

Boulevard Garden Program Expansion: Centre Median Garden Pilot

ISSUE

In April 2021, City Council approved a two-part strategy to expand the existing Boulevard Garden program, pending funding approval. Part one of the strategy is the expansion of the program to centre medians and part two of the strategy considers opportunities to further expand the program to additional sites.

Following the 2022-2023 multi-year business plan and budget meeting in December 2021, part one centre median expansion remains unfunded, while capital funding was approved to explore expansion to additional sites beyond boulevards, as laid out in part two of the strategy. This report proposes that the scope of part two be modified to include a pilot project for the centre median gardening guidelines.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Standing Policy Committee on Environment, Utilities and Corporate Services recommend to City Council that \$51,500 in P.02390.17 – Green Infrastructure Strategy – Street Garden Expansion be used for a Centre Median Gardens Pilot as outlined in this report.

BACKGROUND

The [Boulevard Gardening and Maintenance Guidelines Update and Program Expansion Options](#) decision report was received at the regular business meeting of City Council on April 26, 2021. The report provided an update regarding the [Boulevard Garden Guidelines](#), which were updated following an administrative review in 2020-21. In response to community feedback during that review, the report also provided options to expand the existing Boulevard Garden Program, including updating the program name to the Street Garden Program.

At that meeting, City Council resolved:

- 1) That Option 2 be approved: Expand program to include centre medians and a centre median application process, subject to approval of \$50,000 in operating funding for 2022 onwards, to be brought forward to the 2022-2023 Business Plan and Budget deliberations; and
- 2) That a \$60,000 capital funding request for the development of a feasibility study and community engagement, to further expand the garden program, be brought forward to the 2022-2023 Business Plan and Budget deliberations.

At its regular business meeting on August 30, 2021, City Council received the [Sustainability Reserve Project Funding](#) report and in part approved the establishment of

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the Street Garden Expansion Capital project and the allocation of \$51,500 from the 2021 Sustainability Reserve.

At the 2022-2023 Preliminary Business Plan and Budget meeting on November 29 to December 1, 2021, the operating business plan option “Street Garden Program Centre Median Expansion” was not added to the consideration list for funding.

Engagement

[Public engagement about the Boulevard Garden Program](#) and proposed expansion to centre medians was completed between December 2020 and February 2021. Most respondents (86%) support program expansion to other types of city green spaces such as centre medians and back lanes through an application process. Some respondents are concerned about how to safely access centre medians.

DISCUSSION/ANALYSIS

This report recommends that the examination and analysis for boulevard garden expansion on the city rights of way include a centre median pilot to develop further understanding of site requirements, safety considerations, maintenance needs and community involvement opportunities. To progress expansion through the pilot, a revision to the scope of work for P.02390.17, which is defined as a feasibility analysis for further boulevard garden program development, including expansion of gardening to additional city sites and program enhancements - is recommended.

This proposed approach respects the purpose of the original project, which is to progress garden expansion beyond the current limitations of the boulevard garden areas but incorporates a pilot rather than a broader feasibility study to shape this progress. A comparison of the original boulevard garden expansion feasibility study project and the proposed centre median pilot is as follows:

Topic	Original P.02390.17: Analysis and Plan for Expansion	Proposed: Expansion Pilot – Centre Medians
Expansion opportunity analysis and administration	Analyze expansion of the program to other types of City green spaces and develop criteria for those spaces. No implementation.	Guidelines and administrative processes for centre medians are complete and ready for implementation.
Site improvements	None at this stage	Existing centre median gardens will be brought into the program administration, and new sites will be considered for approval and implementation. Funds are earmarked for up to five abandoned centre median gardens to be restored to pre-garden state.
Communications	Develop an enhanced education and communication program for expanded program when implemented.	Develop and deliver communications and education relative to the pilot, update the Boulevard Garden Guidelines for pilot, awareness for pilot, one-time production of education material.

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Community outreach	Implement outreach to groups identified during engagement that may benefit from additional support to further enhance program plan.	Explore opportunities for community outreach depending on sites and locations utilized.
Demonstration of best practices	Develop demonstration garden plans that showcase best practices for gardening on rights-of-way.	Identify, communicate, and educate using examples of best practice gardens by participants.
Community supports	Develop approach to support residents/gardening community.	Analyze pilot outcomes to propose opportunities for support for residents / community in future phases.
Incentives	Create incentives to landlords and condo associations to permit their residents to garden on boulevards or other rights-of-way adjacent to their property.	Analyze pilot outcomes to propose possible incentives for landlords or condo associations, for implementation in future phases.

