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This report entitled, "Can you Dig it? Accessibility in Community Garden Polices and Lessons from Two Canadian Cities" analyses the community garden policies of Kingston, Ontario and Victoria, British Columbia in order to investigate how both municipalities address physical, geographic and economic accessibility within their policy.

The majority of research on community gardens is focused on the environmental, social, and economic as well as health related benefits of gardening. An in-depth literature review uncovered that there is currently limited research which investigates the relationship between municipalities and community gardens. Research also uncovered that in the last ten years municipalities in Canada have been increasingly adopting community garden policies to regulate the development of community gardens on public and even private land. Therefore, this report is a preliminary evaluation which will address one aspect of municipal community garden policies; accessibility.

Objective

The objective of this research is to uncover how Kingston, Ontario and Victoria, British Columbia address physical, geographic, and economic accessibility in their community garden policies. The second objective of this study is to develop recommendations on accessibility for municipalities that wish to amend or develop a community garden policy.

Research Methods

The research methods used in this report include a detailed literature review, a review and analysis of municipal policy documents, as well as semi-structured interviews with a key informant from the City of Victoria. The use of these three research methods resulted in the triangulation of data. This benefited the construct validity of the research as well as the mitigation of researcher bias. An analytic chart was developed in order to compare the policy statements on accessibility which were found within the City of Kingston and City of Victoria community garden policy. This chart was then used to conduct a parallel analysis on the similarities and differences between the policy statements of both cities.

Analysis and Recommendations

An analysis of data acquired through a review of literature, policy review, and interviews with key informants resulted in the creation of a series of three recommendations. These three recommendations cover areas related to physical, geographic, as well as economic accessibility. The findings from an analysis of Kingston and Victoria cannot be generalized for all municipalities in Canada. However, the recommendations made from this report can be reviewed by municipalities amending or creating a community garden policy to assist in the process of policy development.

Based on the research findings, the following recommendations are proposed to municipalities looking to amend or develop their own community garden policy.

1. Collaborative, Comprehensive Municipal Accessibility Policy

It is recommended that municipalities work collaboratively with organizations, residents, businesses municipal departments and other municipalities to develop a municipally-wide and comprehensive accessibility strategy. Accessibility strategies such as Facility Accessibility Design Standards (FADS) have been adopted by municipalities across Canada with the goal of supporting the creation of accessible community facilities, which includes community gardens. Having a FADS document is important because it allows a municipality to return to a set strategy or policy when planning and designing municipal facilities

2. Geo-Spatial and Demographic Analysis

It is recommended that municipalities perform a geo-spatial and demographic analysis of the municipality using GIS or other computer software. This will assist decision makers in gaining a better understanding of where gardens should be geographically located to ensure that residents are able to access the garden, Factors which can be mapped to gain and understanding of the municipality include: the location of bus routes, age distribution, population density, household income, location of pre-existing gardens, transportation statistics etc.

3. Sliding Scale Fee Program and Municipal Support

Finally it is recommended that municipalities develop a carefully managed sliding scale gardening fee program which supports the inclusion of individuals and families of various economic backgrounds. A sliding scale system allows individuals to pay the fee that they are able to pay depending on their income. Partnerships should be developed which support the inclusion of low income individuals in a manner which does not identify the residents and marginalize their position within the gardening community. It is also recommended that municipalities carefully consider how they are financially and technically supporting community garden groups.

Conclusion

Developing an understanding of how municipalities address various forms of accessibility in relation to community gardening will assist planners and policy makers in understanding how a municipal policy can encourage an inclusive community gardening environment. It is hoped that this report will be used by municipalities and community garden organizations to facilitate the development of accessible community gardens.