

CITY OF VAUGHAN

EXTRACT FROM COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES OF APRIL 8, 2014

Item 7, Report No. 14, of the Committee of the Whole, which was adopted without amendment by the Council of the City of Vaughan on April 8, 2014.

7 COMMUNITY GARDEN POLICY

The Committee of the Whole recommends:

- 1) That the recommendation contained in the following report of the Commissioner of Strategic and Corporate Services, dated March 25, 2014, be approved;**
- 2) That the following be approved:**
 - 1. That staff approach the current owners of the lands occupied by the Carville Community Garden requesting that they consider in their deliberations relating to the sale of the land, the retention of some part of the property as a community garden;**
 - 2. That if the property is sold for development, the new owner be approached with the same request; and**
 - 3. That failing success to retain land for a community garden at this site, the McMillan Farm be considered as an alternative; and**
- 3) That the deputation of Ms. Leslie Atkinson, Carrville Community Garden, Briarcliffe Crescent, Thornhill, be received.**

Recommendation

The Commissioner of Strategic and Corporate Services in consultation with the Commissioner of Legal Services, Director of Legal Services, Manager of Environmental Sustainability and the Parks Service Manager recommend:

1. That the City of Vaughan adopt the preliminary Community Garden Policy;
2. That staff identify one (1) community garden for the 2014 growing season to assess the effectiveness of the attached Community Garden guidelines, procedures and policy;
3. That the Environmental Sustainability Office report back to a future Committee of the Whole meeting with findings from the 2014 Community Garden policy assessment.

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 5, Objective 5.1: To share sustainable best practices and ideas between and among municipal staff and the community.

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Economic Impact

The establishment of a network of community gardens translates directly into tangible economic benefits such as lower food costs for the gardeners and increased sales for local businesses. Community gardens allow for a greater availability of local, nutritious food which can serve to reduce transportation-related food costs. In addition, the expansion of a network of community gardens can serve to increase the local business activity of suppliers to the gardens (plant nurseries, home, hardware and garden suppliers).

The City of Vaughan is currently involved in three community garden initiatives located at Baker Sugarbush Heritage Park, Michael Cranny House and Vaughan Fire Hall #7-1. To date, budget impacts of the Sugarbush and Michael Cranny House gardens have included the initial and annual site preparation. As both gardens are located adjacent to city-owned buildings, the installation of exterior water taps was a minimal cost. Temporary fencing has also been installed at the Sugarbush Garden. Total annual costs, including staff hours for oversight, are being absorbed through the Parks & Forestry Operations operating budget and are estimated to be approximately \$3,500 per year.

In 2011, the City of Vaughan provided the Growing to Give Garden at Vaughan Fire Hall #7-1 with \$1,500 in cash funding support as well as in-kind contributions of soil testing, tilling of the garden, mulch and compost materials, water access and staff support. Following this initial financial support Seeds for Change, the organization partnering with the City of Vaughan on the Growing to Give garden, received support from third parties such as local businesses, community groups and members of the general public. With the exception of the in-kind support, including water access from Fire Hall #7-1 to irrigate the garden, the Growing to Give project has become self-sufficient.

In support of the City of Vaughan's existing community gardens, Parks Operations has dedicated approximately 98 staff hours (4 staff working 3.5 days) for initial garden set-up and installation, and 70 staff hours (up to 2 staff working 2 days in the Spring, 1 day mid-season and 2 days in the Autumn) for annual maintenance, per garden.

With this past experience, it is anticipated that Parks Operations can continue to accommodate a similar commitment in terms of staff hours to prepare and maintain community gardens in 2014. Efforts will be made to ensure that the respective resource needs of each community garden be kept to a minimum. Additionally, efforts will also be made to leverage existing staff time to administer the community garden program, and to utilize student interns and other resources to increase the number of gardens in 2014. We will continue to leverage our experience of using strategic site selection, creative site design, and volunteer garden coordinators to establish an inventory of potential, preferred community garden locations. Should it be determined that additional resources are required to address future demand for community gardens beyond 2014, the Environmental Sustainability Office will work in conjunction with Parks Operations to develop the necessary documentation for the 2015 budget cycle.

As the community garden program evolves and grows, increased staff support and staffing resources may need to be considered and evaluated based on program size and success. Based on our own experience and consistent with other municipalities, the future program costs can range from \$11,500 to \$25,000. The former being the figure for strategically located sites with expenditures for community consultation (\$3,500), garden start-up costs including soil testing, site preparation, rototilling, placement of a water source (\$3,500), garden promotion (\$500) and program oversight/administration (\$4,000) with maintenance provided by the gardeners themselves. The \$25,000 figure is more realistic for community garden locations lacking any of the basic amenities such as: fencing, a storage area/shed and a source of potable water. These minimal requirements must be taken into consideration when establishing community gardens.

