

Request for Expressions of Interest (REOI) *McQuesten Urban Farm*

Issued by:
McQuesten Community Planning Team

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"not about us, without us"

In partnership with the City of Hamilton



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A. INTRODUCTION

Once you have reviewed this document, we request that you register your interest in the process by requesting an application via email to Pat Reid at

mcquestenurbanfarm@gmail.com

The McQuesten Neighbourhood has been identified through the Neighbourhood Action Strategy (a partnership initiative of the City of Hamilton, the Hamilton Community Foundation and the Best Start Network) as a neighbourhood with significant barriers, including (but not limited to), poor health and well-being outcomes, statistically and by the media. A statistical profile of priority neighbourhoods, including the McQuesten neighbourhood was developed by the Social Planning and Research Council of Hamilton and can be found at www.sprc.hamilton.on.ca/reports.pdf.

The vision of the McQuesten Community Planning Team states “We, the residents of McQuesten, are proud of and engaged in our community. We believe in the assets and strengths of the people who live, work and play in our neighbourhood. Through building strong relationships, we work together to ensure our neighbourhood remains a safe and healthy place where everybody has equal access to supports, opportunities, employment, food and the capacity to build a healthy life”

As a result of the resident-led neighbourhood action planning process facilitated by the Neighbourhood Action Strategy, the issue of food insecurity and healthy eating was identified in several of the Neighbourhood Action Plans, including the McQuesten Neighbourhood Action Plan.

To address the concern of food insecurity, the McQuesten Plan presents a comprehensive response, of which urban agriculture is identified as one viable strategy. Urban agriculture can be defined as growing fruits, herbs, and vegetables in cities, a process that may be accompanied by other complementary activities such as production, processing and distributing food, collecting and reusing food waste and rainwater, and educating, organizing, and employing local residents.

This urban farm will be part of a food continuum to promote food security and facilitate residents having access to safe, healthy and nutritious food, it promotes inclusiveness by helping residents build relationships with each other; it connects individuals and families to their food; and it can help people build skills for jobs. The urban farm will ultimately satisfy some of the desired actions of the McQuesten Community Planning Team and be part of a broader food centre which may include a food bank, food

pantry, community garden, urban agriculture, community kitchen, grocery store vouchers program, local sustainable food choices, a farmers market and access to a local grocery store.

The purpose of this Request for Expressions of Interest (REOI) is to solicit interest and information in order to prepare an RFP with the appropriate terms, conditions, evaluation criteria and other information to encourage the submission of high quality proposals to provide the McQuesten Planning Team with the optimum model of an urban farm.

This REOI is the preliminary stage in a multi-stage competitive process. This is not a solicitation of bids or proposals; rather it is a non-binding invitation to gather information from qualified individuals or agencies and their expertise, experience and success in social enterprise and agricultural projects

For the purposes of the Urban Farm project, social enterprise is defined as a “revenue-generating businesses with a twist. Whether operated by a non-profit organization or by a for-profit company, a social enterprise has two goals: to achieve social, cultural, community economic or environmental outcomes; and, to earn revenue. On the surface, many social enterprises look, feel, and even operate like traditional businesses. But looking more deeply, one discovers the defining characteristics of the social enterprise: mission is at the centre of business, with income generation playing an important supporting role”¹.

The McQuesten Community Planning Team reserves the right to identify and pre-qualify a short-list of individuals or agencies from responses to this REOI who may be invited to participate in a future Request for Proposals.

The McQuesten Community Planning Team reserves the right to determine, at its discretion, the methodology and scope of related future Request For Proposals (RFP). Further, the McQuesten Community Planning Team reserves the right to limit any RFP invitation to those firms who are “short-listed” as a result of this REOI. No award or contract negotiation will be undertaken based solely on the REOI process. This is not a solicitation for bids or proposals.

¹ Centre for Social Enterprise
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The information gathered may be useful for finalizing the details of the project. Interested respondents will have:

- ✓ a 'social conscience'
- ✓ a knowledge of food security principles and social justice
- ✓ a business background
- ✓ expertise in organic farming/agriculture

and will approach this project through a social enterprise lens. This project, though in its initial stages, has a wealth of resources and a vision that offers an opportunity for stakeholders who may have solutions which provide mutual benefits to all involved. The respondents may include, but are not limited to, individuals, not-for-profit organization, farmers, and businesses. The REOI process is outlined in the document below.

