



PODS TO PLATES WORKSHOP SERIES

THE GARDENS POD PROJECT 2016



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GENERAL OVERVIEW OF PROJECT/PROGRAM

The GARDENS Pod Project is an extension of the ‘conceptual’ work completed by the Humber School of Applied Technology and their Summer Intensive Studio Program. An interdisciplinary team of students researched and designed an urban farm and community hub model that would address concerns about environmental and food security issues in South Etobicoke. They designed functional creative spaces that emphasized social, economic and environmental considerations. Their design included a large scale garden pod concept – the scheme is grounded by the idea of an interconnected system of elevated community gardens joined together by bridges, elevated pathways, and raised social spaces. The Pods were conceived as a module that could either be integrated into the Community Hub/Urban Farm multiple times, or dispersed within the local community.

The GARDENS Advisory Council (GAC) is currently made up of 15 active volunteer members from the South Etobicoke community. The GAC is now implementing the next phase of our vision – The GARDENS Pod Project. For 2016, the Pod Project is similar to the concept of a community garden except the pods tend to be smaller, mobile, raised beds that don’t need a lot of space and are spread throughout the community.



This initiative promotes the growth and consumption of local food, thereby reducing emissions. Garden pods will increase community residents’ contact with greenery, encourage physical activity amongst the gardeners and volunteers, and boost populations of pollinators in the neighbourhood. By donating a portion of the harvest to the community, the pods will also impact food security for low income earners, lone parent families, persons living on fixed incomes, and people with disabilities living in the South Etobicoke area.

Pods are defined as ‘sites’ that serve the end goal of supplying food to persons that are food insecure. The committee has developed three classifications of pods, an organization pod (hosted and managed by a business or an organization), a residential pod (resident interested sharing produce) and a community pod.

We envision our Community Pod as an expansive pod model that includes mobile raised planter harvesters, a market kiosk, potential programming and a social gathering space. This year, the project will only include organization and residential pods.



Our goal this year is to continue to learn about the effectiveness of this model. As such, we are considering The GARDENS Pod Project 2016 a “pilot project” and will also establish an evaluation component which will provide useful feedback for future project development and enhancement.

Please refer to our website - <http://www.gardenslakeshore.ca/>

DETAILED PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Community gardens around the world have been credited with an array of beneficial outcomes for participants. These include local political activism; environmental education where participants learn about sustainable urban agriculture, biodiversity and improved waste management; and opportunities for training, employment and local economic development in the form of markets and food co- operatives (Keeney, 2000).

Nevertheless, the most significant and widely reported benefits are associated with individual and community health and well-being. Gardens require physical exertion, provide relief from stress and engender creativity, participation with nature and a sense of stewardship for the land (Francis and Hester, 1990).



Individuals reap direct benefits from the physical activity involved in gardening and having access to fresh, affordable produce on a daily basis. These gardens foster neighborhood ties and promote physical, social, and mental well-being.

Currently, there are no 'city-funded' gardens in Ward 6, a low-income neighbourhood that the City of Toronto has identified as an Urban Priority area. Presently there is a garden on the Daily Bread Food Bank property, but it has restricted access due to Daily Bread's hours of operation, a long waiting list, and limited water access. At this time, the GARDENS Advisory Council is unable to obtain land to build a permanent community at this time so we have created an innovative approach to move our mandate forward.

Air quality in Ward 6, a previously industrial area, and close proximity to the major highways results in some of the worst air pollution in the city. The GARDENS Community Pod project is an innovative idea to address food security and environmental concerns.

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To date, we have 10 Pod Site Providers: Toronto Public Library – Long Branch, St. Leo's Catholic School, Thomas Berry Early Learning and Child Care Centre, Marguerite Butt Early Learning and Child Care Centre, Lush Fresh Handmade Cosmetics, Lakeshore Lodge Long Term Care, Humber College (Fashion Institute), LAMP Community Health Centre, Barsa Kelly Cari-Can Cooperative Homes Inc. and Haven on the Queensway. We have also had interest from residential gardeners who wish to donate a part of their land for a pod in return for a portion of the harvest and the remainder of the produce to be donated.

