



**CITY OF HAMILTON**  
**COMMUNITY & EMERGENCY SERVICES DEPARTMENT**  
**Neighbourhood & Community Initiatives Division**

<b>TO:</b>	Chair and Members Emergency & Community Services Committee
<b>COMMITTEE DATE:</b>	May 25, 2015
<b>SUBJECT/REPORT NO:</b>	McQuesten Urban Farm Design and Construction (CES15023) (Ward 4)
<b>WARD(S) AFFECTED:</b>	Ward 4
<b>PREPARED BY:</b>	Adam Watson (905) 546-2424 ext. 7806
<b>SUBMITTED BY:</b>	Joe-Anne Priel General Manager Community & Emergency Services Department
<b>SIGNATURE:</b>	

**RECOMMENDATION**

- (a) That a competitive procurement process be undertaken in accordance with the City's Procurement Policy 13-317 for the provision of construction services for the McQuesten Urban Farm Project, including site preparation, surfacing, tree planting, structures, water servicing and the installation of entrance features;
- (b) That the project identified in subsection (a) be funded from the Neighbourhood Action Strategy (Project # 2051255204) at an estimated cost of \$350,000; and,
- (c) That the General Manager of Community and Emergency Services be authorized and directed to take all necessary steps and execute any agreements or documents, in a form satisfactory to the City Solicitor and with content acceptable to the General Manager of Community and Emergency Services, in order to give effect to and implement subsection (a) above.

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The Neighbourhood Action Strategy was established in 2010 to develop resident-led neighbourhood action plans that would make neighbourhoods great places to live, work, learn and play. Residents, service providers and the City of Hamilton worked collaboratively to develop the McQuesten Neighbourhood Action Plan which has clear and feasible actions to address the health inequities in this neighbourhood. The idea of the McQuesten Urban Farm rose out of this Action Plan as a means to address the issue of food insecurity and healthy eating. The proposed McQuesten Urban Farm is located on a vacant three acre parcel of City-owned land at Melvin Ave and Woodward Ave, as in Appendix A to Report CES15023. This farm will consist of crop growing and include no animal husbandry.

Over the past year, significant progress has been made on the development of the McQuesten Urban Farm. The required Official Plan changes have been completed to allow for urban agriculture at this site. As well, an environmental site assessment has been completed to identify any risks of soil contamination. City staff resources have been allocated to work with the McQuesten Community Planning Team (Report CES14037) and project partners to realize the construction of the farm, and grants have been secured to fund a community animator and launch programs to increase community engagement at the site. In addition, a partnership was formed with Hamilton Victory Gardens to construct over 120 raised beds to produce food for neighbourhood residents and area food banks. In February 2015, the McQuesten Urban Farm Committee commenced a facilitated community design process, and a conceptual design is now complete, as shown in Appendix B to Report CES15023. The design incorporates many of the desired features identified by neighbourhood residents throughout the planning process, and works with the existing site opportunities and constraints to achieve a space that enables significant produce to be grown on the site. The design concept also allows for food education opportunities and community enjoyment of the space.

The next phase of the project requires that a request for proposals be prepared for Phase One of farm construction. This will include site preparation, surfacing, tree planting, structures, water servicing and the installation of entrance features. These components are integral for the site to be used as Hamilton's first urban farm and will support the development of community activities such as food literacy and the hosting of school groups on the site. Phase Two of the urban farm construction will focus on enhanced site features such as a greenhouse and outdoor cooking space, once additional funding is secured through strategic partnerships. Staff will report back to Emergency & Community Services Committee later in 2015 on the plans for construction of the Phase Two amenities and the economic model proposed to fund the operation of the farm. The development of the McQuesten Urban Farm is the first major step taken by the neighbourhood to expand the existing St. Helen's @ McQuesten Centre into a community food centre.

