

CITY OF VAUGHAN

EXTRACT FROM COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES OF MARCH 19, 2013

Item 4, Report No. 9, of the Committee of the Whole, which was adopted without amendment by the Council of the City of Vaughan on March 19, 2013.

4 COMMUNITY GARDEN INITIATIVE-GROWING TO GIVE PROJECT

The Committee of the Whole recommends approval of the recommendation contained in the following report of the Commissioner of Strategic and Corporate Services, dated February 26, 2013:

Recommendation

The Commissioner of Strategic and Corporate Services, in consultation with the Manager of Environmental Sustainability, Director of Parks and Forestry Operations and Fire Chief of Vaughan Fire & Rescue Services, recommend:

1. That, the Growing to Give Case Study summarizing the experiences of the community garden two year pilot project be distributed for informational purposes; and,
2. That the City of Vaughan continue to partner with the Seeds for Change to implement a community garden project at Vaughan Fire and Rescue Service Station #7-1, located at 835 Clark Avenue West; and,
3. That the Environmental Sustainability Office in partnership with the Parks and Forestry Operations Department be directed to develop a community garden policy.

Contribution to Sustainability

The City of Vaughan recognizes that the principles of sustainability must be incorporated into our activities. Community gardens positively contribute to environmental, social and economic sustainability. Research has shown that gardens within a community and other community greening activities contribute to community development.

This report is consistent with the priorities previously set by Council in the *Green Directions Vaughan*, Community Sustainability Environmental Master Plan:

- Goal 5, Objective 5.2: To continue the City's role in advocacy and information sharing on environmental issues; and
- Goal 1, Objective 1.2: To reduce greenhouse gas emissions through actions such as working with the community to develop a local action plan.

Economic Impact

The Growing to Give project has created an indirect positive economic impact on the local community by producing food, creating a more attractive living space and supporting local suppliers to the garden. In addition, volunteer gardeners have donated close to 350 pounds of harvested food to community members in need.

Following \$ 1,500 of funding support and in-kind contributions of soil testing, tilling of the garden and mulch from the City of Vaughan for Year 1 of the Growing to Give pilot project, Seeds for Change was able to secure additional financial support from private and non-profit agencies. As a result, the Growing to Give project was able to install 13 separate garden beds, a gravel walkway off Clark Ave, a pergola and small patio area to enhance safety and the volunteer experience. With the exception of water from Station 7-1 to irrigate the garden, the Growing to Give project has become self-sufficient.

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Communications Plan

The Environmental Sustainability Office will disseminate the Growing to Give Case Study through a number of channels including the GTA Clean Air Council, the Ontario Municipal Environmental Managers and Coordinators list as well as peers within York Region. The case study will also be posted on the Environmental Sustainability page on the City of Vaughan's newly launched Vaughan website. The Growing to Give project provides an excellent opportunity for promotion and awareness of the City of Vaughan's commitment to sustainability.

Purpose

The purpose of this report is to obtain Committee approval to continue with the Community Garden Initiative- Growing to Give project and to establish a framework for executing additional community gardens in the future.

Background - Analysis and Options

Growing to Give (GTG) garden project

The Growing to Give (GTG) garden project was designed as a two-year pilot project and sought to create a community garden model that could be replicated at Fire Halls throughout the City of Vaughan.

The goals of the initial pilot project included:

- Creating a community garden that can be sustained in future years and provide a model of how a community garden can be successful in the City of Vaughan;
- Providing healthy food to members of the community who may not otherwise have access; and
- Raising awareness within the community to initiate collective actions that reduce greenhouse gas from food transportation.

The Growing to Give project is a partnership between the City of Vaughan's Parks & Forestry Operations Department, Environmental Sustainability Office, Vaughan Fire & Rescue Service (VFRS) Department, Seeds For Change and York Region Food Network. The Growing to Give project was designed to create hands-on gardening opportunities for local residents.

The VFRS Station #7-1 on Clark Avenue in Thornhill was an ideal location for this pilot. The garden was built in the south-end of the property facing the back of the fire station and residential fences. Natural features include a sunny south-west exposure, a naturalized field adjacent to the site and buildings that will protect the garden from wind.

