



2012

# Acton Community Garden Report: Year One

Good Food,  
Community Building  
and Place Making



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A United Way Member Agency



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Funders of the Garden

Town of Halton Hills;

TD Friends of the Environment Fund;

The Home Depot Foundation;

Hands Across Niagara

Walk this Way;

Growing and Sharing Food in Halton

Supporters of the Garden:

R and M Contracting

Trout Lilly Farm

Whole Circle Farm

Reds Garden Centre

RONA

Halton Region

The New Acton Tanner



For more information on the garden you can visit the Facebook Page

<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Acton-Community-Garden/390801147651406> or the website at

<http://actontgether.cdhalton.ca/>



## Acton Community Garden: Good Food, Community Building and Placemaking

The Acton Community garden is located in the Town of Halton Hills, Rotary Park just off Elizabeth Street. The vision statement for the garden is as follows:

*The Acton Community Garden will be: An accessible, co-operative garden that inspires broad community participation in growing our own organic food.*

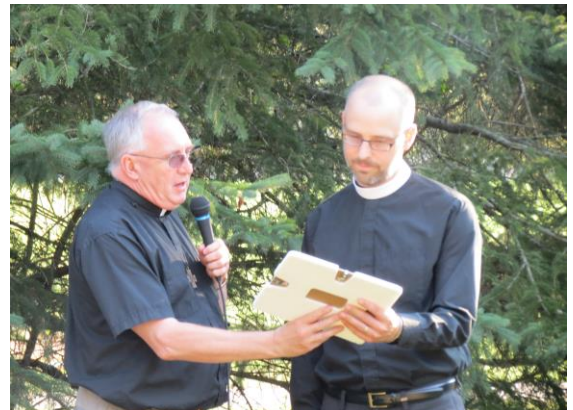
The garden is a co-operative garden. No one pays to participate. It is managed by a group of volunteers and the food grown is meant to be shared and enjoyed by everyone in Acton.

From the very beginning of the community initiative the Garden Committee hoped to be able to connect with local seniors, children, youth, families, and those living in the local group homes and co-operative housing developments; people with expertise in gardening and those who want to learn!

In practice the Garden Committee has connected with all these groups and has engaged them in gardening, watching over the garden, eating good food, and most recently, developing cooking skills through a canning workshop.

The Community Garden has been an exercise in community building and placemaking...not to mention food security, urban agriculture, skill development and healthy eating.

The garden has a variety of financial supporters: Town of Halton Hills, TD Friends of the Environment Fund, The Home Depot Foundation, Hands Across Niagara, Walk this Way, and Growing and Sharing Food in Halton. In addition the garden has other local supporters that have provided in-kind contributions that have made the project feasible: R and M Contractors, Tout Lilly Farm, Whole Circle Farm, Reds Garden Centre, RONA, Halton Region, and the New Acton Tanner. Volunteer hour contributions, by the well over 20 core volunteers are estimated at well over \$5000.



## Community Building

The garden has been a place for people to get to know one another. Community residents from all walks and all ages are participating in the garden, planting, weeding, watering and now developing food skills together.

The garden initiative has facilitated skill building in the areas of public processes, advocacy, consensus building and collaboration and has provided many opportunities for leadership development.

The garden has brought community partners together; many town citizens, local church groups, local businesses, organic farmers, nonprofit groups, school representatives, local media and town staff. Increased capacity for collaborative work is essential for healthy, strong communities.

## Place Making

The concept of placemaking is not new, coming from planners in the 1960's like Jane Jacobs and William Holly Whyte.

*Their work focused on the importance of lively neighborhoods and inviting public spaces. Jane Jacobs advocated citizen ownership of streets through the now-famous idea of "eyes on the street." Holly Whyte emphasized essential elements for creating social life in public spaces.<sup>1</sup>*

The Project for Public Spaces defines placemaking as:

*Placemaking is a multi-faceted approach to the planning, design and management of public spaces. Put simply, it involves looking at, listening to, and asking questions of the people who live, work and play in a particular space, to discover their needs and aspirations. This information is then used to create a common vision for that place. The vision can evolve quickly into an implementation strategy, beginning with small-scale, do-able improvements that can immediately bring benefits to public spaces and the people who use them. Placemaking capitalizes on a local community's assets, inspiration, and potential, ultimately creating good public spaces that promote people's health, happiness, and well being.<sup>2</sup>*



<sup>1</sup> Project for Public Spaces (2009) What is Placemaking? [http://www.pps.org/reference/what\\_is\\_placemaking/](http://www.pps.org/reference/what_is_placemaking/) December 31, 2009

<sup>2</sup> Project for Public Spaces (2009) What is Placemaking? [http://www.pps.org/reference/what\\_is\\_placemaking/](http://www.pps.org/reference/what_is_placemaking/) December 31, 2009





The Town of Halton Hills has been part of the planning process since February 2012 and provided the public space for the garden in Rotary Park. The project outcome by November 2012 the creation of a placemaking space uses the existing capacity in the community to create a gathering space that engages people and contributes to community health and well-being.