***Alternatives for Consideration – See Page 9***

## **FINANCIAL – STAFFING – LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

**Financial:** \$350,000 for the first phase of construction of the McQuesten Urban Farm will be funded from the \$2 million Neighbourhood Fund (Project # 2051255204), which would leave a balance of \$414,943 in the fund.

**Staffing:** There are no staffing implications associated with Report CES15023.

**Legal:** There are no legal implications associated with Report CES15023.

## **HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

In 2010, the City of Hamilton and the Hamilton Community Foundation created a partnership to work with residents and local leaders in order to make neighbourhoods better and healthier places for all residents. This collaboration, known as the Neighbourhood Action Strategy works with 11 neighbourhoods and as of January 2014 has facilitated 10 neighbourhoods having developed and presented their unique Neighbourhood Action Plans to the General Issues Committee. One of the themes that emerged across neighbourhood plans was the lack of access to fresh and healthy food. Solutions ranged from a food pantry or food bank to community gardens and community kitchens. Some of the neighbourhood needs noted in the McQuesten Neighbourhood Profile (SPRC, 2012) included higher than normal rates of high-school non-completion, poverty, and hospital visits indicating poorer levels of health. One of the solutions identified by the McQuesten Neighbourhood Action Plan is to build on the assets of the St. Helen's @ McQuesten Centre and repurpose an adjacent strip of vacant city-owned green space as an urban farm. This would be the first step towards redeveloping the site as a community food centre. The school is owned by the Hamilton-Wentworth Catholic District School Board who is in support of these neighbourhood initiatives and is committed to the long-term viability of the building as a community centre.

Urban agriculture is important not only for food production but because it engages communities through education and skill-building, as residents learn how to grow and prepare food, and how to market and sell food that is produced to other Hamilton residents. In order to support the development of the McQuesten Urban Farm, the City needed to assess current policies and by-laws. It was discovered that urban agriculture within the Urban Hamilton Official Plan was not a permitted use, so the Neighbourhood Action Strategy office worked with the University of Toronto to commission a discussion paper on urban agriculture, including an environmental scan of Official Plan policies and Zoning By-law regulations across Canadian and American municipalities on how urban agriculture was permitted.

The discussion paper was presented to the Senior Management Team (SMT) of the City of Hamilton requesting that the Urban Hamilton Official Plan be amended to include urban agriculture as a permitted use and that a pilot project in the McQuesten neighbourhood be permitted. Senior Management Team also endorsed the recommendation that City staff work with the McQuesten Planning Team, the Social Planning and Research Council and the Hamilton Community Foundation on further community engagement and begin the groundwork for an urban farm pilot in McQuesten. SMT also directed Planning staff to amend the Official Plan to permit urban agriculture in designated areas within the City. As a result of this SMT direction Planning staff submitted Report PED14161 which was passed by Council on September 24, 2014, but has subsequently been appealed to the Ontario Municipal Board. Phase One of the McQuesten Urban Farm can still be developed under existing zoning.

In April 2014, the McQuesten Planning Team entered into an agreement with Hamilton Victory Gardens Inc. to partner on a joint Victory/Community Garden initiative. The Hamilton Victory Gardens will not only provide community garden plots to residents to engage diverse participation in agriculture in the neighbourhood but also produce vegetables in the Victory Garden plots for donation to local food banks. By the end of 2014 over 120 raised garden beds were constructed by Victory Gardens volunteers, including many McQuesten residents, and a total of 6,400 pounds of vegetables were harvested on the site. This produce was distributed to local food banks, including St. Matthew's House which operates the food bank at the St. Helen's @ McQuesten Centre. A "Volunteers for Veggies" program was also launched which allows community members to volunteer in the Victory Gardens in exchange for produce harvested. In 2015, a significant increase in production from the Victory Gardens is anticipated now that all of the beds have been constructed and will be in production for an entire growing season. The urban farm committee is also developing new programs intended to get more fresh vegetables directly to local residents outside of the existing food bank system.