The initial idea of a community garden came from a City of Vaughan firefighter who worked at Fire hall 7-1. This individual approached Environmental Sustainability staff about this initiative and has been instrumental in securing support from senior staff within VFRS. It should be noted that issues raised by City of Vaughan Risk Management staff and VFRS were addressed in the pilot project planning and execution. Provisions were made that prevented the pilot project participants from interfering with VFRS operational duties/staff while maintaining the highest regard for public safety. VFRS staff was not directly involved in the day to day operation of the community garden, however station 7-1 provided access to water as well as an outdoor tool and equipment storage area.

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The Growing to Give pilot project was able to adequately address all of the challenges that are typically faced by community garden projects. These challenges included managing the volunteer gardeners, financial support for the garden, pests, infrastructure, vandalism, education, maintenance, and insurance. As noted in the case study (Attachment 1), the Growing to Give pilot project was able to establish a strong volunteer base, secure significant support from the local business community and granting agencies to support education efforts and infrastructure improvements. Given the round the clock presence of fire staff, the community garden did not experience if any vandalism over the two year pilot.

Existing Community Gardens in Vaughan

Currently the Parks and Forestry Operations Department supports community garden projects located at Baker Sugarbush Heritage Park and Michael Cranny House. The Sugarbush Community Garden began as a pilot project in 2010, while the Michael Cranny House community garden was established in 2012. These gardens are a benefit to the community, especially to those who do not have the means to garden on their own property. The individual gardeners are required to sign letters of understanding and comply with the department's guidelines and rules. Once a site is confirmed, the groups designate a Community Garden Coordinator who is the main contact with the Parks and Forestry Operations Department. This coordinator will ensure the site is safe, well maintained and communicates the rules to the participants. The City of Vaughan in return prepares the site annually by rototilling the soil and provides a source of water.

Community Garden Policy

A community garden policy is a guiding document for community groups wishing to establish community gardens within the City. A policy could include information about the roles and responsibilities of various departments in the development of community gardens, allocation of in-kind services if applicable, and maintenance guidelines. Several municipalities including Kitchener, Waterloo, Peterborough and Markham have established such policies.

Relationship to Vaughan Vision 2020/Strategic Plan

This report is consistent with the Vaughan Vision 20/20 strategic goal of providing service excellence to citizens and the strategic objective to lead and promote environmental sustainability. This report is consistent with the priorities previously set by Council and the necessary resources have been allocated and approved

Regional Implications

This Growing to Give project at Vaughan Fire and Rescue Station #7-1 in Thornhill is a community garden model which can be replicated at Fire Halls and other potential community garden locations throughout York Region. The project has promoted urban agriculture opportunities that contribute to food sustainability in the Region.

Conclusion

The Community Garden Initiative- Growing to Give pilot at VFRS Station #7-1 has created awareness of the City's commitment to sustainability within the community by supporting a unique partnership to drive urban agriculture. By continuing to implement Growing to Give, the City of Vaughan will benefit from the results achieved by Seeds fo Change and its partners. Results include tangible economic and social benefits, such as greater availability of nutritious food, increased business activity from suppliers to the garden and greater community engagement as more people within that neighbourhood are more involved with each other. By incorporating the learning from the Growing to Give community garden initiative into a Community Garden policy, the City of Vaughan will be well positioned to encourage future community garden initiatives.

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Attachments

1. Growing to Give Case Study

Report prepared by:

Chris Wolnik, Manager of Environmental Sustainability, ext. 8633

(A copy of the attachments referred to in the foregoing have been forwarded to each Member of Council and a copy thereof is also on file in the office of the City Clerk.)

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE – FEBRUARY 26, 2013

COMMUNITY GARDEN INITIATIVE-GROWING TO GIVE PROJECT

Recommendation

The Commissioner of Strategic and Corporate Services, in consultation with the Manager of Environmental Sustainability, Director of Parks and Forestry Operations and Fire Chief of Vaughan Fire & Rescue Services, recommend:

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Managers and Coordinators list as well as peers within York Region. The case study will also be posted on the Environmental Sustainability page on the City of Vaughan's newly launched Vaughan website. The Growing to Give project provides an excellent opportunity for promotion and awareness of the City of Vaughan's commitment to sustainability.

