

The Abbotsford Community Garden’s Alignment with the Benefits of Parks, Recreation and Culture



The Abbotsford Community Garden was founded in cooperation with the City of Abbotsford in 2008 to foster the principles of community growth and development by offering an outdoor space for individuals and groups to develop and nurture their passion for gardening

- to engage and educate members of the community on nutrition, environmental stewardship, agriculture, and passive recreation through seminars, reading materials and other resources
- to provide a positive and complimentary environment where agriculture, wildlife and passive recreation are brought together
- to create a growing space for community interaction across all ages, cultures, and incomes
- to provide members an opportunity to participate in the natural process of growing food and thereby improving the local food supply and food security

The Abbotsford Community Garden consists of 166 plots, which potentially means 166 member families, individuals, or groups have an opportunity to garden here. Our policy is to have, as far as possible, no barriers to joining the Abbotsford Community Garden.

The plots are sub-grouped into 131 10’x 20’ foot plots, 21 10’x 10’ foot plots, and 8 raised garden boxes 3’ x 10’ and 4’ high. Additionally, there are six areas of communal designated crop production such as summer squash, winter squash, herbs, berries, grapes and fruit bearing trees. This produce is shared among all the gardeners. The greenhouse has provided a washroom; an office; a communications hub with whiteboard, records and sharing table; tool and wheelbarrow storage; a secure space for lawn mowers and weed eaters; and an unheated greenhouse where gardeners start their bedding plants.

The Abbotsford Community Garden has no paid staff and is managed entirely through required in-kind hours of work and countless volunteer hours by members.



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Connections to nature are needed by humans physically, mentally and emotionally. Nutrient dense food is essential for good health. Community gardening meets these needs, leading to a sense of satisfaction, resilience and wellbeing. It is a proven stress reliever. The Abbotsford Community Garden makes it possible for members and their families to experience these benefits even when they do not have land of their own. We believe the Abbotsford Community Garden plays a vital role in supporting the physical, mental and emotional health of our community.

After reviewing the City of Abbotsford's *Allocation Policy Framework*, the Abbotsford Community Garden offers the following evidences of alignment with the benefits lists.

The numbers in this section reference the numbers of the benefits as listed in the City of Abbotsford's *Fees and Charges Bylaw and Policy Framework*. [Click this link to go to the list of benefits in Appendix 1.](#) It is important to note that many of the Abbotsford Community Garden benefits apply across multiple benefits listed in the City of Abbotsford Framework. We have tried to make this clear without being too redundant.

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2. Support to Local Groups

- a plot designated for the Food Bank is managed by member gardeners to provide vegetables specifically requested by the Food Bank
- fresh garden vegetables donated by other garden members from their own plots are delivered regularly to the Food Bank throughout the growing season
- our volunteers have worked collaboratively with Ag in the Classroom to help with their garden design and infrastructure

5. Social Functions

The Abbotsford Community Garden has provided social activity through:

- barbecues and pot lucks
- harvest festivals - gardeners brought dishes to share made with food from their own garden plots
- the AGM and other meetings at which refreshments were served, and a social time followed the business portion
- work bees provided opportunities for people to work together, cooperating in caring for the community garden space
- the community garden hosted educational *Garden Talks* by experts such as Marina Gibson of Day 1 Urban Farm: *Maximizing Your Community Garden Space*; Nancy Moore, Master Gardener: *Garden Design*; Marjolaine Dessureault, Crop Consultant: *Potato Workshop*; Brenda Falk of Tanglebank Gardens: *Waterwise Gardening*, and many others
- often small informal groups of garden members assess a perceived need and take on projects to enhance the community garden
- camaraderie is enjoyed and friendships blossom as gardeners talk and share plants and produce

6. Protecting Community Natural Resources

The Abbotsford Community Garden mandates the use of organic gardening and soil management practices. It provides education in these methods to its members. Other ways the organization protects natural resources are:

- by preserving the wetland and habitat along the north bank for birds, pollinators and wild plants, which supports bio-diversity
- while all gardens nourish pollinators, some gardeners engage in plantings specifically chosen to attract additional pollinators
- by providing open green space and a grove of trees as well as the large aforementioned marsh (wetland) area. The perimeters of the cultivated area provide thickets and hedgerows that offer habitat for wildlife.
- the garden is a raptor habitat where owls and hawks feed on voles and rabbits. When necessary, natural vole control is practiced. No rodenticides are permitted to enter this food chain, thus protecting the birds of prey from ingesting poison.
- by providing habitat for endangered songbirds, and other flora and fauna
- by providing space and food for pollinators without risk of pesticides; our food supply depends on these insects whose numbers are in rapid decline due to pesticides
- by providing the opportunity for households to grow their food locally, thus reducing both the pollution and the food transport carbon footprint
- air quality is improved in the immediate area through the natural cycle of plants. Gardener and community health benefits from this
- by contributing to a healthy ecosystem. This encourages and supports local biodiversity
- the Abbotsford Community Garden Society was the winner in the Community/Grassroots category at The Rotary Club of Abbotsford-Matsqui's third annual Abbotsford Environmental Leadership Awards in 2014
- *see also 22*