Also, a McQuesten farm newsletter has been launched which is being distributed to approximately 300 homes around the farm site. The purpose of the newsletter is to keep the neighbourhood up to date on activities happening on the site and to promote greater engagement and ownership of the project by the neighbourhood.

Throughout 2014, staff engaged a consultant to undertake a Phase One Environmental Site Assessment to assess the potential for any soil contamination to be present on the site. The Assessment recommended that further in-depth study was required and a Phase Two Environmental Site Assessment, including soil core sampling throughout the entire site, be undertaken. The Phase Two Environmental Site Assessment was completed in December 2014 and the results showed only low concentrations of contamination in a few small sections of the farm site. The design of the farm site has incorporated the risk mitigation recommendations provided by the consultant to ensure that no food grown on the farm will make any contact with these soils.

The Neighbourhood Action Strategy office has spent \$25,500 to complete the Phase One and Two Environmental Site Assessments and the conceptual design work for the farm site, which has been funded from the Neighbourhood Action Strategy (Project # 2051255204). In addition, the temporary project manager approved under report CES14037, funded from the Neighbourhood Action Strategy (Project # 2051255204) at a cost of \$131,850, has been in place since November 2014 with the goal of working with the McQuesten Community Planning Team and other project partners to complete farm construction and the development of an operating model by spring 2016.

The McQuesten Urban Farm committee has been successful in acquiring grants of over \$70,000 from the Hamilton Community Foundation and the Funders' Network Partners for Places Fund to support the development of the urban farm, specifically aimed at increasing community engagement at the site. This funding has allowed for a

community animator to be hired for one year to coordinate activities on the farm and oversee the operations of the Victory Gardens at the site. These grants will also fund the creation of a children's gardening camp that will run in the summer of 2015.

This camp is seen as a significant engagement tool to draw youth and their families to the site and offer education around healthy food and gardening to the neighbourhood. In addition, a TD Friends of the Environment grant of \$4,500 was received to purchase plants and gardening supplies, as well area businesses, such as Lowe's, have donated products to support the farm. Several other grants and corporate donations are currently being pursued. With a conceptual design complete for the McQuesten Urban Farm, the project partners are better able to illustrate more definitive plans for the farm to potential donors.

### **POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND LEGISLATED REQUIREMENTS**

There are no policy implications or legislated requirements related to the recommendation.

### **RELEVANT CONSULTATION**

#### Internal Stakeholders

Staff from both the Recreation Division of the Community and Emergency Services Department and Landscape Architectural Services Section of the Corporate Assets and Strategic Planning Division of the Public Works Department have been consulted on the conceptual farm design to ensure that the operations will be compatible with the implementation of the Ward 4 Urban Fitness Trail which is adjacent to portions of the farm and have no issues with Report CES15023.

CityHousing Hamilton (CHH) staff have been consulted on the report and are in support of the recommendations. The urban farm will provide an important community amenity for CHH residents living at the adjacent Oriole Crescent property. CityHousing Hamilton is allowing the urban farm to incorporate some existing CHH assets into the design.

Planning & Economic Development staff from Building Services and Growth Management Divisions were consulted and provided input on the pond, fencing and structures proposed for the site and have no issues with Report CES15023.

Public Health Services staff from the Healthy Living and Health Protection Divisions have provided input on managing the food safety and standing water impacts, as well as the beneficial nutrition and physical activity components of the farm design, and have no issues with Report CES15023.

Public Works staff from the Parks and Cemeteries Section have reviewed the report and have no issues with Report CES15023.

Public Works staff from Hamilton Water in the Infrastructure & Source Water Planning and Sustainable Initiatives Sections have reviewed the proposed water harvesting and irrigation system and have no issues with Report CES15023.

Corporate Services staff from the Legal Services Division and Financial Services staff from the Risk Management and Procurement Sections have reviewed the report and have no issues with Report CES15023.

### External Stakeholders

The McQuesten Community Planning Team has endorsed the plans for the urban farm and several of its members have been actively involved in the planning and design process.