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The initial idea of a community garden came from a City of Vaughan firefighter who worked at Fire hall 7-1. This individual approached Environmental Sustainability staff about this initiative and has been instrumental in securing support from senior staff within VFRS. It should be noted that issues raised by City of Vaughan Risk Management staff and VFRS were addressed in the pilot project planning and execution. Provisions were made that prevented the pilot project participants from interfering with VFRS operational duties/staff while maintaining the highest regard for public safety. VFRS staff was not directly involved in the day to day operation of the community garden, however station 7-1 provided access to water as well as an outdoor tool and equipment storage area.

The Growing to Give pilot project was able to adequately address all of the challenges that are typically faced by community garden projects. These challenges included managing the volunteer gardeners, financial support for the garden, pests, infrastructure, vandalism, education, maintenance, and insurance. As noted in the case study (Attachment 1), the Growing to Give pilot project was able to establish a strong volunteer base, secure significant support from the

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Conclusion

The Community Garden Initiative- Growing to Give pilot at VFRS Station #7-1 has created awareness of the City's commitment to sustainability within the community by supporting a unique partnership to drive urban agriculture. By continuing to implement Growing to Give, the City of Vaughan will benefit from the results achieved by Seeds fo Change and its partners. Results include tangible economic and social benefits, such as greater availability of nutritious food, increased business activity from suppliers to the garden and greater community engagement as more people within that neighbourhood are more involved with each other. By incorporating the learning from the Growing to Give community garden initiative into a Community Garden policy, the City of Vaughan will be well positioned to encourage future community garden initiatives.

Attachments

1. Growing to Give Case Study

Report prepared by:

Chris Wolnik, Manager of Environmental Sustainability, ext. 8633

Respectfully submitted,

Joe Pittari
Commissioner of Strategic and Corporate Services

Growing to Give Case Study

In the Fall of 2010, Fire Fighter Jacob Dabit approached the City of Vaughan Environmental Sustainability Office to inquire if Fire Hall #7-1, located at 835 Clark Ave. West, Thornhill, ON, would be a suitable location for a community garden. The Environmental Sustainability Office contacted two local non-governmental organizations, York Region Food Network (YRFN) and Seeds For Change (SFC), to inquire if they would be interested in working with the City to undertake a community garden project at Fire Hall #7-1. YRFN and SFC agreed the site would be a suitable location for a community garden and they expressed interest in working with Vaughan Fire and Rescue Service and the City of Vaughan to create a Vaughan Fire Hall community garden.

The project was named the *Growing to Give* (GTG) garden project. It was designed as a two-year pilot project and sought to create a community garden model that could be replicated at Fire Halls throughout the City of Vaughan. The first phase of the pilot project consisted of prepping the site, organizing volunteers and planting about 15% of the expected garden plots. The second phase of the project was set to expand the plotted areas of to the site to project completion

The *Growing to Give* project is a partnership between the City of Vaughan's Parks Operations & Forestry Department, Environmental Sustainability Office, Vaughan Fire & Rescue Service (VFRS) Department, Seeds For Change and York Region Food Network. The *Growing to Give* program was designed to create hands-on gardening opportunities for the patrons of the local library, school, religious institutions, local businesses and social service agencies.

The project sought to:

- 1) Provide engaging and enjoyable programs for local citizens and organizations in Vaughan who are interested in learning about how to grow food;
- 2) Expand upon the fire people's ongoing and honourable efforts to donate non-perishable foods by donating fresh, local, organic produce for those community members in need;
- 3) Support the City of Vaughan's sustainability efforts; and
- 4) Build community and relationships through community gardening.

1.0 Breakdown of Roles and Responsibilities

The roles and responsibilities for each party involved were outlined prior to the garden being opened. Seeds For Change signed an agreement, which outlined the arrangement for the use and creation of the *Growing to Give* (GTG) project at Fire Hall #7-1. Seeds For Change administered *Volunteer User Agreements* outlining volunteer's responsibilities.

1.1 City of Vaughan

The GTG project aligned with the City of Vaughan's objectives as outlined in *Green Directions Vaughan - Community Sustainability and Environmental Master Plan*. The City of Vaughan, through the Environmental Sustainability Office, coordinated with Vaughan Fire & Rescue Services, Corporate Communications, and Parks Operations & Forestry Department. The City of Vaughan already supported a similar small scale, community-garden project at Sugarbush Heritage Park. Based on lessons learned from the Sugarbush garden, Parks and Forestry Department recommended:

- Best practices to establish adequate water availability for the site;
- A template for the User Agreement, to be signed by all garden volunteers; and
- Soil sample collection methods.

