

Reallocation for Green Network Food Program - Sustainable Food Forest Pilot

ISSUE

During the 2022-2023 budget planning process, funding was approved for three Sustainable Food pilots: a traditional food system pilot, edible foraging map, and school organics program, while funding for a proposed food forest pilot was not approved. However, there is potential to leverage federal funding if a food forest pilot is pursued instead of the three pilots that are currently funded. For this reason, this report seeks approval for funding reallocation to proceed with the Food Forest Pilot.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Standing Policy Committee on Environment, Utilities and Corporate Services recommend to City Council that \$140,000 from P.10013-Sustainable Food be redirected to P.02390-Green Infrastructure Strategy and combined with \$87,000 currently in P.02390-Green Infrastructure Strategy to be used for the Sustainable Food Forest Pilot as outlined in this report.

BACKGROUND

At the 2020-2021 budget deliberations, \$150,000 was approved in 2020 for P.02390 *Green Infrastructure Strategy: Biodiversity Action Plan*, and \$150,000 planned for 2021, for P.02390 *Green Infrastructure Strategy: Urban Agriculture Plan*.

On February 10, 2020, the Standing Policy Community on Environment, Utilities, and Corporate Services received *The Green Infrastructure Strategy: Towards an Interconnected Green Network* report, which updated 2020-2021 tasks for P.02390 *Green Infrastructure Strategy* to include:

- Education materials about the green network;
- Collaboration opportunities with Meewasin;
- A program to support green infrastructure projects through community and commercial grants or incentives;
- Enhanced collaboration with the University of Saskatchewan and other stakeholders; and
- Prioritizing sites, assessing risk, and developing management plans or restoration work.

On August 10, 2021, the Standing Policy Community on Environment, Utilities, and Corporate Services received Sustainability Reserve Project Funding, which includes the recommendation, in part:

1. That the following capital projects be established, and funding allocated from the 2021 Sustainability Reserve as follows:

a. *Sustainable Food Pilot establish Capital Project – \$140,000*
(P.10013 Sustainable Food)

At the 2022-2023 budget deliberations, City Council approved a funding plan for the Green Infrastructure Program operations, beginning in 2023. Work carried out as part of this program is to include project management, partnership development, funding application preparation, education, monitoring, reporting and data management.

At its regular Business Meeting on June 27, 2022, City Council approved *Pathways for an Integrated Green Network*, an implementation plan for the Green Infrastructure Strategy. The document defines initiative 5.1.1 (2b) Sustainable Food Pilots and proposes their development from 2022-2025.

Pathways to a Sustainable Urban Forest implementation plan was approved in principle by City Council at its regular Business Meeting on Oct 31, 2022. This plan identifies under Action 2.1: *Reach city-wide canopy cover of 15-20% by 2060*, and the need to support partners to incorporate food and fruit production or traditional food systems into high priority urban areas.

Engagement

During [engagement on Green Pathways](#), sustainable food projects were strongly supported by the community (93%). Food forests and traditional food systems initiatives received the most support (86%), followed by development of an edible foraging map (81%). Participants stressed the importance of these initiatives in providing food and resources to low-income and structurally excluded residents, as well as providing renters with access to food security programs. Participants also identified the risks of starting too big to effectively manage the programs, over-harvesting and contaminated sites.

DISCUSSION/ANALYSIS

Food Forest Pilot

A food forest contributes to sustainable local food systems, which have been shown to improve public health outcomes and reduce the carbon footprint of the food we eat. Food forests are supported in *Pathways for an Integrated Green Network* (Green Pathways) under 5.1.1 Green network food program: *Sustainable food pilots - Work with community partners and City departments to implement urban agriculture on public land including traditional foods and medicines and food forests.*

The goals of the food forest pilot include:

- Establish edible landscapes that produce fruit/food that can be consumed safely;
- Grow food in areas that are publicly accessible, or that can be distributed to the community, focusing on communities in need;
- Enhance fruit/food cultivation skills and opportunities for open/public spaces within the City and this region;
- Enhance Saskatoon's green network and promote environmental sustainability;
- Contribute to the city-wide tree canopy cover target of 15-20% by year 2060;

- Achieve long-term success through community-supported maintenance and stewardship;
- Design the pilot to be planned and installed within one year, and planned with long-term operational resources; and
- Deliver findings and knowledge to inform food forest guidelines for the City, as well as a future Saskatoon Food Action Plan.