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The overall suitability of the site is critical to these considerations. A green field site for example, far from a water source and requiring the installation of other amenities could require an initial investment of up to \$25,000. This investment would provide the required water infrastructure (up to \$12,000 for a new, self-draining yard hydrant with backflow preventer, chamber and meter), fencing (up to \$3,000 depending on site requirements), a storage facility or shed (up to \$2,500), soil testing and the provision of top soil, mulch, compost and other amenities (up to \$1,500) and more substantial staff support for oversight, maintenance and administration (up to \$6,000).

Communications Plan

The Environmental Sustainability Office will work directly with Corporate Communications staff on a news release announcing the Community Garden Policy and its key aspects, and the timing and content of any broader messaging for the community. The Environmental Sustainability area of the City of Vaughan's website will highlight the Community Garden Policy and community engagement opportunities. The Environmental Sustainability Office will continue to disseminate the Community Garden Policy to existing networks within the community with an interest in this area.

This is consistent with Goal 5 of *Green Directions Vaughan* "To be leaders in advocacy and education on sustainability issues" where "Vaughan is committed to sharing its successes with the community".

Purpose

The purpose of this report is to seek Committee approval of the preliminary Community Garden Policy and of the City's facilitation of one (1) additional community garden for the 2014 growing season, to assess the effectiveness of the Community Garden guidelines, procedures and policy.

Background - Analysis and Options

Benefits of Community Gardens

According to the American Journal of Public Health, "community gardens build and nurture community capacity, which is defined as the sum total of commitment, resources, and skills that a community can mobilize and deploy to address community problems and strengthen community assets and strong community capacity increases the effectiveness and quality of community health interventions" (American Journal of Public Health, 2003).

Community gardens encourage community building and enhanced levels of civic engagement and community vitality. These gardens provide a livable environment by controlling physical factors such as temperature, noise and pollution while protecting and promoting biodiversity; they help create a community image that is perceived as positive by both residents and outsiders; they create opportunities to improve communities by encouraging physical activity and healthy living, the cultivation of local, healthy, and affordable food, and increased environmental awareness. Neighbourhoods containing community gardens will be more attractive places to live and work as community engagement and connectivity grows. In addition, regular garden users also provide an additional level of security and monitoring of the spaces where community gardens are located. This promotes one of the key CPTED (Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design) principles and contributes to a safer community.

Public Demand for Community Gardens in other Canadian Municipalities

Several municipalities including Barrie, Calgary, Guelph, Halifax, Hamilton, Kingston, London, Markham, Mississauga, Peterborough, Oshawa, Ottawa, Toronto, Vancouver, and Windsor have established community garden policies and programs.

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Interest in and demand for community gardens in Canadian municipalities has been developing progressively over the last decade. Seeking to evaluate the community demand for and support of community gardens in other jurisdictions, the Environmental Sustainability Office conducted research into the community garden programs of other municipalities across Canada. A comparative review was conducted of the formalized community garden policies of 18 Canadian jurisdictions. The Environmental Sustainability Office also inquired individually into the community garden programs of 10 municipalities of comparable population size to the City of Vaughan. Detailed responses were received from seven municipalities.

The majority of responding municipalities reported that their community garden programs were created primarily in response to growing community demand for gardens. The community garden programs in all of the responding municipalities included garden sites on both municipally-managed properties as well as on privately-owned lands. Total number of garden sites (on both municipal and private lands) in these municipalities ranged from 7 to 60 sites. Many of these municipalities reported several hundred active gardeners participating in their community garden programs. Frequently located in high density areas, several of the garden sites within these municipalities were identified as having a greater community demand for garden plots than were available at the existing garden sites.

Public Demand for Community Gardens in Vaughan

Recognizing the need to assess demand for community gardens in the City of Vaughan, the Environmental Sustainability Office hosted an online Community Garden Survey for the period of one month. The survey was promoted online through the Community Garden webpage on vaughan.ca/environment, Twitter and Facebook. Additionally, it was also sent out to 12 community partner and stakeholder groups; to the City's existing community gardeners; to citizens through Councillor newsletters; to City staff through the use of Jostle; and to Vaughan-based businesses through the Vaughan Chamber of Commerce e-Bulletin. A total of 50 responses were received and of those 50 respondents, 88% identified themselves as either living or working in the City of Vaughan. Approximately 50% of all respondents were already aware of the City of Vaughan's existing community gardens. 35 out of 50, or 70% of respondents expressed a further interest in participating in a community garden within the City of Vaughan. When asked if they felt there should be an increased number of community gardens in the City of Vaughan, 35 respondents said 'yes', 0 respondents said 'no' and 15 respondents did not provide an answer. When probed on where potential future gardens should be located, strong support was shown for locating future garden sites near community centres, libraries and retirement homes, and in high density areas near condominiums and apartment buildings. Additional detail was gathered through the Community Garden Survey, including detail on preferred garden types, motivations and barriers to participating in a community garden and basic demographic information. This data will be referenced and leveraged in the future development of Vaughan's Community Garden program.

