

TUG Networking Meeting Minutes – Sept. 21, 2016

Meeting Moderator: James Kuhns

Curator talk of Carrot City – Joe Nasr

Slideshow

Photos from:

- Native Child & Family Services' rooftop healing garden and sweat lodge
- CAFS tour – The Stop, Scadding Court Community Centre, Greenest City
- Scarborough gardener Kamal Mustafa

Presentation 1: Jon Woodside, Sprout Community and Landscape Service Club

- Sprout brings together community groups and landscape architects
- It is an organization that provides landscape architects to volunteer and provide services to the community
- It focuses on public space, public good, helps self-sufficient/self-reliant groups (Sprout just there to help implement and then step away)
- They are not insured, don't do permit applications to the city, construction drawings, contract mgmt. → can make recommendations if necessary though
- Recent projects: CEED project with FoodShare and Malvern Family Resource Centre; Ashbridges Estate with Building Roots; Rexdale Linear Park
- Starting online presence and documentation, i.e. a blog with ambitions to become a research hub
- looking for volunteers to do research interviews and transcribe
- website: <http://www.sproutcommunity.com/>

Questions:

How are you funded? Sprout received a start-up grant and are currently applying for others, but all Sprout members are employed in other positions and volunteer their time for Sprout projects. They work in and around Toronto.

Rhonda thanked Jon and added that getting approvals for projects like CEED can be very complicated, if you haven't worked with landscape architects before it's hard to know what questions to ask. Support of organizations like Sprout to get started can be very helpful.

Presentation 2: Jonah Krochmanek, Living Earth Farm

- Started by experimenting in his basement, moved to a warehouse in an industrial area near York U
- It is a seven level indoor vertical certified organic farm
- Challenges include: electricity costs, rent, sales/marketing
- He does not sell direct, only sells wholesale
- Space 2000 sq. feet, but with tiering has 15,000 sq feet space in total

- Website: <http://www.livingearthfarm.ca/>

Questions:

- Higher tiers are accessed with a ladder. As it's just him that does the work, he gets around the insurance and safety concerns. If he expands further, he will look at getting a scissors lift like many larger operations because they're safer.
- He sells trays, and is slowly starting to get into cuttings.
- Solar panels are not feasible because he rents the space and it wouldn't be worth the cost.
- He sells to Fresh City Farms and Mama Earth, and the rest to restaurants.
- Growth of plants from seed to harvest: head of lettuce – 7 weeks, microgreens – 1-3 weeks – have found soil vs indoor vertical has been roughly 3x as fast. Use of blue-violet spectrum LED lights rather than full-spectrum speeds growing, reduces electricity use.
- So far pest infestations have not been serious, thus far limited to fungus gnats. Joel thinks he's been lucky and also he's been diligent in blocking outside contamination.
- Any surprising learnings as an entrepreneur? Stress? Frustrations? – Not much. You have to expect unexpected – but starting small is best thing he could've done as it's a learning curve, plus it keeps costs and risks down. If he had built current system all at once, would have cost \$150,000.
- Vacations difficult but hopes to have an employee next spring. Has been relying on mechanization to expand this far.
- Financially he's aware of subsidies, but he would rather not have to rely on these for his business. Organic certification is difficult and bureaucratic, but necessary. He must grow on soil. Organic fertilization is used with minute amounts of compost.

Greenhouse updates: Joe Nasr

Two Toronto businesses have encountered a long road in securing greenhouses for their businesses:

4 Life Natural Foods, Pots Sallapa (Kensington Market):

The owner wanted to grow organic food in a new greenhouse to be erected on his rooftop. He met many bureaucratic challenges. Current situation: not much to report, revising zoning. Revised zoning does not allow growing of produce it, but nor does it *not* allow it. New 2nd floor green space subject to property taxes that adds up to tens of thousands of dollars on top of construction. Pots may consider going another route as alternative.

Fresh City Farms, Baka Greenhouse:

They wanted to install a new greenhouse on private property beside Highway 427. The land is subject to both city planning and provincial transportation regulations. Fresh City Farms went to the Committee of Adjustments, obtained a number of variances that will allow them to apply for a building permit. The application was submitted with revisions, but yet to hear back.

It is currently zoned industrial, which does not allow agriculture. By growing seedlings above the ground, they get around that distinction and can avoid hefty development charges. One person suggested container growing might be a way around their challenges. It is being considered. Soil tests were conducted – no issues.

TUG updates: Rhonda/Joe

Grower2Grower

TUG's project to help growers share knowledge across the city. Latest installment is a photo essay on Kamal Mustafa's experiments with bottle gourds and grafting tomatoes and eggplants onto potato rootstock (harvest 2 vegetables from one plant!). Article will be posted on <http://torontourbangrowers.org/grower2grower>

Tours

TUG has organized a number of tours for conferences over the summer, the next will be for the Food Secure Canada Assembly on October 13, 2016. For more info, see <http://foodsecurecanada.org/resettingthetable/side-events>

Indigenous culture and urban agriculture tour Monday October 17 9:30-12:00

Starting at Native Child and Family Services at 30 College St. west of Yonge (north side) Also visiting the therapeutic garden and Aboriginal programs at Central Toronto Community Health Centre, Bathurst and Queen

See how two different organizations are integrating food and medicine with healing practices while learning about Indigenous culture in Toronto. We will have time for discussion. How do people from settler and immigrant cultures connect constructively with Indigenous communities in Toronto? How can an Indigenous world view inform our work in urban agriculture?

Tour is PWYC, suggested donation \$10

The tour sites are fully accessible, however we will be taking streetcars between the two sites. If the cost of TTC is a barrier to participation, we can provide tokens for the trip between sites.

Registration at <http://torontourbangrowers.org/news/tug-tour--growing-connections-urban-agriculture-and-indigenous-culture>

If there are particular questions or issues you'd like to cover on the tour, you can email rhonda@torontourbangrowers.org and let us know!

If you're interested in Indigenous history and culture, newcomers, growing food, water and neighbourhood environmental activism, check out <http://www.torontogreen.ca/what-we-do/rivers-rising/> for tours & training.

TUG map

The map of UA projects in Toronto and the Golden Horseshoe is now LIVE!!!! If you have a UA project that you'd like to share, go to <http://torontourbangrowers.org/register> and create an account. Then you can add info about your project, as well as photos and website/social media links. For more info on how to use the map, see <http://torontourbangrowers.org/tug-map>

Toronto Agriculture Program

James Kuhns introduced the program of the City of Toronto. It grew out of a recommendation of the GrowTO Urban Action Plan from 2012. Council approved its creation in 2013, complete with a workplan. The steering committee was led by the Deputy City Manager. The steering committee will likely meet again in November. Those present were asked what concerns James could bring to the meeting.

Questions and comments included:

- From the original work plan, what was accomplished and what still needs to be done?
- Make sure we're connecting to other city initiatives i.e: poverty reduction that intersect with
- Proposing to have a designated person in the city such as UA office that deals with UA specific issues, helps people navigate bureaucracy
- Would it help if we provide examples from other cities? e.g. Rosemount near Montreal
- Place to start: rooftop bylaws, cities with UA offices or similar bodies
- Bottlenecks in establishing new community gardens
- Policy of 2 year term limit in community gardens, impact on ability to increase community organizing capacity
- Raise the issue of chickens, as it is legal in many cities with no issues.

Forward other thoughts/questions to james@torontourbangrowers.org or rhonda@torontourbangrowers.org