

Communities in Bloom recommendations top Elk Point EDC's first 2025 agenda

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Both Elk Point's Community Gardens and the collection of rainwater from the library roof drew positive comments from the Communities in Bloom judges who visited the site on their tour of Elk Point in August. / File photo

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ELK POINT – Elk Point Economic Development Committee, still beaming with pride from Elk Point's 3-Bloom rating in their first year of Communities in Bloom judging, spent much of their first meeting of the new year going over the recommendations from judges Berta Briggs and Cathy Kermer, as they start planning for another year of competition.

Praises for the respect and friendliness between the EDC, town council and public works, acknowledgement of the history and contributions of First Nations to the community, the community profile developed by the committee and the strong sense of passion for the community all were part of the judges' general comments, which were followed by a special mention for the community garden. The nine-bed garden between the library and the historical mural was called "a natural gathering space" and was declared "a wonderful community initiative."

Judging was divided into Community Appearance, Environmental Action, Heritage Conservation, Tree Management, Landscape and Plant and Floral Displays, with recommendations for each section in addition to the total points earned.

Community Appearance, earning 113 of 150 points, brought recommendations to encourage business beautification, to beautify main street, improve way-finding signage and assess public infrastructure, such as benches. The benches were one topic of discussion last week, the committee agreeing that more benches, possibly all decorated with the elk image, and refurbishing those that need a fresh look would be a good starting point for this section.

Environmental Action brought 112 points out of 150 and recommendations to create a climate change action plan preparing for floods, fires and hailstorms, increasing the number of residential rain barrels, harvesting water from municipal buildings, protecting the watershed and protecting the community's residents from chemical pesticides and idling vehicles. Converting waterways to bio-swales, rather than sewer pipes or grass ditches was on the list, with the judges noting that the ditch beside the community garden, actually a natural seasonal stream, is already developing into a bio-swale, with a good variety of native plants, grasses and wildflowers to effectively filter and purify the water.

While Heritage Conservation only scored 105 out of 150, the judges had praise for the ongoing efforts of the Elk Point Historical Society, and recommended identifying and promoting the local natural heritage, from the North Saskatchewan River to the boreal forest, protecting the mural from further deterioration, promoting Indigenous culture, and preserving heritage by replacing the deteriorating historical storyboards on the viewing platform at the river campsite, possibly also including a Cree language version of the information.

Tree management brought marks of 121 of 150 points, recommending developing a tree plan, having a formula for tree replacement, providing information for recommended trees, planting trees at parks and cemeteries, investing in arborist training and diversifying plantings.

Landscape brought 141 points out of 200 and recommendations including developing a trail map with wayfaring signage, building access across the creek between the trail and the golf course, keeping parks functional and save, developing a turf management plan and having consistency in public furnishings. Replacing the access across the creek brought up mention of a potential grant that could help to fund a structure to replace the bridge swept downstream several springs ago and restore easy access by ATVs, bicycles and walking to the golf course and recreation park, and the committee agreed this possibility should be explored.

Plants and Floral Displays earned 131 out of 175 points, with recommendations to educate the community about invasive plants, continuing to encourage community engagement, expansion of the community garden, checking interest in a gardening group and continuing to incorporate the colour of the year.

The EDC has since learned that Communities in Bloom has chosen a fresh and fun theme for 2025 – Edible Gardening.

***About the Author:* Vicki Brooker**

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