7. Beautify the Community

- open, treed and cultivated green spaces provide a respite from roads and buildings
- the Abbotsford Community Garden has participated in *Communities in Bloom* by the City of Abbotsford

8. Family Oriented Leisure

- children often accompany their elders who teach them how food is grown. Thus, skills and traditions are preserved and passed down from one generation to the next.
- families with no garden space at home still have the opportunity to garden together to provide food and to teach this knowledge to their children
- family picnics under the trees at the garden are enjoyed by young and old
- *also see 11, 12, 13, 15, 16 and 17*

9. Integrating Generations and Sub Groups

- when gardening we wear gloves and boots not ties and dress pants. Status is not a factor. Community gardening is, by its very nature, a social leveller
- accessible raised beds make growing food possible for those with mobility issues
- plots are made available to mentors and their special needs clients
- community garden plots may be the only garden space available for new immigrants or sponsored refugees. The Abbotsford Community Garden rates are intentionally low, making this an affordable opportunity for those who are just finding their way in a new community.
- gardeners are from many ethnic groups. Conversations about growing food take place even if the participants are not fluent in each other's languages. Gardening knowledge is broadened as ethnic foods and growing methods are shared.
- at the Abbotsford Community Garden people naturally share knowledge, food and resources. Generosity is fostered. Community cohesion is evident
- recent shifts in societal views and research findings have shown that community gardens have ample potential to provide space for individual and communal good
- *also see 2, 11, 12, 13 and 17*

10. Fitness and Wellbeing

The Abbotsford Community Garden greatly enhances fitness and wellbeing for all of its member and their families as a natural consequence of gardening. Examples of these are:

- gardening requires a variety of movements that are gentle and effective in maintaining physical wellbeing
- working in the garden brings people into the fresh air and sunshine and provides important contact with soil and the earth's surface
- a garden plot provides natural, fresh produce that enhances the family diet at a very low cost
- growing food gives individuals purpose, a sense of satisfaction, and a sense of resiliency and self-sufficiency
- community gardens have a social aspect lacking in individual gardening which addresses loneliness and provides social support
- spending time at the garden calms stress and restores equilibrium. Connections to nature are needed by humans, both physically and emotionally
- working or simply being in the community garden reduces stress (*see report from 2011 by van den Berg and Clusteis, National Library of Medicine*)
- stress is associated with poor mental and physical health. Gardening provides restoration from stress. This has been empirically supported by results in field experiments where stress levels as assessed by cortisol levels were proven to be reduced
 - Study in Singapore – after controlling for age and levels of connection to nature – “community gardeners reported significantly higher levels of wellbeing than individual/home gardeners ... community gardeners reported higher levels of resistance and optimism than the non-gardening control group. These novel results indicate some potential for mental health benefits in urban environs, specifically in terms of subjective wellbeing and resilience.

- *Community Gardening: stress, wellbeing and resilience potential*
published online September 16, 2020, US National Library of Medicine

- also see sections of 17 and all of 19

11. Pre-School Leisure Opportunities

Preschoolers who come to the community garden with their families enjoy the many aspects of nature from playing among plants, to following a bunny, to listening to bird's song as they swing in the hammock hung between trees, to picking a fresh vegetable or plucking a raspberry and immediately enjoying it. They gain the important, cumulative experience of observing and learning about:

- where food comes from
- why and how to plant seeds
- how to tend a garden
- how vegetables and other plants grow and produce a harvest
- using the senses of sight, taste, and smell to recognize familiar and new plants
- how the garden changes during the cycle of the seasons

12. Basic Leisure Skill Development for School Aged Children

Growing food is a foundational life skill for all children. The Abbotsford Community Garden provides opportunities for local children who live in homes with no land to experience many important aspects of gardening and working with plants. These include:

- gaining knowledge and skills that build on the preschool points listed above but at more advanced level
- gaining an understanding of sources of food and the importance of freshness for flavour and nutrition
- gaining a sense of security from learning how to grow food
- plant identification over a broad range of greens, other vegetables, fruits and herbs

13. Advanced Leisure Skill Development for School Aged Children

The Abbotsford Community Garden further provides the opportunity for these children to:

- grow food from seed to harvest, a life skill which engenders a sense of competence, security and self-sustainability
- learn how to manage stress through spending time in nature
- study plant identification in depth
- observe the web of life, which may lead to further education in biology or in areas such as horticulture or landscaping
- meet and interact with gardeners whose professions are in related fields such as soil management specialists, master gardeners, beekeepers, etymologists and others

