



AGENDA REPORT

Meeting Date (M/D/Y): 5/15/2014

Subject: Proposed Airdrie Urban Agriculture Pilot Project

Boards Routed Through:
Corporate Planning Team
City Council

Date:
5/15/2014
6/2/2014

Description:

Staff is presenting the proposed scope of work for the Airdrie Urban Agriculture Pilot Project.

Background:


On February 18, 2014, staff presented Council with results from the urban agriculture citizen engagement process, which asked residents about their level of support for a variety of urban agriculture activities (Attachment One). Council directed staff to explore and report back with options for implementing an urban agriculture pilot project and to consider The Village as a potential neighbourhood for the pilot project.

The citizen engagement process indicated there were high levels of support for activities such as edible landscaping and community gardening on public lands and City-owned spaces. The predominant concerns mentioned with regard to public/City initiatives included on-going maintenance and vandalism. It was also identified that citizens had lower levels of support for backyard hens and beekeeping on private property; however, a number of people indicated they were 'neutral' because they needed to know more about such activities. Citizen concerns regarding private/backyard initiatives included allergies to bees and concerns about noise and odours associated with backyard chickens. Given this range in levels of support and familiarity with the various activities, running an urban agriculture pilot project was identified as a way the City and citizens could learn more about and observe how the less familiar activities integrate with the community in a controlled manner. This report outlines a proposed scope of work for the Airdrie Urban Agriculture Pilot Project.

Proposed Airdrie Urban Agriculture Pilot Project

Purpose


The City of Airdrie is proposing to undertake a pilot project to assess and support the following objectives:



- Providing opportunities for community participation and collaboration in urban agriculture activities
- Increasing awareness of urban agriculture activities and the benefits such activities can bring to the community
- Enhancing community acceptance by providing projects to observe and learn from
- Testing required regulations and processes for urban agriculture activities on private property
- Reducing potential for negative impacts by building in limits and mechanisms to mitigate the community's expressed concerns
- Forming partnerships with citizens, community groups, and organizations who are also interested in enhancing urban agriculture and access to local food

Project Development and Considerations

To develop the proposed scope of work, staff assessed opportunities for a project in public spaces and carried out research regarding backyard hen and beekeeping pilot project processes used by other municipalities. In addition to this internal assessment and research, staff connected with interested citizens, the Airdrie Village Community Association, and some organizations with expertise in hens and beekeeping to gather feedback and guidance on pilot project options. The following considerations arose from the assessment and research work that was done:

- To keep the urban agriculture pilot project manageable for existing City resources, staff is recommending a phased approach to the pilot project with the initial phase focusing on edible landscaping and backyard hens. The levels of community interest in edible landscaping and/or backyard hens, as seen in both the citizen engagement results and also in calls and emails that have been received over the past couple months, supports starting with a focus in these two areas.
 - Urban beekeeping is to be deferred for two years (2016) to allow for implementation and evaluation of the first phase initiatives. Organizing a beekeeping project is going to require staff's focused effort and time especially given the details, contingencies, and partnerships that will need to be managed to mitigate the types of concerns that were expressed in the citizen engagement surveying that was done.
 - The initial phase of the urban agriculture pilot project requires interdepartmental collaboration involving primarily Parks, Planning, and Municipal Enforcement. Additionally, Communications support will be required for developing education and awareness raising strategies.
 - The scope for implementing the edible landscaping and backyard hens initiatives has been designed such that project work can be started immediately following Council approval and the financial costs can be covered within existing 2014 budgets.
 - Opportunities for potential partners have been identified ranging from working with individual citizens and the Airdrie Village Community Association to building networks for capacity building and logistical support.
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Proposed Approach

As a result of the analysis and research work undertaken, staff have developed a detailed scope of work (see Attachment Two), which describes the proposed initiatives including tasks, potential partnerships, anticipated resource implications, timelines, and deliverables. Within the scope of work, awareness raising and capacity-building strategies have been identified to encourage community participation in the pilot project activities, increase community understanding around urban agriculture, and provide supporting resources to project participants. For the pilot project two specific initiatives have been identified:

1. Edible landscaping initiative: Staff are proposing a Community Orchard along the fence line north of the baseball diamond behind the Plainsmen Arena (See Figure 1). An edible landscaping project provides an opportunity for the City and community to work together to create a unique public green space and community food asset. Thirteen different species of edible fruit, berry, and nut trees and shrubs have been proposed for the orchard to provide some variety for citizens to enjoy and allow the City to test how different species grow in Airdrie's climate.



2. Backyard hens pilot program: Staff are proposing a backyard hens pilot program that allows a maximum of 10 urban residential properties to have hens over a period of 18 months. This length of time is proposed as it gives pilot program participants time to learn about proper hen care and get a hen coop set up. This timeline also allows City staff a chance to gather public feedback and observe the backyard hen setups at the participating properties. Staff has incorporated limits and mechanisms where possible within the proposed program to mitigate community concerns around noise and odours. Some of these limits and mechanisms include limiting the number of hens to a maximum of four, not allowing roosters, setting the minimum lot size that is eligible to 400m² (4,305ft²), and providing guidelines and educational information on proper hen care.

Alternatives/Implications:

1. That Council approves the Airdrie Urban Agriculture Pilot Project Scope of Work as proposed.

2. That Council approves the Airdrie Urban Agriculture Pilot Project Scope of Work with amendments and directs staff to make any required revisions.
3. That Council tables the Airdrie Urban Agriculture Pilot Project Scope of Work and directs staff to provide additional information, details, or clarification.

Corporate Communications:

A Communications Plan would be developed to support implementing the urban agriculture pilot project.

Boards Routed Through:

N/A

Recommendation: That Council approves the Airdrie Urban Agriculture Pilot Project Scope of Work as proposed.

Amanda Ginn
Sustainability Coordinator

Presenter: Amanda Ginn
Attachments: Attachment One_February 2014
report; Attachment Two_scope of work; Attachment
Three_participant guidelines; Attachment
Four_application form