Existing Community Gardens in Vaughan

Currently in the City of Vaughan, the Parks & 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.

In addition, the City of Vaughan has been participating in a two-year community garden pilot project at Vaughan Fire Hall #7-1. This Growing to Give garden project is a partnership between the City's Parks & Forestry Operations Department, Environmental Sustainability Office, Vaughan Fire & Rescue Services, Seeds For Change and the York Region Food Network. The main objectives of the pilot were to provide a model for how a community garden could be successful

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in the City of Vaughan; provide healthy food to members of the community who may not otherwise have access; and raise awareness about reducing greenhouse gas emissions from food transportation. The Growing to Give garden was officially opened on June 1st, 2011 and continued with its third summer in operation in 2013. The Growing to Give garden now has 30 active volunteers, ranging from seniors to youth, who maintain 17 plots while continuing to donate fresh produce to community members in need. The 2013 harvest produced approximately 100 kilograms of organic produce. In addition, the garden has hosted several successful community educational workshops over its three-year operation. A series of Toronto Star articles over Q3/2013 has resulted in excellent exposure highlighting the social and environmental benefits achieved by the Growing to Give garden.

Analysis and Options

Future Program Development

Given that the demand for community gardens in Vaughan has been from seniors in predominantly high density neighborhoods, an effort will be made target these areas for future community garden development initially. The Community Garden Policy provides guidance for establishing community gardens on City of Vaughan lands but efforts will be made to encourage other stakeholders such as developers and other open space landowners to establish community gardens as well. The City of Vaughan can play the role of facilitator to encourage these other landowners to establish community gardens where demand has been confirmed.

In adopting this formalized preliminary Community Garden Policy, the City of Vaughan would be providing guidance to community groups wishing to establish community gardens within the City. The Policy includes information about the roles and responsibilities of various City departments in the development of community gardens, allocation of in-kind services if applicable, and maintenance guidelines. The Environmental Sustainability Office would provide program oversight and administrative support. These responsibilities would be incorporated into the existing roles of staff thereby exercising cost-efficiency. Additionally, the Environmental Sustainability Office would liaise with the community volunteer garden coordinators as they conduct the required day-to-day garden management activities. Subject to the availability of staff, equipment and material, the Parks & Forestry Operations Department would provide initial operational and maintenance support for garden sites. These responsibilities would also be seamlessly integrated into existing staff roles so as to maintain negligible additional costs to the City.

In the context of Vaughan municipal service offerings, community gardens would be considered a premium, community building program that is slowly evolving into a standard, desirable program as it is being more frequently requested and provided by most urban GTA municipalities. Similar to other premium service offerings that strive to reduce financial impact, the community garden initiative would be structured to engage community groups in day-to-day management activities, leverage resources, integrate full cost recovery components where possible as well as be situated and maintained at negligible costs to the City. Experience from the 2014 gardening season will help define the rationale for full cost recovery and further enhance the preliminary Community Garden Policy.

It is anticipated however that as a community garden develops it will become increasingly self-sustaining and therefore will require a lessened financial and in-kind investment from the City of Vaughan.

Relationship to Vaughan Vision 2020/Strategic Plan

This report is consistent with Vaughan Vision 20/20 and the priorities previously set by Council. In addition it supports the City's goal of providing service excellence to its citizens and the strategic objective to lead and promote environmental sustainability.

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Regional Implications

The benefits of local food growth and local food distribution are components of York Region's "SM4RT LIVING" Integrated Solid Waste Management Master Plan.

In November of 2013, a joint presentation was made to the Priorities and Key Initiatives Committee from York Region and City staff, outlining the Region's "SM4RT LIVING" Integrated Solid Waste Management Master Plan (ISWMMP). The Master Plan is designed to provide a framework for managing solid waste over the next 40 years, and its creation involved input and guidance from all of the local area municipal staff.

One of the key strategies identified in the ISWMMP was reducing food waste, including pilot projects that link the benefits of local food production and local food distribution, to overall waste reduction. One of the initiatives that Vaughan supported in the Plan, was encouraging community gardens, and supporting composting pilots at community gardens. The recommendations contained in this report, and in the draft policy, are in line with the goals outlined in the ISWMMP.

In addition, as community gardens and issues of food sustainability become more prominent, the City of Vaughan's community garden program will become part of a larger network of community-led gardening initiatives. This has the potential to positively impact the economic, social, environmental, and food sustainability of the region.

Conclusion

Establishing the framework for a larger community garden network, a formalized preliminary Community Garden Policy will help to demonstrate the City of Vaughan's ongoing commitment to sustainability. Results from this initiative would include tangible economic and social benefits, such as greater availability of nutritious food, increased business activity of suppliers to the gardens and greater community engagement and interaction. An established policy will better position the City of Vaughan to encourage and manage future community garden initiatives.

Attachments

1. Community Garden Policy

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.)