

## **COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE – APRIL 14, 2015**

### **COMMUNITY GARDEN INITIATIVE – VAUGHAN CITY HALL**

#### **Recommendation**

The Interim City Manager and the Manager of Environmental Sustainability, in consultation with The Director of Buildings & Facilities, and Director of Transportation Services and Parks & Forestry Operations recommend:

1. That the City of Vaughan partner with the Seeds for Change, York Region Food Network and Petits Chefs Academy to undertake a two year, community garden project at Vaughan City Hall; and
2. That Council authorize the execution of an agreement with the above organizations to facilitate the project.

#### **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 along with other community greening activities contribute to positive community development.

This report is consistent with the priorities previously set by Council in the *Green Directions Vaughan*, the 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.

#### **Economic Impact**

The City of Vaughan's financial contribution over the two year project would be approximately \$4,300 which amounts to 30 % of the total project budget. The Environmental Sustainability Office has existing budget to support this request. Vaughan's contribution would be directed to supporting a part-time Seeds for Change garden coordinator dedicated to this project. Seeds for Change and its partners would be responsible for sourcing other sources of funding to support acquisition of tools and plants, workshop expenses, signage and other garden development costs. A private company has agreed to cover the cost of proving the required water infrastructure to the location of the garden.

Efforts will be made to ensure that any in-kind resource needs for the Vaughan City Hall community garden project will be kept to a minimum particularly for Parks Operations staff. At this time, the Vaughan City Hall project will require mulch only for a creation of a short path to the garden from the East parking lot area. No additional requests for support are anticipated.

The Vaughan City Hall project is expected to create an indirect positive economic impact on the local community by creating a more attractive living space. As per the City of Vaughan Community Garden Policy, the Vaughan City Hall garden would be considered a 'common garden' which is managed and gardened collectively by a group of people. Volunteer gardeners will be encouraged to donate a portion of their harvest to a charitable cause. The project has the potential to provide food to local residents, local schools, or to a local assisted living facility.

## **Communications Plan**

Environmental Sustainability will work with the partner organizations and Corporate Communications, to support a launch event at the onset of the Vaughan City Hall community garden project. Invitations will be extended to the Mayor, Members of Council, project volunteers, agencies and organizations that will benefit from the harvest donations as well as representatives from media outlets. In addition, the Environmental Sustainability area of the City of Vaughan's website will highlight the City Hall garden along with other community gardens operated on City owned lands.

Project partners will also be responsible for some communications related to the Vaughan City Hall project. Posters for the Community Garden Initiative City Hall project will be strategically placed to inform volunteer recruits of the opportunity to volunteer with Seeds for Change to execute the Vaughan City Hall project. Seeds for Change will collaborate with local environment organization to draw upon their volunteers. Additionally, Seeds for Change will provide several workshops at local libraries and the Growing to Give Garden through spring of 2015 to generate awareness and recruit volunteers.

The Vaughan City Hall 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 Council approval to proceed with the Community Garden Initiative for the Vaughan City Hall.

## **Background - Analysis and Options**

The Community Garden Policy was approved by Council in April 2014. The intent of the policy was to provide a framework for the establishment of community gardens on City owned lands which would nurture a more integrated urban community and increase civic engagement. As per item 5.6.1 of the Community Garden Policy, a community consultation will occur prior to the approval of any new Community Garden.

The proposed site location for the project at Vaughan City Hall will be just south of east parking lot Between the CN rail tracks and the Mapleglen Retirement Residence (see Attachment 1). The location for the proposed garden is well positioned to not interfere with any of the development plans for the City Hall campus.

Initially, the Vaughan City Hall Community Garden project will construct 5 of the suggested 8' x 3' raised garden beds in 2015. In the second year of the Vaughan City Hall project, the focus will be on increasing external funding and community support for project, working with volunteers from the retirement community, local school programs, and local business interests as well as constructing an inground pizza garden. Additionally, in Year 2, exploration of innovative environmental projects may be undertaken such as vertical gardens.

Additionally, the proposed garden would be located in a busy part of Maple that is easily accessible by foot, public transportation, and bicycle. The community garden would provide a safe and therapeutic space for the surrounding residential community, especially for the neighbouring retirement residence.

The Environmental Sustainability Office has already coordinated the successful implementation of several other community garden projects. Currently, the City of Vaughan and the Parks & Forestry Operations department supports community garden projects located at Baker Sugarbush Heritage Park, established as pilot project in 2010 and Michael Cranny House, established in

2012. Additionally, the Environmental Sustainability Office has been working in partnership with the City's Parks & Forestry Operations Department, Vaughan Fire & Rescue Services, Seeds for Change, and the York Regional Food Network to develop and maintain the Growing to Give community garden pilot project at Vaughan Fire Hall #7-1. The Growing to Give garden was established in 2011 and has attracted over 30 active volunteers, hosted several successful community events, gained public exposure in the Toronto Star, and has produced over 100 kilograms of organic produce.

Should the Vaughan City Hall garden be successfully implemented, the City of Vaughan would be the first municipal office in York Region to have a community garden on site, encouraging community engagement, eating more nutritionally and locally produced food, and promoting environmental stewardship.

Initial surveying of the surrounding community has already been undertaken, with a community meeting conducted in early March of 2014. Soil testing completed in Q3, 2014 confirmed the site is suitable for a community garden. The Environmental Sustainability Office has consulted with Buildings & Facilities and the Environmental Services water service contractor regarding the placement of the garden and obtaining safe water access to the garden site.

### **Relationship to Vaughan Vision 2020/Strategic Plan**

This report is consistent with the priorities previously set by Council and the necessary resources have been allocated and approved.

This pilot project addresses the following objectives outlined in *Green Directions Vaughan*:

- 1.2 To promote reduction of greenhouse gas emissions in the City of Vaughan;
- 5.1 To share sustainable best practices and ideas between and among municipal staff and the community;
- 5.2 To continue the City's role in advocacy and information sharing on environmental issues.

### **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 (ISWMMP) released in 2013. 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 initiatives that Vaughan supported in the Plan, was encouraging community gardens, and supporting composting pilots at community gardens. Moving forward with another community garden is in line with the goals outlined in the ISWMMP.

### **Conclusion**

Seeds for Change, Petits Chefs Academy and the York Region Food Network are interested in partnering with the City of Vaughan to undertake a two year, community garden project at Vaughan City Hall. The garden, situated south of the East parking lot, would be positioned as a common garden' and subjected to the requirements of the Community Garden Policy approved by Council in 2014. The Vaughan City Hall project aims to create a community garden that can be sustained in future years, provide healthy food to members of the community who may not otherwise have access, raise awareness within the community to initiate collective actions that reduces greenhouse gas from food transportation, and encourage local community members to

engage in outdoor recreational activities, thereby contributing to overall health and well-being of our citizens. The City of Vaughan would contribute \$4,300 , which amounts to 30 % of the budget, over the two year project with the remainder being secured by Seeds for Change and its private company partners as well as other funding sources. The Vaughan City Hall Community garden initiative supports Vaughan's commitment to being a leader in sustainability.

**Attachments**

1. Map of proposed garden area

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Respectfully submitted,

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