The Project for Public Spaces provides the following steps for placemaking:<sup>3</sup>

**“1. The community is the expert.** People who use a public space regularly provide the most valuable perspective and insights into how the area functions.

**2. You are creating a place, not a design.** Design is an important component of creating a place, but not the only factor. Providing access and creating active uses, economic opportunities and programming are often more important than design.

**3. You can't do it alone.** A good public space requires partners who contribute innovative ideas, financial or political support, and help plan activities.

**4. They'll always say, "It can't be done."** Every community has naysayers. When an idea stretches beyond the reach of an organization or its jurisdiction and an official says, "It can't be done," it usually means: "We've never done things that way before." Keep pushing. Identify leaders in the community who share your vision and build support.

**5. You can see a lot just by observing.** People will often go to extraordinary lengths to adapt a place to suit their needs. Observing a space allows you to learn how the space is used.

**6. Develop a vision.** A vision for a public space addresses its character, activities, uses, and meaning in the community. This vision should be defined by the people who live or work in or near the space.

**7. Form supports function.** Too often, people think about how they will use a space only after it is built. Keeping in mind active uses when



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designing or rehabilitating a space can lower costs by discouraging unnecessary and expensive landscaping and monuments.

**8. Triangulate.** The concept of triangulation relates to locating elements next to each other in a way that fosters activity. For example, a bench, trash receptacle, and coffee kiosk placed near a bus stop create synergy because they are more convenient for waiting bus passengers and pedestrians than if they were isolated from each other.

**9. Start with the petunias.** Simple, short-term actions such as planting flowers can be a way of testing ideas and encouraging people to know their ideas matter. These actions provide flexibility to expand the space by experimenting, evaluating and incorporating results into the next steps and long range planning.

**10. Money is not the issue.** A lack of money is often used as an excuse for doing nothing. Funds for pure public space improvements often are scarce, so it is important to remember the value of the public space itself to potential partners and search for creative solutions..

**11. You are never finished.** Given the certainty of change and fluid nature of the use of a place at different times, the challenge is to develop the ability to respond effectively.”

The Acton Community Garden Committee has instinctively been following these placemaking steps:

- The garden is based on community wisdom and know how;
- Community members are working to ensure that the garden is a creative place to learn and engage and is accessible to all;
- There are many hands in the soil with many supporters;
- The volunteers developed the garden in record speed and sometimes against all odds;
- They located a space for the garden that is easily accessible for seniors, children and those living in the Acton group homes. It is near other park uses, a good thing when you want people to spend time and walk through the garden.
- The current form of the garden fits the cooperative function.
- The garden is not finished...it is a work in progress with a children's garden and accessible beds and pathways yet to come...one step at a time bringing new partners along as we go.
- The garden has been provided with local and foundation financial support, in-kind contributions galore and the hard work of many. It has not been an expensive venture and has yielded food for approximately 180 individuals participating in the “Food for Life” food distribution program, the garden volunteers, neighbours and passers-by who are simply in need of a tomato or lettuce.





### Good Food

Learning to grow food and sharing what has been grown in the garden is a main priority for those involved with the garden initiative. Much of the garden produce has been distributed through the efforts of St. Alban the Martyr Anglican Church volunteers by means of the “Food for Life” food distribution program (reaching approximately 180 people each time there is a harvest). The produce has also been eaten by those who participate in gardening and sometimes by passers-by.

At the end of the growing season (September) the Garden Committee hosted a canning workshop, provided by Growing and Sharing Food in Halton. Adults learned to can tomatoes and pears and children jarred kale salad. The workshop participants go to take the food they prepared home.

### Plans for the Future

The Garden Committee intends to host future workshops; all focusing on increasing gardening skills and food skills. The Committee will reach out to community partners, such as the local schools, the Acton Community Our Kids Network HUB, YMCA and Early Years Centre to develop and plant a children’s garden. An accessible bed has been designed and in the spring of 2013 it will be built and installed.

Where possible the garden produce will be offered for use in the Acton Community Dinner and other food related activities and events.

