

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 for 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:

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(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.)