

Committee of the Whole (2) Report

DATE: Tuesday, June 16, 2020

WARD(S): ALL

TITLE: SOVEREIGNTY GARDENS PILOT PROGRAM

FROM:

Bill Kiru, Acting Deputy City Manager, Planning and Growth Management

ACTION: DECISION

Purpose

To seek endorsement of the Sovereignty Gardens Pilot Program, in collaboration with the Transformation Initiative, a Canadian registered not-for-profit agency that focuses efforts in Canada's five core sectors: Finance, Insurance, Energy, Resources and Agri-food.

Report Highlights

- The Pilot Program aims to provide immediate food security to the underserved community in Vaughan, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic
- The Pilot Program aligns with other City initiatives to improve community well-being through the support of local food
- The legal and risk ramifications are still being explored with applicable City departments

Recommendations

1. That the Sovereignty Gardens Pilot Program, as described in Attachment 1, be endorsed;
2. That Staff be directed to initiate the Sovereignty Gardens Pilot Program, in collaboration with the Transformation Initiative, subject to Staff's ongoing review of legal and risk ramifications;
3. That the Sovereignty Gardens Pilot Program be promoted through the various corporate channels; and
4. That Staff report back on the outcome of the five-month Pilot Program with consideration of the viability and sustainability of the program going forward.

Background

The COVID-19 pandemic will cause a rise in food insecurity

In addition to the health and economic challenges that the COVID-19 pandemic has caused, it is projected that food insecurity will rise as a result of the pandemic. On April 25, 2020, the Province of Ontario amended an emergency order to re-open community gardens and declared them as an essential source of fresh food for people, including those who are facing food insecurity during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In direct response to the pandemic, the Transformation Initiative reached out to the City with a proposal for a Sovereignty Gardens Pilot Program (the “Pilot Program”). The five-month Pilot Program will run from June 2020 to October 2020 and will address the following objectives to:

1. Provide immediate food security for the underserved community in Vaughan through collective community action and strategic partnership.
2. Empower communities by fostering a culture of resiliency through urban agriculture.
3. Demonstrate the case for a transformative and resilient food system through local, sustainable and decentralized production and distribution.

The intent of the Pilot Program is to encourage private property owners in Vaughan to grow fresh produce and provide the produce to local food banks and/or other local food organizations.

Council passed a Member’s Resolution to endorse the Pilot Program

On May 27, 2020, Council passed a Member’s Resolution to endorse the Pilot Program, in principle. The Member’s Resolution also recommended that City staff work with the Transformation Initiative to determine the scope and logistics of the Pilot Program, and report back to Mayor and Members of Council on staff’s recommendation on whether to proceed with the pilot.

The Transformation Initiative creates sustainability solutions

Founded in 2020, the Transformation Initiative is a Canadian registered not-for profit agency with the intention to serve as an industry catalyst to transform markets and the economy and to bring people together collaboratively to create sustainability solutions. The Transformation Initiative focuses efforts in Canada’s five core sectors: Finance, Insurance, Energy, Resources and Agri-food.

The Pilot Program aligns with City initiatives

Green Directions Vaughan 2019, the City's community sustainability plan, was adopted by Council on December 17, 2019. Green Directions Vaughan promotes the improvement of community well-being through the support of local food, the Agricultural System and the Agri-Food Network. The Pilot Program aims to improve community well-being through local food during the COVID-19 pandemic.

City staff are members of the York Region Food Council with a mandate to support and implement local food system projects, build capacity to influence change, and engage on local food and farming issues that are relevant in the community. Staff are also members of the York Region Agriculture and Agri-Food Advisory Committee and are mandated to implement action items in the Agriculture and Agri-Food Sector Strategy.

Through the creation of partnerships with local food organizations, and other sustainability organizations such as the Transformation Initiative, the City is increasing its ability to empower citizens to build skills in producing food at home or in a community garden. As an example, in 2019, in partnership with the York Region Food Network, the City hosted eight workshops in our community gardens which were focused on food and wellness.

Previous Reports/Authority

Previous reports considered by Council related to the Sovereignty Gardens Pilot Program can be found at the following links:

[Committee of the Whole \(2\), May 20, 2020](#) – Member's Resolution for Sovereignty Garden Pilot Program.

[Item 7, Report No. 39, of the Committee of the Whole, which was adopted without amendment by the Council of the City of Vaughan on December 17, 2019.](#)

Analysis and Options

Staff recommend proceeding with the Pilot Program, contingent on the ongoing review of legal ramifications

Based on consultation with the Transformation Initiative and discussions with various City departments, City staff recommend proceeding with a five-month Pilot Program starting in June 2020, in collaboration with the Transformation Initiative. This recommendation is contingent on all applicable risk and legal ramifications being met.

