

Black Diamond Community Garden Story

The first Community Garden to be established in Black Diamond came about in 2002 with the arrival of a group of youth associated with Katimavik. At that time, Katimavik was a federal program for young people giving them an opportunity to work and develop skills and experience as a volunteer in a number of communities across Canada. Town Council was thrilled that they had come to Black Diamond and suggested that a vacant lot near the water tower could be turned into a community garden. There was a lot of enthusiasm and participation from the gardening community, and Pro Hardware, the (predecessor to Rona), contributed a working shed to the project which is still in use. The Water Tower Community Garden was established.

By 2007, the complaints of neighbours due to traffic parking, the presence of tree roots and shade over the garden led Council to offer the Community Garden a more appropriate location. This turned out to be our current location at 205 – 2nd Ave. N.E. in Black Diamond.

Enough money was raised through on-going fund-raising and contributions of labour from many individuals and businesses as well as the Foothills Lions Club to build the original 42 raised beds, install a watering system to connect with the Town and build an 8-foot perimeter fence. The beds measure 16 feet long x 4 feet wide x 18 inches high.

Prior to the installation of the fence, a final decision was made to expand the footprint of the garden to make room for 27 more beds thereby expanding the garden to a total of 69 beds as well as having room for a west and a south berm to be planted with a fruit forest of trees and shrubs.

The current Diamond Valley Community Garden was established in Black Diamond in 2009. Throughout this expansion and operational phase, the Community Garden was linked as a “sub-committee” with the Parks Recreation Committee of the Town of Black Diamond. According to Council’s mandate, the land was made available, but no public funds were to be spent on the Community Garden. This relationship has continued until the end of 2023 when the Parks and Recreation Committee was disbanded with the amalgamation of Turner Valley and Black Diamond.

At that time, the Town Administration became our legal entity with the understanding that Diamond Valley Community Garden would pursue independent status by the end of 2024.

With the agreement of both community gardens, a committee of volunteers from both gardens was formed to take on the necessary task of writing the Bylaws & Objectives and filling out the forms to become a Society. The Province has informed us that our application as “Diamond Valley Community Gardens Society” was accepted and that we were incorporated as of June 15th, 2024.

With respect to the relationship of the Society and the Town of Diamond Valley, we will be connected through a Memorandum of Understanding. This will be completed before our Annual General Meeting which is scheduled for October 27th 2024. At the AGM, Directors will be elected from each garden to manage the affairs of the Society. The Board will make every effort to respect the culture and priorities of each garden and to appreciate their differences.

Turner Valley Community Garden Story

The Turner Valley Community Garden is one of the rare positive outcomes of the “covid years.” It grew out of a loose collaboration called High Country Helps, that had been formed by the High Country Ministerial Association in 2020 as a response of the churches to covid needs in our area. Alberta Government (FCSSAA) grants were made

available for such joint efforts to assist vulnerable seniors and other home-bound individuals. When, in early 2021, the crisis time passed and High Country Helps still had grant money remaining, they asked permission to use it to start a community garden in Turner Valley. This fit with sustainability goals of both the government and the Town administration who already had an ideal site in mind, so Town Council approval was quickly given. More funds were forthcoming from Western Financial Group, Foothills Lions Club, Millarville Horticultural Club and Rona.

So 625 Calkins Road, a nice level spot in full sunshine, was staked out to make a 140' x 100' garden which nicely accommodated 45 raised beds. It was already April, but as word spread and potential gardeners expressed interest, everyone sprang into action in order to have beds ready for May planting. Heavy-duty, rough-cut fir and larch planks were acquired from south of Fernie, and a load of local garden dirt from Teskey's Three Point Industries. Two Saturday workdays with enthusiastic help from Youth with a Mission volunteers, saw an 'IKEA-style' assembly line to cut, screw, level and fill 40 8'x10' beds. Just like that, ready for May planting time and beds fully occupied! The agreement with the Town specified that they would supply non-potable river water to a tank which the garden would purchase. So pipes and taps also needed to be put in place. Meanwhile, gardeners were busy planting in faith that before the veggies were deer-nibble height, funds for a fence could be raised. This came from a surprise offer from FCSAA for another grant (covid leftover money!) and a grant from Crescent Oil Foundation. This completed the basic structure of the garden, followed the next spring by a Rona shed and the final 5 beds.

The garden is an example of the power of community to work together to address a perceived need. Ongoing mutual effort by garden members has resulted in winter workshops in the Library where knowledge is shared, help for seniors with digging or planting beds and watering for people who are away or sick. The joy of growing healthy food spills over into lively conversation and in sharing the overflow with others including the local Food Bank.

All proving that even something as negative as covid can result in positive good.

Until the present, 2024, the Turner Valley (or west) Garden has remained under the High Country Helps umbrella, with thanks in particular to the Meota Anglican Parish for fiscal responsibility. As we move on to Alberta Society status in cooperation with the Diamond Valley Garden, a Board of Directors, elected officers and Annual Meetings will spread responsibility and decision making over a wider group. It will also give us a higher profile and a wider garden community of like-minded friends.