Staff presented the plans for the McQuesten Urban Farm to the Community Food Security Stakeholders Committee and they are in support of the project going forward.

Staff from the Social Planning and Research Council of Hamilton have been consulted on the report and are in favour of the recommendations.

Staff from the Hamilton-Wentworth Catholic District School Board have been consulted on the plans for the site and have participated in the farm design process. They are in support of the recommendations.

### **ANALYSIS AND RATIONAL FOR RECOMMENDATION**

The McQuesten Urban Farm design process was initiated in February 2015 with the goal of completing the conceptual design in April 2015. Bienenstock Design and Consulting was hired to run a facilitated community design process with a stakeholder group consisting of McQuesten residents, City staff (Neighbourhood Action Strategy, Public Health Services, CityHousing Hamilton), service providers (Social Planning & Research Council, Hamilton Victory Gardens) and other project partners (Hamilton-Wentworth Catholic District School Board). Bienenstock Design and Consulting is a local Hamilton company with extensive experience working with diverse communities in the design and construction of a wide range of parks and greenspaces. Over the course of three meetings and one public forum (held in conjunction with the McQuesten Community Planning Team monthly meeting), a design was created. This design incorporates many of the neighbourhood's wishes for the farm site as both a space to produce a significant amount of fresh food and to create an attractive outdoor community space and teaching environment. Several images of the completed farm design are attached as Appendix X to Report CES15023.

The McQuesten Urban Farm is approximately three acres in size and the design incorporates many of the amenities requested by the community to fully realize the potential for the site. In order to maintain momentum for the project in the neighbourhood and to realize the goal of commencing full farm activity on the site for

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spring 2016, the staff recommendation for the allocation of funds will be broken into separate phases. Phase One will focus on the construction of the core features of the site needed to allow for food production and some amenities required to use the site for educational and community purposes. The construction activities for Phase One will include the following:

- (a) Site Preparation
  - Site grading and creation of a vehicle access to the site.
  
- (b) Planting
  - Planting of a mix of coniferous and deciduous trees to provide shade and windbreak on the site, particularly around the community gathering locations. Where possible, fruit trees will be used to enhance the food production and education opportunities on the farm.
  - Native perennials and fruit and nut bearing shrubs will also be planted throughout the site to provide opportunities for foraging and habitat for pollinator species.
  - Staff will work with the Forestry Section of Public Works to determine opportunities for the provision of suitable species to offset the need to purchase of some of the required trees.
  
- (c) Surfacing
  - Installation of accessible pathways, sod and mulched surfaces in the community spaces and surfacing of a community picnic space.
  
- (d) Structures
  - Construction of a small lean-to structure to allow for secure storage of equipment.
  - Construction of a teaching garden in the middle of the site to allow for hosting school groups and community gatherings.
  - Installation of a shade canopy to cover the community picnic space at the south end of the site.
  
- (e) Entrance Features
  - An entrance feature at each of the four main access points to the farm site.
  
- (f) Water Services
  - Excavation of the area currently experiencing seasonal flooding into a 50,000 gallon pond to store all harvested water for irrigation use. This will include the necessary fencing to effectively secure the site.
  - A wind-powered pumping system and a precast concrete pump house to house the system mechanics.
  - A main water line throughout the site and a commercial irrigation system.

As the McQuesten Urban Farm is a resident-led initiative, the farm construction activities will also incorporate opportunities for resident involvement in site construction.

The use of community-build events is an effective tool to foster greater involvement and ownership of the farm by the McQuesten Neighbourhood. These community build activities may take the form of tree & shrub planting and construction of site features such as composters, benches and other site amenities. Opportunities for job skills training for youth will also be pursued throughout the farm build process.