The Pilot Program will target private property owners in Vaughan that already have a garden or have property and do not need support to create a garden. The scope of the Pilot Program does not include assistance to property owners in the creation of a garden, however resources relating to garden maintenance and harvesting will be made available on the project website. If successful, future growth of the Pilot Program may include the support and assistance needed for property owners to create a garden.

The Transformation Initiative will be connecting with local food banks to create partnerships for the distribution of produce. If the food banks are unable to accommodate the volume of food donations, then the Transformation Initiative will engage with community organizations that also distribute fresh food to the community.

The roles and responsibilities of the City and the Transformation Initiative are outlined below.

The City's responsibilities include the following:

- Pilot Program endorsement, including support in engaging with sponsors and community partners and permission to use the City logo for promotion and in corporate packages
- Communications and marketing support by promoting the Pilot Program on corporate communications channels, and the Vaughan Public Library communications channels
- Sponsorship advice, including providing introductions with existing, applicable, City corporate sponsors
- Incentive development for participants

The Transformation Initiative's responsibilities include the following:

- Program management including developing the project website, overseeing participant registration, tracking donations, providing online resources, partnership and volunteer management and coordination of produce drop-off
- Contract execution with partners and sponsors, including legal and risk ownership
- Corporate sponsor securement and community member engagement
- Marketing including graphic design, social media management and content development

The following City departments have been consulted to determine the appropriate level of support:

- Corporate and Strategic Communications
- Economic and Cultural Development
- Facility Management
- Legal Services
- Parks, Forestry and Horticulture Operations
- Recreation Services
- Risk Management
- Vaughan Fire and Rescue
- Vaughan Public Libraries

The City of Brampton initiated the Backyard Garden Program which can be used for lessons learned

The City of Brampton was the first municipality in Canada to launch an initiative to support residents in starting their own gardens, in response to COVID-19. The Backyard Garden Program helps support food security and encourages residents to get active at home. Similar to the Sovereignty Gardens Pilot Program, the initiative encourages residents to grow produce on their property and donate the crops to local food banks and community organizations. The initiative has received more than 11,000 requests to participate.

The success of Brampton's initiative demonstrates the vision of the Pilot Program. The City and the Transformation Initiative will solicit advice from the City of Brampton regarding lessons learned and the health and safety strategy that was implemented.

Feed Ontario supports the Sovereignty Garden Pilot Program

The Transformation Initiative has support from Feed Ontario, a registered charity that manages food banks in Ontario. Feed Ontario unites food banks, industry partners, and local communities in work to end hunger and poverty.

Financial Impact

Staff will provide services in-kind to accommodate the responsibilities listed above. There is no other financial impact.

Broader Regional Impacts/Considerations

Food insecurity is an issue that affects households throughout York Region. An estimated seven per cent of York Region households experienced food insecurity between 2009 and 2014, representing approximately 24,700 households. While local food programs are not the entire solution to food insecurity, they can make healthy,

affordable food more accessible to York Region residents. The Sovereignty Gardens Pilot Program, if successful, can be used to demonstrate the impact of accessible fresh food and sustainable food systems. The Pilot Program may be adapted and utilized in other municipalities within York Region and broader communities.

Conclusion

City staff recommend implementing the Pilot Program for a five-month period between June 2020 to October 2020, on the basis that all risk and legal ramifications are met.

Staff recognize the importance of food security and understand the impacts that the COVID-19 pandemic is having on the local food system. The Sovereignty Gardens Pilot Program demonstrates the case for a transformative and resilient food system through local, sustainable and decentralized production and distribution. Through the creation of partnerships with local food and sustainability organizations, such as the Transformation Initiative, the City is increasing its ability to empower citizens to build skills in producing food at home and contribute to a culture of resiliency through urban agriculture.

The Pilot Program aligns with various City initiatives to promote community well-being, implement local food system projects, build capacity to influence change, and engage on local food issues that are relevant in the community.

If successful, the Pilot Program can continue in future years and expand into a more fulsome program that also teaches and provides support to Vaughan residents that wish to create a garden on their property.

For more information, please contact Alanna MacKenzie, Sustainability Coordinator, ext. 8941.

Attachment

1. Sovereignty Gardens Pilot Program Overview, Transformation Initiative, May 29, 2020

Prepared by

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