

To Mayor Craig and the Council of the Municipality of Kincardine,

Re: The Waterfront Plan Report

We have reviewed the Waterfront Plan Report and would like to submit a few comments about the boardwalk gardens on behalf of the Kincardine and District Horticultural Society (KDHS).

While we appreciate the in-depth analysis of the waterfront area by the consultants plural, there are a few misconceptions that need to be addressed.

The plan states that the boardwalk gardens are maintained by members of KDHS. This is an error. The gardens are actually planted, maintained and largely paid for by volunteer members of the community. Some of them are memorial gardens dedicated to loved ones of the individuals or families who maintain that particular garden. While some of the gardeners at the boardwalk may happen to be members of KDHS, the society has no responsibility for the boardwalk gardens.

The Society does plant and maintain gardens at the foot of Harbour Street and at the cemetery. It's members put in many hours of unpaid work every year at these locales, planting, weeding and sustaining the plants under adverse conditions of wind off the lake, no sprinkler system, and the occasional unfortunate accident or vandalism.

It is our opinion that the boardwalk gardens planted by community volunteers are "the jewel in the Crown" of the boardwalk area. They enhance the area and are a tourist attraction in themselves. KDHS has been in charge of showing Communities in Bloom judges around our town in the past: Kincardine has won the Communities in Bloom National Championship (2002), International Champion (2003), the Scott Award for Community of Best Gardeners (2004), and the Canadian classic competition for mentoring the town of Mildmay in 2005. In 2006, Kincardine was first runner-up in the international division of Communities in Bloom. The volunteers' boardwalk gardens have always impressed the CIB judges. If the town of Kincardine moves the boardwalk to the East in order to allow growth of the Lake Huron sand dunes, we strongly recommend that another place nearby be allocated to the boardwalk gardens. And perhaps the individual gardeners who volunteer so much of their own blood, sweat, tears and money should be applauded a little more.

The Waterfront Plan proposal suggests that the boardwalk gardens are filled with environmentally non-productive "colourful annuals and perennials". KDHS supports increasing the planting of native plants. It's true that not all of the plants in the boardwalk gardens are native. However, we have observed that the gardeners, like all of us, are becoming more environmentally conscious. One of the boardwalk gardens contains only native plants, as well as educational signs, and many of the gardens contain milkweed for the endangered monarch butterfly as well as some native plants. As a horticultural society, we would urge Council to accept that there is a place for both native and non-native plants at the boardwalk. They serve different purposes. Nothing gives longer-lasting colour than the annuals planted every year, which bloom all season long. They provide a different kind of beauty than the equally important native plants.

Perhaps more Volunteer community members could be found to plant and maintain gardens of native plants, which will be environmentally beneficial but will be different from the existing boardwalk gardens. We would add a caution: without volunteers (or more paid town employees) to maintain native gardens, they will not look like the one illustrated in “A Stroll Down a New Boardwalk” in the Proposal. Native gardens have to be planned, planted, watered (at least until they become established), weeded and divided, just like any other garden, to look like the ones pictured in the proposal. By the way, KDHS maintains a “butterfly garden” with native plants at the flagpole garden. There is also a wonderful butterfly garden (not maintained by KDHS) at Geddes Park.

A little information about the Society:

There has been a vibrant horticultural society in Kincardine for 108 years. KDHS is a member of the Ontario Horticultural Association. It is an enthusiastic mixture of new and long-standing members, greenhorns and experienced gardeners who are always willing to share the benefit of their knowledge. They can tell you about garden zones, their significance, and how these are shifting with climate change. They can advise you that it's not actually safe to plant all your vegetables on the Victoria Day weekend in this area. Meetings are held on the first Monday of the month at 7 p.m. in the Seniors' room at the Davidson Centre, September to December and March to June. Check our facebook page for any changes in meetings. The society can be reached at (gorski@bmts.com). KDHS meetings are composed of a brief business meeting and a speaker with slide show or demonstration. We hold an annual flower show, go on field trips, socialize, and organize and staff the popular annual tour of Kincardine gardens and plant sale, as well as contributing to the beauty of our hometown. Members receive discounts on plant purchases from local and (through our OHA association) many other Ontario plant nurseries. New members are always welcome, no matter what their experience is.

Respectfully,

Caroline Gorski, President
On behalf of the Kincardine and District Horticultural Society