B. ABOUT THE PROJECT

The McQuesten Urban Farm project is the result of a request from the McQuesten Community Planning team to farm a vacant parcel of land, located within the McQuesten boundaries to address food insecurity, job skills training, education and social connectness in their neighbourhood.

The McQuesten Urban Farm will be part of a larger initiative around food security in the McQuesten Neighbourhood that will be developing over the next few years. This pilot initiative is endorsed by the City of Hamilton, and is supported in principle by multiple community agencies and organizations that have assisted in the development of this project to date, (including Hamilton Victory Gardens, Hamilton Wentworth Catholic District School Board, Hamilton Wentworth District School Board, Social Planning and Research Council, McMaster University, and University of Guelph) and the McQuesten Community Planning Team.

In response to this request, the City of Hamilton has agreed to provide the land (~1 ½ acres), which lies to the east of the former St. Helen's School (785 Britannia Ave). The ultimate goal of this project is to create an urban farm that will help to address food insecurity in the McQuesten neighbourhood, while keeping in mind the vision of a social enterprise and a site for the development of farming education and training as well as community development.

The urban farm will be a social enterprise (an organization or group of people that applies commercial strategies to maximize improvements in human and environmental well-being, rather than maximizing profits for external shareholders). Social enterprises can be structured as a for-profit or non-profit, and may take the form of a co-operative or mutual organization, a social business, or a charitable organization. The aim of the Urban Farm/social enterprise is to provide the McQuesten community with:

- Employment opportunities and sweat equity rewards
- Fresh fruits and vegetables and improved nutritional health
- Reduced poverty and food insecurity and enhanced urban environmental management
- Local economic development, and social inclusion , as well as the greening of the city and the productive re-use of urban wastes (e.g. waste water)
- Social integration
- Recreational opportunities for citizens.

Social enterprise within urban farming is an emerging concept. Information and reference which may be helpful to submitting this proposal can be found in similar initiatives such as Community Food Centres, for example, The Stop in Toronto (www.thestop.org). As well, Stephen Ritz, a teacher in New York's South Bronx, demonstrates the education and employment concept within an urban farm in a February 2012 Ted Talk (www.ted.com/talks/stephen_ritz_a_teacher_growing_green_in_the_south_bronx).

Principles in Developing Your Model

The model of how the farm will be run has yet to be determined and the information acquired through this EOI process will be helpful in shaping this project. Several ideas have been discussed and although they are not necessarily part of the final model that is chosen for this project, they may inspire ideas for potential respondents. They include but are not limited to the following:

- Neighbours will be given the opportunity to work on the farm. In return for their work (sweat equity) they will receive a portion of the harvest. Crops grown for this market will be based on consumer need, culture, and familiarity.
- Various ownership models including a co-op model or an independent operator.
- The secondary target market will be those living in other areas of McQuesten and the Greater Hamilton Area through the development of an on-site “market”. This market will sell the food grown in the McQuesten Urban Farm in order to raise funds for the stability of the project. Special crops such as kale, ginseng, and rhubarb can be grown for this market in response to demand for ‘trendy foods’.

- A Community Shared Agriculture (CSA) whereby community members buy a share of what is grown on the farm may be set up.

This project has several goals to meet the needs of the McQuesten residents. First of all, it should improve nutritional status. McQuesten is a community that does not have a full service grocery store within walking distance of many. As a result, people here often must rely on convenience stores to buy food. Access to fresh produce is limited in these stores and what is available may not be of the best quality or affordable.

The McQuesten Urban farm will help to address the issues of lower education levels and skill development of residents developing its role as an educational farm. Urban farming is on the rise worldwide. If people engage in the farm work, they have the opportunity to develop transferrable skills which may result in increased employment potential and future income. There is an ever increasing awareness that food produced locally can decrease the environmental footprint from the transportation of food from farm to consumer. Food produced on this farm will be raised organically (i.e. with no herbicides or pesticides) thus furthering the positive environmental impact.

Through the development of the McQuesten Urban Farm, we hope to strengthen bonds among neighbours, the sense of belonging, and cohesion among supportive resident base.

The Urban Farm will not include livestock.