The City of Vaughan provided access to the land that is located behind Fire Hall #7-1. The City of Vaughan provided \$1,500 to be used for volunteer recruitment, some in-kind contributions to the project, including but not limited to, soil analysis, tilling of the land, providing compost materials, water access and staff support.

1.2 Seeds For Change

Seeds For Change provided a garden coordinator to manage the daily activities associated with the *Growing to Give* project, including teaching the benefits of gardening, and how to cultivate fresh produce.

Seeds for Change agreed to:

- Be the lead coordinating party for the GTG project;
- Oversee all aspects of volunteer recruitment and management including coordinating volunteer workshops, obtaining completed *Volunteer User Agreements* as supplied by the City of Vaughan;
- Return completed volunteer user agreements to the City of Vaughan- Environmental Sustainability Office within one week of the agreement being signed;
- Fundraise for the GTG project as required including fundraising applications, sponsorships and in-kind contributions;
- Respect and consider advice from the City of Vaughan in addressing any volunteer issues;

- Direct the \$1500 initial cash contribution from the City of Vaughan - Environmental Sustainability Office to volunteer recruitment efforts or another area of need in consultation with the Manager, Environmental Sustainability;
- Provide budget updates to the City of Vaughan as requested;
- Vet any potential program sponsors with the City of Vaughan's Manager of Environmental Sustainability;
- Seek approval from the City of Vaughan before distributing communication materials to the public; and
- Allow the City of Vaughan to display the Seeds For Change logo on City of Vaughan website.

1.3 York Region Food Network

The York Region Food Network played an advisory role in the *Growing to Give* project. They provided guidance, expertise and advice on an as needed basis.

1.4 Volunteers

All Volunteers were required to sign a *Volunteer User Agreement*, which outlined the rules for using the garden and visiting Fire Hall #7-1. Specific components of the *Agreement* included:

- Children under the age of 16 must be accompanied by an adult when they are in the garden;
- Volunteers would not take any materials, including harvest, which is not rightfully theirs;
- Volunteers would participate in the maintenance and upkeep of the garden including: watering, weeding, harvesting and any other garden-related maintenance;
- Volunteers agreed not to visit the community garden or Fire Hall #7-1 property between 3:30 pm and 5:30 p.m., in an effort to avoid traffic during daily shift changes;
- Volunteers would use the designated walkway on the east side of the Fire Hall to enter and exit the community garden, unless a disability impeded them from doing so;
- Volunteers were instructed not to walk in front of the fire truck vehicle doors;
- Volunteers were allowed at the community garden anytime that worked for their schedules except shift changes times noted above;
- Volunteer days were held on Tuesday evenings and weekends; and
- Volunteers shared the harvest from the community garden among themselves and VFRS staff as well as sharing a majority of the harvest with community members in need.

2.0 Project Overview

The *Growing to Give* pilot project received initial approval at the April 12, 2011 Committee of the Whole meeting and formal Council approval on May 3, 2011. The main objectives of the pilot were to provide a model of how a community garden can be successful in the City of Vaughan; provide healthy food to

members of the community who may not otherwise have access and raise awareness within the community to initiate collective actions that reduces greenhouse gas from food transportation.

Prior to any construction or growing, the soil was tested for heavy metals and general soil conditions by Agrifood Laboratories. The results confirmed that the soil was suitable for gardening. In order to access external funding programs, the project received Letters of Support from Ward 5 Councillor Alan Shefman and Environmental Sustainability Manager, Chris Wolnik.

In advance of the initial launch event, the Environmental Sustainability Office circulated an information-based question and answer sheet to the Vaughan Fire and Rescue Service Fire Fighters. The City sought to ensure that local Fire Fighters were aware of the project and able to communicate directly with the organizing parties as needed.

The *Growing to Give* garden was officially opened on June 1st, 2011.

3.0 Results

Since the official opening, the garden has been converted from a grass-covered patch of land to being 50% transitioned into food garden beds. The site now has 13 separate beds with 6 being raised beds, an in-ground garlic bed, a strawberry patch, a raspberry patch, an eggplant patch, sunflower patch, butterfly garden and cabbage patch, a cold climate gardening bed and a functional irrigation system. Structural upgrades include a gravel walkway off of Clark Ave. and a pergola that was donated and erected by Home Depot. The site has a patio area for the gardeners, including two picnic tables and large sit rocks, which were donated by Beaver Valley Stone.

