

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE – APRIL 12, 2011

COMMUNITY GARDEN INITIATIVE-GROWING TO GIVE PILOT PROJECT

Recommendation

The City Manager and the Manager of Environmental Sustainability, in consultation with the Director of Parks and Forestry Operations and Acting Deputy Chief of Vaughan Fire & Rescue Services, recommend:

1. That the City of Vaughan partner with the York Region Food Network and Seeds for Change to undertake a two-year community garden pilot project at Vaughan Fire and Rescue Service Station #7-1, located at 835 Clark Avenue West; and,
2. That Council authorize the execution of an agreement with these organizations to facilitate the pilot 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 and other community greening activities contribute to community development.

Community Gardens provide a livable environment by controlling physical factors such as temperature, noise and pollution; they help create a community image that is perceived as positive by both residents and outsiders; they create opportunities to improve communities in many ways.

These factors translate directly into tangible economic and social benefits, such as greater availability of nutritious food, and increased business activity. The neighbourhood will be more attractive because the people within that neighbourhood are more involved with each other. Communities benefit from gardens based in the community by wildlife habitat protection/restoration, reduced transportation-related food costs, improved population health and community beautification.

Economic Impact

The Growing to Give pilot project is expected to create an indirect positive economic on the local community by creating a more attractive living space. Volunteer gardeners will be encouraged to donate a portion of their harvest. The project will provide food to local residents, possibly to a local school or to a local assisted living facility. Once completed, the pilot project will be evaluated to determine if it would be feasible to be expanding the program to other fire stations within York Region.

The estimated total budget for Year 1 of this project is expected to be \$ 9,979, which includes volunteer coordination and training, communication/promotion as well as garden development costs such soil testing, wood framing materials, soil/compost, labour to construct wood frame, gardening equipment, sprinklers, garden hoses, seeds/seedlings, harvest collection baskets. Some of the budget is expected to be contributed through in-kind donations. Seeds for Change have agreed to provide a Garden Coordinator to undertake all daily activities of the Community Garden Project and has secured partial financial support. The City of Vaughan Environmental Sustainability Office has proposed that the City of Vaughan be responsible for \$2000 of the total budget, of which 25 % would be in-kind contributions. The cash contribution would go toward soil testing and offsetting the cost of the Seeds of Change Garden coordinator. This contribution would come from the existing Environmental Sustainability business unit 2011 budget for public

events/public relations. In-kind contributions would include tilling of the garden, providing a small amount of compost and providing water access to the garden.

Communications Plan

Information sessions will be held to introduce volunteers to the project. Posters for the Community Garden Initiative Growing to Give pilot project will be strategically placed to inform volunteer recruits of the opportunity to volunteer with the Seed of Change to execute the Vaughan Fire and Rescue Service (VFRS) Station #7-1 pilot project. Seeds for Change will collaborate with local environment committees to draw upon their volunteers.

Environmental Sustainability will work with the partner organizations and Corporate Communications, to host a launch event at the onset of the 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 Parks and Forestry, Fire Firefighters and media outlets.

The Growing to Give project provides an excellent opportunity for promotion and awareness the City of Vaughan's commitment to sustainability. A more detailed communications strategy will be developed in partnership with Corporate Communications.

Purpose

The purpose of this report is to obtain Committee approval to proceed with the Community Garden Initiative- Growing to Give pilot project

This pilot project aims to:

- i) Create 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
- ii) Provide healthy food to members of the community who may not otherwise have access
- iii) Raise awareness within the community to initiate collective actions that reduces greenhouse gas from food transportation.

The Growing to Give pilot will create hands-on gardening opportunities for the patrons of the local library, school, religious institutions, local businesses and social service agencies.

There are three main goals for the first year of the Growing to Give Pilot project. One goal will be to identify internal and external partners, assign roles and responsibilities to partners and move forward with initial planting of plots. The second goal is to identify and address issues, including legal, infrastructure, or practical considerations that could hinder success of a community garden throughout Vaughan. The third and final goal is to construct 2 of the suggested 15 garden plots in Spring 2011. In the second year of the Growing to Give pilot project, the focus will be on increasing external funding and community support for project, working with volunteers from retirement community, local school programs and local business interests as well as constructing the remaining 13 of the suggested 15 garden plot.

Background - Analysis and Options

The VFRS Station #7-1 is set back on Clark Avenue in Thornhill. It is located between Clark Avenue (north), a gas station (east), a residential community (south) and a large field (west). The garden will be built in the south-end of the property facing the back of the fire station and residential fences. There is a large building (the fire station) on the site and a long service road

that the fire trucks use from Clark Avenue to the back of the building. There is a shed beside the proposed garden area which may be used to store garden tools. Natural features include a sunny south-west exposure, a naturalized field adjacent to the site (providing the garden with native pollinators) and buildings that will protect the garden from wind.

The land is currently not being used by the community. The proposed garden would be located in a busy part of Thornhill that is easily accessible by foot, public transportation and bicycle. The community garden would provide quiet place of refuge and safety as it is tucked away behind the fire station. To ensure the utmost safety, a walking path to the garden via the east side of the building will be constructed to ensure pedestrians are not in the way of fire trucks.

A similar small scale, community garden project has been successful through the in-kind support of the Parks and Forestry Operations Department. The Sugarbush Heritage Park Community Garden is entering its second year of operation. The project successes and lessons learned have been incorporated into the development of the Growing to Give Pilot Project.

A community garden is also being proposed as part of a broader application by the Vaughan Community Health Centre. The City of Vaughan has provided a letter of support for that initiative. An effort will be made to liaise with the leaders of the Vaughan Community Health Centre community garden project should the initiative move forward.

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 have been addressed in the pilot project planning. Provisions have been made that will prevent the pilot project participants from interfering with VFRS operational duties/staff while maintaining the highest regard for public safety. Other than housing the garden on the Fire hall 7-1 site and providing water access, VFRS staff are not expected to contribute to the operation of the community garden.

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

This 2-year pilot project at Vaughan Fire and Rescue Station #7-1 in Thornhill seeks to create a community garden model that can be replicated at Fire Halls throughout York Region. The V Community Garden Initiative-Growing to Give pilot project will work with local area volunteers to prep, maintain and tend to the site, which will grow vegetables/herbs and provide a portion of the food harvested to local assisted living facilities in the near project area.

Conclusion

The Community Garden Initiative- Growing to Give pilot at VFRS Station #7-1 would create awareness of the City's commitment to sustainability within the community. It would support Vaughan's commitment to being a leader in sustainability. The project creates the potential for a larger community-wide community garden initiative.

Attachments

N/A

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Respectfully submitted,

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