This work will include developing site feasibility criteria that inform an inventory of sites suitable for food forest establishment in areas such as parks, rights-of-way, or other publicly accessible green space. While food forest guidelines have not yet been developed for the City, as they will be proposed as a result of this pilot, the process for selecting and approving sites, public engagement, and establishing maintenance agreements with interested community groups will mirror similar administrative procedures for activities such as [Community Gardening](#), park upgrades, and [Boulevard Gardening](#). Once a site or sites are selected and stakeholders are engaged, site designs will be implemented that could include fruit trees and shrubs, as well as traditional or Indigenous plants where appropriate.

Funding Reallocation to Support the Food Forest Pilot - P.10013

To enable delivery of a food forest pilot, this report requests approval to reallocate funding from P.10013 to the P.02390 Green Infrastructure Strategy.

The approved budget for P.10013 includes work on three pilots: a traditional food system pilot, edible foraging map, and school organics program. The original scope of P.10013 did not include a food forest pilot; instead, it was included in a separate funding request in 2022-23, but funding was not identified at that time. As such, there is no City funding currently allocated to support a food forest pilot.

The work currently scoped for P.10013 will either be addressed through future work, subject to funding availability, or other opportunities to proceed will be explored. Some elements of the traditional food system pilot will be introduced into the work of the traditional land use and knowledge assessment project (currently underway). Opportunities to integrate traditional plants will also be explored in the food forest pilot.

Funding Reallocation to Support the Food Forest Pilot - P.02390

The February 2020 report defines work for P.02390-Green Infrastructure Strategy as including: education materials; Meewasin collaboration; a green network grant; collaboration with the University of Saskatchewan and other stakeholders; and management plan process development and restoration work. This work defined under P.02390 has progressed and it will continue through other capital and operating resources, such as the Green Network operational program scheduled to start in 2023. To enable delivery of a food forest pilot, this report requests approval to reallocate \$87,000 remaining in P.02390 towards work on the food forest pilot (also within P.02390).

Rationale for Reallocation

Recent opportunities to apply for federal funding have focused on built green infrastructure instead of planning or programs, and so by reallocating resources to the food forest pilot, the City will be better positioned to take advantage of federal funding opportunities. The City has applied for federal funding opportunities to support a sustainable food forest pilot, through the Natural Infrastructure Fund and the Canada Community Revitalization Fund. If external funding is approved, a post budget adjustment will be brought forward to Council to increase the project budget and scope.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

This report recommends that \$140,000 from P.10013 Sustainable Food be redirected to P.02390 Green Infrastructure Strategy for the Green Network Food Program: Sustainable Food Forest Pilot; and that \$87,000 from P.02390 be utilized for the Green Network Food Program: Sustainable Food Forest Pilot. The total project value is \$227,000.

Funding	\$
Reallocated from P.10013	\$140,000
Redefined in P.02390	\$87,000
TOTAL Food Forest Funding	\$227,000

\$227,000 is adequate to proceed with the Food Forest Pilot. Should external funding become available, the project would be scaled in alignment with the additional funding.

OTHER IMPLICATIONS

Communication and Engagement Activities

A communications and engagement approach will be developed for the Food Forest Pilot; activities are likely to include an engagement approach similar to that used for community garden establishment and park upgrades, education/training, an awareness campaign, and site signage. City Councillors will be informed of the short-listed sites once identified.

Operational Impacts and Service Levels

This funding does not support ongoing maintenance and operations of the food forest sites. Operational implications and service levels will be identified as a part of this pilot project and a funding proposal will be presented in a future report for City Council's consideration.

Environmental Sustainability

Food forests have the potential to reduce the carbon footprint; sequester carbon through the establishment of trees, shrubs, and perennial plants; and lead to ecosystem services benefits such as pollinator habitat, biodiversity, storm water management, and shade.

Privacy

There are no privacy implications resulting from this report.

NEXT STEPS

The first phase of the work assessing sites and engagement will get underway to then inform the approach to implementation and construction of the food forest pilot, which will result in the installation of permanent or semi-permanent features (e.g., fruit trees, shrubs, site enhancements) to public space. Any financial implications for the ongoing maintenance and operations of these permanent or semi-permanent features will be reported out at a later date.

Report Approval

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