15 Basic Leisure Skill Development for Adults

- being part of a community garden strengthens community ties and provides a sense of belonging. Members' needs can be met through commitment to one another and to the garden

- gardeners learn skills such as plant propagation, natural soil management, organic growing methods, harvesting and preserving the harvest, and seed saving
- gardeners study insects and natural controls when needed
- gardeners learn to identify a wide variety of wild volunteer plants as well as cultivated plants
- new gardeners learn from experienced gardeners who are eager to share their passion, and through our educational *Garden Talks*
- *also see 5, 12, 13, 17, 19 and 20*

16 Advanced Leisure Skill Development for Adults

Gardening is lifelong learning. Gardeners are constantly honing their knowledge and skills.

17. Opportunities for Seniors

The Abbotsford Community Garden offers many benefits to seniors such as:

- a place where seniors can garden and supplement their diets after they have downsized
- gardening at the Abbotsford Community Garden provides gentle exercise, fresh air and naturally grown fresh produce at a very affordable price
- a destination where seniors can spend quality time with their grandchildren, and pass on food-growing skills and family traditions
- life-long learner education at *Garden Talks*, in individual conversations, and through personal experiences and experimentation
- cross-cultural contact through conversations about growing food with people of other ethnic backgrounds. Cultural barriers fall due to a shared interest and focus. Gardening knowledge is broadened as ethnic foods, growing methods and produce are shared.
- reducing isolation. Gardeners meet as strangers but soon form connections as they chat about their gardens. A lonely person can almost always find someone else at the garden to talk to, as early as 6:30 a.m. and until sundown.
- *also see 5, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 15, 16 and 20*

18. Interpreting the Environment

- *see 6, 20 and 22*

19. Reflection / Escape

Mental health is promoted by access to nature. The Abbotsford Community Garden provides a green space and productive activity whereby emotions are calmed and minds are refreshed. Many gardeners have expressed how a short session at the garden has calmed their stress and restored their equilibrium

- open, treed and cultivated green spaces provide a respite from roads and buildings
- the benefit of this time working in the soil among plants follows gardeners to their homes, enhancing the relationships to those within their circle
- *also see 10*

20. Leisure Education

- Participants learn to grow food gardens without the use of pesticides, herbicides or methods of land use that are not sustainable. Participants are coached in the use of natural gardening methods, following the healthful patterns of nature rather than those of monoculture factory farms. This knowledge will become increasingly important in the future as we better learn to live with nature, rather than dominate it. Sustainability may depend on this.
- Studies have shown that outdoor experiences develop knowledge and skill and have a positive impact on long-term memory and enhance overall learning. <https://seewhatgrows.org/>
- *also see 11, 12, 13, 15, 16, 17 & 18*

21. Communication System

The Abbotsford Community Garden has an informative public web site and a Facebook page. Members-only communications are distributed by email to the member e-list.

<https://abbotsfordcommunitygarden.com>

22. Connecting with Nature

- gardeners and their families have the opportunity to observe the cycles of nature: e.g. can we grow anything in the winter? What plants will return year after year? Does some food taste better after the frost has hit it? Children have their curiosity aroused about the lives of red-wing blackbirds, killdeer, small songbirds, raptors, butterflies, bees, ladybugs, and many other parts of our local ecosystem including invasive plants like blackberries.
- children freely play in the green spaces at the perimeter of the garden, observing and connecting with nature. Adults wander about the garden, spending time under the trees, harvesting culinary herbs, birdwatching by the wetlands, or perusing the varied designs and contents of other members' plots
- families and friends gather for lunch or a snack at the picnic tables under the trees.
- the entire gardening experience connects gardeners with nature. See all of the above.

Appendix 1

The City of Abbotsford's List of Benefits of Parks, Recreation and Culture

COMMUNITY BENEFITS	INDIVIDUAL BENEFITS
<ul style="list-style-type: none">1. Special Events2. Support to Local Groups3. Exposure to Sporting Events4. Exposure to Culture5. Social Functions6. Protecting Community Natural Resources7. Beautify the Community8. Family Oriented Leisure Services9. Integrating Generations and Sub Groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none">10. Fitness and Wellbeing11. Pre-School Leisure Opportunities12. Basic Leisure Skill Development for School Aged Children13. Advanced Leisure Skill Development for School Aged Children14. Social Opportunities for Youth15. Basic Leisure Skill Development for Adults16. Advanced Leisure Skill Development for Adults17. Opportunities for Seniors18. Interpreting the Environment19. Reflection / Escape20. Leisure Education21. Communication System22. Connecting with Nature