This project will also provide summer employment opportunities for youth and potentially a Humber College student through the position of the GARDENS Operations Coordinator. This is a great way for a current students to implement theoretical knowledge of planning, operations and logistics into real life experiences in a safe and controlled environment.

PODS TO PLATES WORKSHOP SERIES

We are proposing that TD Canada be a presenting partner for the Pods to Plates Workshop Series in collaboration with the GARDENS Advisory Council. The Pods to Plates Workshop Series will feature educational and interactive sessions for the members and volunteers of organizational pod sites, residential pod sites and community members interested in learning about what happens after the produce and harvest occurs at each site. This free educational element is a unique characteristic of the GARDENS Pod Project 2016 to help with the education of what can be produced from the harvest and also a method to find inexpensive healthy meals for the community to become food secure and self-sufficient using our South Etobicoke community gardens.

For 2016, we are targeting a minimum of three workshops using the pending TD Canada Corporate funding to help with the costs such as presenter fees, workshop programming and materials, light refreshments, etc. These workshops will take place from July 2016 to October 2016 and will be presented in locations within South Etobicoke for easy community access.

The suggested learning areas include (subject to change):

1. Workshop 1: Creating Healthy Communities

The GARDENS, with the help of the Ontario Healthy Communities Coalition and community partners, will conduct this session as the initial kick off to the workshop series. Health is dependent on individual characteristics, social and economic factors and physical environment. This workshop will provide an overview of the international Healthy Communities/Cities Movement, the Healthy Communities Framework for Action, and examples of Healthy Communities initiatives. We hope that project participants and community members will share their vision of a “healthy community” and engage in small group conversations about community issues and the potential for action, from small, practical steps to longer-range strategic processes.

2. Workshop 2: Creating Inexpensive Meals

This community workshop will provide an opportunity for participants/attendees to learn to make healthy, inexpensive meals using some of the harvested produce from the project, ultimately empowering community members to make better and healthier choices, and see the benefits of growing your own produce. This will be an interactive workshop allowing participants to actively engage in creating their own healthy meal on-site with a seasoned chef. As an additional highlight, a recipe handout will be provided with quick, healthy recipes that participants can make with the current growing pod produce.

3. Workshop 3: The Art of the Power Soup

This workshop will teach the art of creating power soups that are tasty, nutrient-dense using the simple ingredients grown in the various pod sites. The presenters will provide pointers on how to make this dish and valuable nutrition tips for attendees.

This workshop series through the GARDENS Pod Project 2016 aims to engage and empower community members who are food insecure to work together and to influence community conditions that affect their health and quality of life. Food plays a powerful role in promoting health, as well as building strong and diverse communities, protecting the environment and strengthening the economy. This series will also be supplemented with other educational workshops being offered from LAMP CHC such as food canning and preservation workshops.

LOOKING AHEAD

We are hopeful that the Organization Pod participants will return next year and continue to produce food for South Etobicoke (building supplies and soil will not be required and seeds will be harvested to plant for the following year). We will also be testing out a self-watering system.



A better educated community about gardening helps citizens grow their own food or for others. Our model is not the traditional large plot concept – it is taking small pieces of land and maximizing their use to produce food. In the event that an Organization Pod participant does not return to the project in 2017, the versatility of the planter’s design will allow us to dismantle and relocate them to another site. Community gardens play a vital role in building sustainable local food systems, providing access to fresh, healthy and nutritious food, and creating resilient community spaces.

This project is a phased approach allowing the GAC and community to build capacity. We believe our model has great potential and our outputs will inspire others to look at our innovative methods as a best practice, once the pilot is successful. We are hoping that our research approach will also lead to funding in the future.

Over this year, GAC is also working on a business plan that will help leverage our relationship with potential sponsoring companies in South Etobicoke that are interested in sustainable projects.

Our end goal is to find land where we can develop a long-term community garden hub – a Community Pod model which would include an opportunity for produce to be sold at affordable prices or ‘pay what you can’. The revenue earned would be used to support the GARDENS projects.