



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 and 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 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.