

Community & School Gardening Capacity Building Meeting - NOTES

Monday, November 30, 2009

Remarks by Garity Chapman, Urban Garden Coordinator, Ecology Action Centre

- Urban Garden Project web site: <http://www.ecologyaction.ca/content/urban-garden-project>
- Co-hosted a Community Garden Roundtable and tour of the Bloomfield Community Garden at the EAC in August to identify initiatives and needs
- Notes and pictures of the roundtable are posted here: http://nsen.ca/i_communitygardens.php
- Co-hosted a Community Garden Summit: Governments, Schools, and Communities Working Together meeting and tour of the Gorsebrook Community Garden in September
- Building on those initiatives

Remarks by Tamara Lorincz, Executive Director of the Nova Scotia Environmental Network

- Nova Scotia Environmental Network (NSEN) has a Sustainability Education in Nova Scotia for Everyone Working Group (SENSE) – trying to advance sustainability education in schools and communities. We believe that community & school gardens can promote sustainability and can develop an environmental and stewardship ethic.
- We have started a Community & School Garden Caucus to try to bring together community garden leaders in the province - we have a vision to have a major provincial symposium on community & school gardens in 2011 (we would need a small advisory committee to organize such a symposium and we already have seed money to do it)
- We have started to compile resources on our web site: http://nsen.ca/i_communitygardens.php
- We prepared a document “The Benefits of Community Gardens” – it is posted on our web site – environmental, social, health, recreation, and economic benefits to these communal gardens
- We are advocating for a community garden at the Mainland North
- HRM is hosting the Communities in Bloom 2010 Annual Conference – opportunities to green HRM
- Other jurisdictions across Canada much further ahead on community & school gardens in NS
- We were approached by the Nova Scotia Agricultural College to have a meeting about the training opportunities for community gardens & urban agriculture – hence our meeting today

Introductions around the room (30 participants)

Nova Scotia Agricultural College (NSAC)

- What can NSAC bring i.e. technical expertise?
- Build awareness of and support for local food and farmers
- Continuing educational programs, opportunities for outreach into urban agriculture
- Possibility for more non-credit courses & programs at NSAC – use resources at the college to help meet a learning need, building horticultural skills, i.e. Nova Institute, women’s prison, women develop horticultural skills
- Department of Agriculture partners – small farm program, 5-day summer intake program
- Atlantic master gardener (AMG) program, distance and on-campus program 35 graduates so far
- AMG Program – new program, first graduates in 2007, must volunteer to maintain certification
- Potential – to encourage more back to the land, urban agriculture
- Organic horticulture program at NSAC - food for body & food for soul

Discussion

- Need help with **soil testing** – Jean Snow of Lake City Farms (Small Plot Intensive Farming: SPIN mentioned this: <http://www.lakecityfarm.com/Home.html>) She is offering apprenticeship programs

- Clear understanding regarding heavy metals & plant uptake
- Soil food web – very expensive, prohibitive costs for school gardens & soil testing
- Contaminating soil a concern
- Survey of HRM of potential urban growth areas to get an idea of where problems areas are
- Don't have a database or soil inventory
- NSAC does do plant nutrient testing, but does not do heavy metal testing
- Microbial biomass testing
- Apprentice training through ACORN
- Stewards Of Irreplaceable Land (SOIL)
- Meet with groups, talk with community gardens, farmers and gardeners, generalists?

Department of Agriculture (Judy Grant & Michael Kittelsen)

- Education increase awareness, supportive of school gardens, supports edible school yard.
- Michael is the Department of Agriculture Resource Coordinator (Central Province) mentioned that there is soil testing, there is a provincial lab with basic soil testing for nutrients, pH, etc...
- For nutrient testing \$20, contaminant testing is more expensive and more of a challenge
- Soil testing needed, currently beyond provincial lab

Halifax Regional Municipality (Councillor Jennifer Watts & Richard McClellan)

- HRM going through process of clarification, "sorting itself out", developing policies to support community gardens, growing interest in this that HRM recognizes
- Distinct funds to support community gardens, attempt to coordinate HRM assets for community gardens, links to recreation
- Sustainability Environmental Management Office (SEMO) supportive, more HRM departments integrated on this issue
- Urban agriculture – there will be conflicts and challenges regarding integrated land use
- American institute & Canadian planners have flagged community gardens as an important land use challenge, urban agriculture will have an impact on bylaws and zoning
- Jennifer working with HRM planning to help move HRM forward to deal with urban agriculture i.e. chickens in the city
- Discussion about the benefits and value of land, access to land & financial support.

