



REQUEST FOR DECISION

MEETING DATE: March 21, 2022

TITLE: Community Orchards in Public Parks

DIVISION: Planning & Infrastructure

SUMMARY:

This report is provided in response to a motion of Council on November 8, 2021 requesting Administration review the viability of an orchard.

PROPOSED MOTION:

A motion is not required.

BACKGROUND / ANALYSIS:

Community orchards are pieces of public land that are developed with plants that produce edible fruit, nuts or seeds that can be accessed and consumed by the community. Generally these locations are either planted and maintained by the City or they fall under a community stewardship program. The latter requires groups or individuals to take on a steward role that involves basic maintenance, plant care, and harvesting responsibilities. This is different than a community garden which typically assigns a plot for an individual to grow annual plants for their own recreation and consumption.

There are a number of municipalities in Alberta who have developed programs to provide edible landscape plantings. Calgary, Red Deer, Grande Prairie and Morinville have each developed their own unique programs that evolve around the notion of a community orchard. Many of the goals of these programs are shared and generally aimed at getting people outdoors and in contact with nature, providing an accessible community food source, and having neighbors build friendships and community ties. For many in our urban setting, and especially for children, orchards help teach plant identification and what can be grown in our climate to produce food.

Spruce Grove has an abundance of parks and open spaces suitable for orchard plantings across the City. Orchards are certainly viable in the City, but like any planting exercise, care must be taken to select the best plant species and varieties and put them in the best location to ensure the highest probability of long-term survival. An effective maintenance plan is also essential to assist with initial plant establishment.

OPTIONS / ALTERNATIVES:

Plants take time to establish and typically more time to produce fruit. For this reason orchards should be developed by the City initially and, if available, the use of community stewards for care and maintenance could be explored only after plants are established.

CONSULTATION / ENGAGEMENT:

This report was informed by a review of data gleaned from several municipal websites and by discussions with Spruce Grove Parks and Engineering staff members. Additional information was obtained through telephone conversations with municipal staff in Grande Prairie.

IMPLEMENTATION / COMMUNICATION:

Establishing community orchards would initially involve creating an inventory of current City plants that produce edibles and creating a plan that would see the development of 3 to 4 locations annually over the next 5 years. As plants are established, planting locations would be mapped and shared with the community along with basic information about the plants in each location and tips on how to determine when fruit is ripe and how best to harvest. For context, Grande Prairie has about 30 sites identified since creating their program in 2015.

IMPACTS:

Orchards as landscape developments have the ability to provide visual interest in our green spaces while increase biodiversity and supporting pollinators in local ecosystems. As a community, resource orchards can provide a fresh foods source for residents and have the potential to get people outdoors and connecting with each other.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

It is estimated that a gradual introduction of edible plants into our landscapes could be achieved for approximately \$5,000 per year when including material and labour costs.

STRATEGIC VISION ELEMENT:

Where People Choose to Experience Community - A vibrant place for community involvement and social wellness

RELATED GOAL:

Spruce Grove has a healthy population that is actively engaged in leisure and recreation.