Over 2 years, the garden achieved the following results:

- **Volunteers:** The recruitment of volunteers focused on a variety of mechanisms including word of mouth, media, established relationships with Seeds For Change, school environmental clubs.

- **Workshops:** As part of the education and learning component of the garden, free workshops were open to volunteers on the following topics:
 - Cold Frames/Kids' Crafts
 - Garlic planting - planted 243 seeds from all over the world and tasted 5 different kinds in homemade hummus
 - Building Raised Beds
 - Container Gardening
 - Launch of the Seeds For Change Chef's Program: Cooking with Tomatoes/Okra
 - Lasagna Gardening
 - Native Plants
 - Square Foot Gardening
 - Three Sisters Planting
 - Vermicomposting

- **Garden yield:** The garden volunteers successfully harvested a wide range of vegetables. In 2011, 15 volunteers harvested over 170 pounds of vegetables including basil, beans, beets, carrots, chard, corn, cucumbers, dill, garlic (nine different varieties), green beans, kale, okra, oregano, onions, parsley, pumpkins, radishes, salad mix, squash, sunflower seeds, tomatoes and zucchini. In 2012, 32 volunteers from the ages of 3 to 80 harvested over 175 pounds of vegetables that included: basil, beans, carrots, cucumber, eggplant, garlic from all over the world, kale, lettuce, okra, oregano, peppers, radishes, Swiss chard, tomatoes and zucchini.
- **Community groups:** Produce was donated to community members in need from the David Lewis community housing project, a local church making salsa with proceeds being directed to projects in the Third world and a local food bank.
- **Funding:** The City of Vaughan provided \$1,500 to be used for volunteer recruitment, some in-kind contributions to the project, including but not limited to, soil analysis, tilling of the land, providing compost materials, water access and staff support. SFC used \$1500 of 'seed' money from the City of Vaughan to leverage support from 11 different local businesses. In 2011 Seeds For Change received monies from: TD Friends of the Environment, Longo's, Heart & Stroke Foundation, Home Depot, Shell and Carrot Cache, a portion of which went to cover the additional costs of the program - project materials, promotions, salaries (part-time), admin. fee, etc. In 2011, Vaughan Firefighter's raised \$2,200.00 and in 2012 - \$2,488.69. Funds were raised by annual firefighter carwashes. In 2012 Seeds For Change contributed monies from additional fundraising from Whole Foods, Loblaws, Shell and Carrot Cache, Fido/Evergreen. At the conclusion of the 2012 growing season, Seeds for Change received \$2,500 from the City of Vaughan Mayor's Gala benefiting community and not for profit community groups.

The 2-year pilot project was concluded with a *Family Fiesta* garden event. This event gave the Mayor and Members of Council an opportunity to see the progress made at Fire Hall #7-1's community garden.

4.0 Lessons Learned

- ***Establish the community garden in an area where demand has the potential to be high.*** Neighbourhoods with higher density housing or a community partner organization expressing an interest should be high priority areas for establishing gardens.
- ***Establish a strong volunteer base to execute key tasks (fundraising, watering, harvesting).*** The broader the volunteer base the easier it will be to sustain the initiative. The volunteer base must have a clear understanding of their roles and how they can contribute, even if it happens to be in a small way.
- ***Pursue a mix of financing to help sustain the program.***

- ***Promote the success of the community garden to the broader community through timely media events.***
- ***Establish 'norms' for the volunteers to negate impact operations of the host site.***
- ***Find a champion early in the process.*** The champion must have credibility with the volunteers as well as the representatives of the garden site.

5.0 Conclusion

The *Growing to Give* pilot project was deemed a successful demonstration of a community garden delivered in partnership with community groups, volunteers, private and public organizations. The project provides a strong foundation to expand the initiative within the City of Vaughan as well as inform others from outside the community what is required to execute a community garden at local Fire Hall. As per goal area five of *Green Directions Vaughan*, our Community Sustainability and Environmental Master Plan, the Environmental Sustainability Office intends to share sustainable best practices to demonstrate leadership. As a result, the electronic version of the case study will be provided to other jurisdictions for informational purposes and shared through the Environmental Sustainability page on the City of Vaughan website.