Discussion

- Mary –Jo, Goodness Grows Community Garden in Dartmouth. She discussed how Goodness Grows got started this year behind community centre. She attended the North American Community Garden Annual Conference in Ohio (<http://www.communitygarden.org/learn/training/annual-conference/index.php>) and mentioned that in the US there are exchange programs for master gardening programs where gardeners have to help community gardens – skill sharing. She would like to see master gardeners in NS train/help community gardens here and they must help communities with their gardens as part of their credit/program.
- EXAMPLE: Common Grounds Garden Program in the US, cooperative learning (a lot of potential there – check it out: http://celosangeles.ucdavis.edu/Common_Ground_Garden_Program/)
- Train the trainer program, Department of Agriculture partnering with NSAC and with community gardening leaders
- Important to help teachers & administrators and elementary and high school kids with their school gardens
- Rosemarie Bradley, Helping Nature Heal (HNH) – community garden – challenge with finding, getting it into the schools/teachers, BCAP – curriculum guide (Check out HNH web site: <http://www.helpingnatureheal.com/>)

School Board

- Critical to link school gardens with curriculum and outcomes – there are many links
- St. Catherine's and Dr. Arthur Hines have school gardens
- HNH developed curriculum links for school gardens and developed backpacks of information
- HNH backpacks not being used unfortunately
- A lot of stress and demands on teachers. The principals and the schools – need a champion in the school for a school garden – need a teacher on a board and need support of community a lot of movement in administration
- Schools do not have a lot of land for this – need access to land, many schools next to HRM fields
- Schools also do not have financial resources for school gardens – Evergreen Foundation provides some grants for school gardens and landscaping: <http://www.evergreen.ca/en/>
- But more money, skills and support needed

Discussion

- Get start up funds but need long-term core funding – can't sustain it too much volunteering in the community & school gardening field
- Paid coordinator for that position especially healthy living coordinator – example is the Healthy Living Coordinator at the Dr. Arthur Hines Elementary school
- Who can pay for that position, how do we make that happen?
- What could be the role of the Department of Agriculture and HRM/UNSM to fund a Community & School Garden Coordinator?
- St. Catherine's School the champion was Tarah Newton, she created a large veggie perennial garden at the school, she become that champion, Tarah is going to leave in two years, it is difficult for someone to take that over
- Northend Community Garden example – entrepreneurial value, added value, kids made and sold salsa from their garden!

Next Steps / Closing

- What are the concrete actions to take out of this?
- Create an inventory re: community & school gardens, gap analysis - who can do this? Role for government?
- Changing host of the meeting? Maybe NSAC or Department of Agriculture could host a future meeting
- Role for the Rural agricultural resource coordinators
- Garity – need institutional support, coordinator needed at HRM, greater role for government to support community-based initiatives
- Next steps – child care conference that looks at natural play space, connecting child care and the environment through small day care garden: [Call for workshop proposals for Nurturing Nature conference featuring Rusty Keeler, conference web site here: <http://www.cccns.org/conf10.htm> For a preview of his book, Natural Playspaces go to: http://www.ccie.com/catalog/product_info.php?products_id=4000509]
- Good neighbours, Great neighbourhoods web site will eventually have community garden information: <http://myhrm.ca/> (*There will need to be a search function, right now difficult to find anything)
- Infrastructure needs – Sheds, natural buildings
- Pool resources to do more for soil contamination, inventory of sites in HRM
- NSAC will host 2-day w/shop for Master Gardeners for schools and kids in July