The additional amenities requested by the community and illustrated in the design will be brought forward as Phase Two of construction to Emergency & Community Services Committee once funding has been secured. These include a production greenhouse, a teaching greenhouse and small food preparation space as well as further enhancements to the community space, including benches and outdoor play features. The project team will continue to solicit support in the form of grants, sponsorships, financial and in-kind donations to fund these amenities. Staff will also report back on the proposed governance model and the economic model proposed to fund the operation of the farm by Q4 2015.

The McQuesten Urban Farm is the result of the wishes and efforts of McQuesten residents. However the scale of the farm, which will allow for an estimated 20,000 pounds of food to be produced annually, will be able to provide benefit to a much larger area, including other nearby Neighbourhood Action Strategy neighbourhoods, such as Riverdale, Davis Creek and Crown Point and host community and school groups from across the city. It will also serve as Hamilton's first foray into the emerging field of urban agriculture. There is significant interest in this project throughout the city and it will be an asset that will draw people to visit the McQuesten neighbourhood.

The urban farm is also the first step towards the McQuesten neighbourhood's larger goal of establishing the long-term sustainability of the St. Helen's Centre @ McQuesten by repurposing it as a community food centre. Community food centres are another emerging trend in Canada and are seen as a more effective means of improving community access to emergency food provision as well as food and nutrition education for the broader community. Several food related programs already exist at St. Helen's and if the community food centre goal is achieved, in conjunction with the creation of an adjacent urban farm, Hamilton would possess one of the most innovative and unique community food assets/facilities in the country.

## **ALTERNATIVES FOR CONSIDERATION**

There is the option of installing a municipal water supply on the site which would feed the irrigation system as an alternative to the installation of a pond and wind turbine powered pump system.



Advantages

- 1) The use of the municipal water supply would provide greater reliability for the farms irrigation needs as supply would not be dependent on the amount of snow melt and rainfall collected on the site.

Disadvantages

- 1) The use of the municipal water supply would add an annual water charge of approximately \$5000 per year based on 2015 water and sewer rates. This would be a considerable operating cost to the farm which would not exist if rainwater harvesting was in place.
- 2) The current site has existing drainage problems that cause a large area of standing water to be present on the site throughout most of the non-winter months. If this water was not collected and reused to irrigate the farm beds, then an alternate solution to the drainage problem would need to be implemented that would collect the excess water and move it away from the site and the neighbouring properties. The estimated cost for this work is \$30,000.
- 3) The use of an innovative system that harvests the existing water on the site and distributes it through a wind-powered system provides an excellent example of sustainable environmental design that will help showcase the McQuesten Urban Farm and provide additional learning opportunities. The use of a conventional water system would not demonstrate any innovation.

When these considerations are factored into the cost calculations it shows the overall capital costs being equal between the two systems, but the municipal supply carries an additional \$5,000 yearly water cost and no additional environmental or educational benefit.

**Financial:** The installation of a farm irrigation system connected to the municipal water supply is projected to cost \$100,000. In addition, \$30,000 will be required to address the current site drainage issues if the standing water on the site is not channelled to a pond and used for crop irrigation. Therefore the total cost of this alternative is \$130,000 which is equal to the cost of the proposed system and would not change the total amount shown in Recommendation (b) of this report.

**Staffing:** There are no staffing implications associated with this alternative.

**Legal:** There are no legal implications associated with this alternative.

## **ALIGNMENT TO THE 2012 – 2015 STRATEGIC PLAN**

### **Strategic Priority #1**

A Prosperous & Healthy Community

*WE enhance our image, economy and well-being by demonstrating that Hamilton is a great place to live, work, play and learn.*

**Strategic Objective**

- 1.5 Support the development and implementation of neighbourhood and City wide strategies that will improve the health and well-being of residents.
- 1.6 Enhance Overall Sustainability (financial, economic, social and environmental).

**APPENDICES AND SCHEDULES ATTACHED**

Appendix A to Report CES15023: Aerial Map of McQuesten Urban Farm Site

Appendix B to Report CES15023: Conceptual Design of the McQuesten Urban Farm