

Community Flower Gardens

Bill Charlton reported on an idea to maintain our Community Gardens adjacent to the Community Hall and Bargain Barn and potentially the triangle gardens at the entrance to Millennium Park and at the corner of Highway 101 and Madeira Park Road. Bill showed a number of slides showing how barren the area was before Don Fraser came to the rescue with a long-term vision and began beautifying the area. He then showed some slides of how beautiful the gardens are today with plants, flowers, lots of trees and rock walls; a very nice place to spend a couple of hours. All this work was almost exclusively funded by Don out of his own pocket, including labour and materials.

We asked the audience how many of them enjoy the gardens and there was almost unanimous showing of hands. We then asked how many people would like to see them maintained. Again, there was full support in a show of hands. Unfortunately for this community, Don is now retired and he wants to move back to the mainland. The reality now is there's no volunteers that really want to take on this task. It's a huge, tremendous task to keep these gardens up to date. Nobody wants to put in the hours. Nobody wants to put in the money and Don is departing soon.

The issue here is we don't have a long-term solution to fund the gardens when Don leaves. Once he goes, we believe, probably within a year, the gardens will cease to exist and we'll be back to the barren dirt before Don became involved.

So, how do we fund this going forward? We we could try to look for endowments. Somebody could leave us a lot of money, and then we can use that money in the future, but that doesn't happen very often. We could look to government grants, but the problem with grants are that you apply and it takes a long time and those are mostly one-time

grants. If we try to look for private funds, that too is difficult as you have to fundraise every year to keep the gardens going.

Another possibility is a small increase in property tax. This would be done through the Alternate Approval Process (AAP) through the SCRD. We estimate it will take somewhere about \$60,000 per year to maintain the gardens.

So what would it cost? If we used every dwelling in Area A—we've got about 2,500 residents that would be taxed—that \$60,000 amounts to about \$24 a year on your parcel tax to keep these gardens going.

If not everyone in Area A wants to contribute—because Area A is pretty big, we could use an area-specific tax boundary. For instance, we could go by postal codes. There are almost 2,400 people if we went by the postal codes for Madeira Park and Garden Bay. In either case, it would only be about a dollar difference.

The AAP is a long process. The first thing to do is assess how many are interested. A show of hands gave a clear majority that supported a small tax increase. We would need to send out a preliminary petition form from the SCRD to the community. It would ask them the same question: Are you willing to partake in a property tax increase to keep the community gardens going? That petition will be sent out probably within the next six months. Residents fill out the form and send it in. Signing the petition does not obligate anyone to anything. By signing it, residents are basically saying that you we should pursue the issue.

If we get at least 51 percent of the residents agree, then we move to the next stage with the SCRD. They then have their staff look at how much they think it would cost based on the proposed maintenance contracts we have and then they come back with a final proposal.

That would be followed by another survey from the SCRCD that gives all the details. Once the majority sign that, then we are committed to agreeing to an increase in our property taxes and eventually it shows up as a parcel tax on your house tax. The funding would then be given to a local community group to administer and sign contracts.