There are benefits in progressing boulevard garden expansion through the centre median pilot, including the ability to study outcomes and develop recommendations from tested, built examples.

Furthermore, the proposed centre median pilot would address the present safety risks from centre medians not being included in the current program. As stated in the Boulevard Gardening and Maintenance Guidelines Update and Program Expansion Options decision report:

There are traffic safety risks associated with expanding the program to centre medians. These include the risk of crossing streets to access medians, hauling garden materials across streets, and gardening activities with traffic on either side. However, since residents are already gardening on centre medians without an education or application process, the risk to residents is higher by not addressing this behavior.

The advantages and disadvantages of proceeding with the revised scope including a centre median garden pilot compared to the current scope of work for additional feasibility work are summarized in the table below.

Advantage / Disadvantage	Original P.02390.17: feasibility study and engagement	Proposed: Expansion Pilot – Centre Medians
Advantages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discrete project with start and end dates that align with short-term capital funding. Leverages the high participation levels that occurred during boulevard gardening engagement in 2020-21. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Residents are already gardening on centre medians without permission. Including centre medians in the program ensures traffic safety and other risks are mitigated.

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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public engagement results support including opportunities to garden on centre medians. Proceeding with an application process for centre medians now allows Administration to test and refine a process that could be incorporated into a revised operating budget request and the feasibility study for additional program expansion at a later date.
Disadvantages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Risk that new engagement or studies are not seen as genuine if the first program expansion has not been able to proceed. Lessons learned from centre median gardens cannot be applied in feasibility assessment of other program expansion options and analysis. Does not address present need for guidelines around centre median gardening. Without funding to implement outcomes of the feasibility study, the information can become dated. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Risk of initiating service level change with one-time capital funding with no future funding identified. The available capital funding is limited and unknown whether it will meet public demand. Funding may run out before all applications are approved, resulting in a wait list that cannot be processed. Not all of the feasibility work proposed in the original scope will be able to be fully carried out and additional capital funding will be requested in a future budget process.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The proposed revision to the scope of work requested in this report is to apply the \$51,500 available in P.02390.17 – Street Garden Expansion for the centre median pilot as outlined above, with the proposed budget:

Administrative and Communication costs for expansion, updates to Guidelines, awareness for pilot, one-time production of education material, and to administer the application process	\$41,500
Clean-up abandoned Garden Sites	\$10,000
Total	\$51,500

Two updated submissions are planned for the 2024-2025 multi-year budget process to fully implement the two resolutions from the [Boulevard Gardening and Maintenance Guidelines Update and Program Expansion Options](#) decision report. The first will be an operating option to continue the centre median gardens as a permanent program. The second will be a capital option for any outstanding scope for the feasibility study for further expansion of the boulevard garden program.

OTHER IMPLICATIONS

If the recommendation in this report is approved, multiple updates will be required to the Boulevard Garden program including updating the Guidelines and related web page, adding an application process for centre medians, and formalizing a related administrative procedure.

Implications for Current Centre Median Gardeners

Residents who are gardening on centre medians, in advance of the program expansion to medians, will be required to visit the City website to register their garden and submit garden site details such as median location and garden design. The City will contact the residents to review their garden and parameters for compliance with the Guidelines as resources permit. Centre median gardeners will also be required to sign a Letter of Agreement to maintain the space and return it to its original condition if they no longer wish to garden.

Communication Activities

If the recommendation is approved, additional communications on centre median gardening would be planned in early 2023. Communications activities would include an update to the boulevard garden web page that aligns with the approved option, and garden education through the Healthy Yards program.

NEXT STEPS

Guidelines and an administrative procedure for the Centre Median Garden Pilot application process have been drafted and are ready to proceed in time for the 2023 gardening season. Upon approval, these documents will undergo a final review and be formalized. Approval from the GM of Transportation and Construction is also required, as enforcement of the Guidelines occurs through the *Traffic Bylaw*.

Results of the pilot project will be reported in Q3 2023, and if needed, revisions will be made to the 2024-2025 budget submissions based on actual program data.

Report Approval

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