C. THE OPPORTUNITY

The individual/group that runs the Urban Farm:

- Has a business opportunity for revenue generation and profit
- Will be part of an innovative and progressive urban agriculture project that has never been done before within the City of Hamilton Urban Boundary. This project will set the bar for possible future urban agriculture projects in Hamilton.
- Will be a leader in the community of social responsibility through this unique social enterprise opportunity.
- Will be in close proximity to local markets and revenue generating opportunities.
- Will lease the land from the City of Hamilton at an appropriate pricing

This project is to be awarded in the fall of 2014 to allow for anticipated construction or implementation by 2015. This rare opportunity is open to respondents who may fall into a variety of categories included, but not limited to, individuals, not-for-profit groups, organizations, farmers, and businesses (criteria requirement listed below).

As an innovative venture, there may be grant funding opportunities for the successful proponent of the urban farm. It would be the responsibility of the proponent to seek out these funds

Hard infrastructure will be in place such as water service, vehicular access and soil testing.

The site is accessible to public transportation. It is in close proximity to two additional community gardens and an engaged community committed to establishing food security in their neighbourhood. There is ready access to Red Hill Expressway, and access to an employable workforce.

Location

The size and accessibility of this arable land at McQuesten is a rare find in an urban setting. The area proposed for the Urban Farm is an accessible, flat, and continuous plot of land total of approximately one acre in 2015 with the possibility for future expansion. An aerial map of the site (Figure 1) is below. The area in orange is the entire area of the McQuesten Urban Farm site. The area in red is the parcel of land available for farming in 2015.

Figure 1: Aerial Image of McQuesten Farm Site (below)



Education

Education is an important component of the urban farm. Proposals can capitalize on this land by promising things such as workshops on gardening techniques, nutritional information, and outdoor interactive classrooms with participants from local schools.

Because the level of education attainment is lower in the McQuesten Neighbourhood compared to many other areas in the City, residents in the community will benefit from these types of opportunities. The McQuesten Urban Farm would provide an entrepreneurial education process that would be hands-on. This education will help residents take full advantage of the food they grow or buy from the urban farm. These initiatives would grow stakeholder interests from organizations in the City that can provide resources to make the project appealing to investors. If people engage in the farm work, they have the opportunity to develop transferrable skills, which may result in increased employment potential and future income.

Economic Benefits

As with any successful social enterprise, the Urban Farm will be of benefit to both the successful proponent who will run the urban farm and the McQuesten residents who participate in the project. The urban farm will allow profit to be re-distributed into the local economy on a micro and macro level through real wealth in terms of food security, job creation, community development, and life skills training. By developing the land into an urban farm via a social enterprise, the doors open for a local farmer to work and generate revenue from a significant sized farm within the urban boundary.

Youth Development

With such a substantial youth population (31% of the population is below the age of 20 in McQuesten) these residents will have the characteristics that are important to the success of an urban farm including time to dedicate to the initiative (especially in the summer months), strength, and young and creative minds to bring new ideas.² The urban farm has the potential to spur young entrepreneurial spirit that is already present in the Hamilton community in many other industries, while again providing opportunity for job skills, training, self-worth and education.

D. SUBMISSION REQUIREMENTS

Respondent should have experience in business with significant knowledge of urban agriculture as well as a strong desire to improve the health and well-being of the McQuesten residents.

Respondent must have a solid understanding of:

- Social Enterprise
- Food security principles and social justice
- Business background
- Best practices around sustainable and organic farming

Respondent may be from a variety of groups: individual, profit or not for profit organizations. The REOI is meant to act as a starting basis for collaboration with the McQuesten Neighbourhood to fulfill current needs in food insecurity and provide solutions to maintain the program sustainably. A proposal does not need to fulfill all requirements outlined in the REOI, but all interested parties should clearly outline which requirements their resources will fulfill.

² McQuesten Neighbourhood Action Plan, 2012, Page 22.
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STEP 2 – INFORMATION SESSION FOR REOI RESPONDENTS

Once you have reviewed this document, we request that you register your interest in the process by requesting an application via email to mcquestenurbanfarm@gmail.com

The McQuesten Urban Farm Working Group will host an information session for REOI respondents to provide details about the opportunity and answer questions and concerns about the project.

Information session:

Wednesday June 11th 2014

6:00 p.m.– 7:30 p.m.

