an area of need as identified through engagement. Program to support food security through opportunities for gardening, food literacy programming, community gathering, and demonstration.

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*Photo by Taylor Jones*