St. Helen's Centre in McQuesten

785 Britannia Ave. Hamilton, ON

RSVP To Pat Reid at mcquestenurbanfarm@gmail.com

If you are unable to attend the above session, please feel free to direct any questions to mcquestenurbanfarm@gmail.com

STEP 3 - COMPLETE AN INFORMATION FORM (below)

STEP 4 – PREPARE AND SUBMIT AN EXPRESSION OF INTEREST

Using the relevant information listed on the information form below

SUBMISSION DEADLINE

Please submit your EOI, (either in person or by email) to

Ms. Pat Reid by **Tuesday July 8, 2014 at 5 pm**

Email

mcquestenurbanfarm@gmail.com

Or

In person

c/o The McQuesten Planning Team

785 Britannia Ave

Hamilton, ON L8H 2B6

Please include 3 copies of the submission.

Next steps

EOIs will be evaluated by select members of the McQuesten Urban Farm Working Group, in partnership with City staff.

E. INFORMATION FORM

MCQUESTEN URBAN FARM REQUESTS FOR EXPRESSIONS OF INTEREST

Type in your information below, then resave the document for printing and submission.

YOUR INFORMATION			
FIRST NAME		LAST NAME	
TITLE			
ORGANIZATION			
STREET ADDRESS			
CITY		PROVINCE	
POSTAL CODE		TELEPHONE	
EMAIL		FAX	

Please include 3 copies of your Expression of Interest Proposal. Your proposal should contain the information below:

RELEVANT INFORMATION –YOUR PROPOSAL MUST INCLUDE:
1. A 1 -2 page description of what your urban farm model would look like
2. A description of why this project is of interest to you
3. A description of all relevant experience related to this project
4. A description of your community development experience
5. A description of your understanding of food security principles
6. A description of your understanding of a social enterprise
7. A proposed time line for development of your urban farm model
8. A financial model for your urban farm
9. Specific goals for the project and how will you know when they are achieved
10. Any additional information you feel relevant to the project

F. LIMITATIONS

Any Respondent making a submission in response to this Request for Expressions of Interest (REOI) does so fully accepting the following provisions:

This is a REOI only; it is not a procurement document. The information contained in this REOI is intended for information purposes only to assist interested parties in assessing whether or not to respond to such request. No representation or warranty express or implied, is made by McQuesten Planning Team or any of its members, as to the accuracy or completeness of such information. McQuesten Planning Team hereby expressly disclaim, any and all liability for any errors, omissions or inaccuracies in connection therewith. In its response to this REOI, the Respondent must disclose to the McQuesten Planning Team, any potential conflict of interest that might compromise this process. If such a conflict of interest does exist, McQuesten Planning Team may, at its discretion, refuse to consider the response in question.

The Respondent must also disclose whether it is aware if any McQuesten Planning Team member has a financial interest in the Respondent and the nature of that interest. If such an interest exists or arises at any point leading to the selection of the successful Respondent, McQuesten Planning Team may, at its discretion, refuse to consider the response, or proceed with the Respondent any further in this process unless and until the matter is resolved to the McQuesten Planning Team's sole satisfaction. All information provided by or obtained at any time from McQuesten Planning Team in any form in connection with this REOI that is not publicly available (i) must be treated in a highly confidential manner; (ii) is not to be used for any other purpose other than responding to this REOI; (iii) must not be disclosed to any other person without the prior written authorization of McQuesten Planning Team; and (iv) shall be returned to McQuesten Planning Team immediately upon the request of McQuesten Planning Team.

This exercise is not a request for tenders. This is a request for information only and no legal obligations will arise hereunder in any circumstances. McQuesten Planning Team reserves the right to amend the scope of this REOI, and to carry out discussions with one or more prospective Respondents at any time, or from time to time, for the purpose of attempting to finalize an acceptable agreement, at all times without recourse against McQuesten Planning Team and its members, should no such agreement be concluded.

McQuesten Planning Team may proceed as it determines in its sole discretion, including to discontinue or invalidate this REOI and including to re-issue or proceed with a further REOI and McQuesten Planning Team will not be responsible for any losses or costs incurred by any Respondent as a result thereof. McQuesten Planning Team has the right not to respond to any report or request made by a Respondent and not to distribute copies of any reports or requests received from a Respondent and responses thereto, to the other Respondents. Where McQuesten Planning Team, in its discretion, considers that such report or request necessitates a change to this REOI, McQuesten Planning Team will prepare and issue an appropriate addendum to this REOI. McQuesten Planning Team reserves the right to terminate this REOI at any time for any reason.