



Lake County Municipal League

2016 Innovation Awards

Nomination

Nominee information

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Municipality: Village of Fox Lake
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Please provide a summary of the project and include a description of the project, project objectives, project deliverables and project achievements.

In an effort to revitalize a vacant parcel in the heart of our downtown, the Village of Fox Lake established the Community Garden of Fox Lake to provide an opportunity for residents to grow organic vegetables and fruit on.

Project Objectives:

- To create an intergovernmental agreement with the Fox Lake Fire Protection District for use of their vacant property for the purpose of building a community garden.
- To build raised garden beds that are available during the growing season for residents of Fox Lake and Grant Township.
- To provide an opportunity to educate residents on the importance of knowing where our food comes from, how to successfully grow our own vegetables and fruits, how gardening isn't age restricted, and why it's important for kids to learn about gardening.
- To build a better community.
- To provide organic vegetables and fruits to area food pantries and those in need.

Project Deliverables:

- Revitalize a vacant lot in downtown Fox Lake that had been unused for several years.
- Create a sense of community that starts by planting a proverbial seed.
- Build a place where people can connect with their neighbors and share ideas, tips, and best of all; their tomatoes!
- To work with other departments, local not-for-profits, local businesses, and other governmental bodies for opportunities to volunteer, learn about growing food, and to grow as a community.

Project Achievements:

- 60 4'x12' garden plots initially built with an additional 10 added as demand for garden plots grew.
- 100's of pounds of vegetables and fruit harvested each week.
- Community support for the project exceeds expectations.
 - a. Fox Lake Area Chamber of Commerce collects and donates gardening tools for their Earth Day project.
 - b. Ace Hardware offers coupons specifically to the gardeners on their gardening products and tools.
 - c. Support provided by University of Illinois Extension Office, Promote Fox Lake NFP, Fox Lake Area Chamber of Commerce, Waste Management, Midwest Organics, Thelen Sand & Gravel, Fox Waterway Agency, Stanton Middle School, and American Legion Post 703.
- Witnessing kids planting and picking vegetables and fruit with their siblings, grandparents, parents and friends...without electronic devices in their hands!

Full description Please provide a detailed description and address the items listed.

Purpose of the project: The Village of Fox Lake is working towards creating more walkability and foot traffic around our downtown area, and to bring in more businesses to fill our vacant downtown buildings. Across the street from Village Hall and in the heart of our downtown is a large parcel owned by the Fox Lake Fire District that had been vacant for several years.

One of our trustees attended a local HOA meeting and asked those in attendance if there was anything they'd like to see in the village. A young woman stood up and said, "A community Garden." When the trustee brought this to our attention, we looked out the window at the vacant parcel across the street and contacted the Chief of the Fox Lake Fire Protection District to discuss the concept. The Chief spoke to his Board of Directors and they were 100% supportive of the project. The intergovernmental agreement was approved by the Village Board in February of 2016 and the planning process for the 2016 Community Garden of Fox Lake growing season began. An idea that began as a seed planted by a local resident was beginning to grow.

We knew that a community garden would bring people to the downtown area and that they'd be purchasing gardening supplies from Ace Hardware across the street. They'd invite friends and family to the community garden to help garden. They'd have another connection to their community by being a part of the community garden which would grow to be the anchor to our downtown.

We wanted to provide educational opportunities for people to learn about the importance of knowing where our food comes from. Why growing organic food is important. How easy it can be to grow our own food and offer gardening classes for beginner and seasoned gardeners.

Stakeholders of the project:

- The Fox Lake Fire Protection District through an adopted IGA for the use of their vacant land.
- Residents of Fox Lake and Grant Township
- The Village of Fox Lake
- Grant Township
- University of Illinois Extension Office

Collaborative efforts:

The Community Garden of Fox Lake wouldn't be possible without the use of the property that is owned by the Fox Lake Fire Protection District. They've been supportive of this project since day one and allowed the village to use their property under an intergovernmental agreement.

The village teamed up with The University of Illinois Extension Office and their Master Gardeners to help us design the raised garden beds, what type of soil composition to use, what we should provide and cautionary tales to be aware of. Kim Isaacson, Horticulture Program Coordinator, for the Extension Office joined our committee and gave presentations at 2 workshops we held for our new gardeners. Kim and the Extension Office have been instrumental in the success of the community garden. They provide Master Gardeners every Saturday to assist gardeners at their plots with any questions they might have. They've donated hundreds of hours in site preparation, maintenance and educational events for our gardeners to advance their gardening knowledge.

We teamed up with Midwest Organics, Thelen Sand & Gravel, and the Fox Waterway Agency to bring in approximately 850 cubic yards of compost and soil to create the ideal mix for growing in. All of it was donated to the community garden.

Our local Ace Hardware saw what we were putting together and approached us about getting involved. They presented coupons for discounts on products specifically for the gardeners at the two educational workshops. The owner gave a small presentation at each workshop and discussed all of the tools and organic products they have available for gardeners.

Home Depot provided a group of 12 employees on a cold and snowy Saturday in March who helped build the boxes for the raised garden beds and clean up the site. They gave the village a large discount on the materials needed for the raised beds.

Several volunteer days have been held and included a group of local residents, business owners, and village staff helping to clean up the site and spread mulch. Stanton Middle School's Day of Service had over 50 kids at the Community Garden for several hours donating their time to build a pollinator garden project that was being spearheaded by local resident, Danice Moore.

Meier Fence gave the village a discount on over 450' of picket fencing that Community Development Director, Donovan Day and Building Inspector, David Watkins installed with the help of Public Works who drilled the fence post holes.

The village's Water Department provided four 750 gallon water containers that they fill twice a week for the gardeners to water their garden beds with. A fire hydrant was installed this year near the garden that will allow us to fill the containers more efficiently. The installation of this hydrant was part of other water infrastructure improvements being completed that were made possible through a CDBG grant from Lake County.

Fox Lake District 114 PTA donated a Little Free Library for the garden. Village employee, Laura Rudkin donated her time to paint the Little Free Library.

Grant High School donated 5 picnic tables and 2 local residents donated the umbrellas for the tables to provide shade for visitors to the garden.

Promote Fox Lake, a local 501c3 donated a 14'x14' gazebo which was then constructed by a local contractor who donated their time to install it.

The Fox Lake Area Chamber of Commerce held an Earth Day fundraiser and asked their business representatives to donate gardening tools to the Community Garden of Fox Lake. Over 40 pieces of gardening equipment were given to the gardeners to use.

Success metrics:

Renting out all of the plots. We made 60 garden beds available which were reserved within the first 18 days of opening the application process. A waiting list was created and 10 more beds were made to bring the total to 70 reserved plots. Gardeners who rented plots could list a secondary gardener (spouses, friend, etc.) on their application so we could keep track of who is supposed to be there. 130 people were listed for the inaugural year!

Producing yields. Gardeners were producing A LOT of vegetables and fruits. Kim Isaacson from the University of Illinois Extension Office stated she had never seen vegetables grow as fast as the ones in the Community Garden of Fox Lake.

Comments. We received several emails from gardeners thanking the village for putting this project together. John Kaufman is a local veteran who said the community garden has changed his life. It's a place where he can go to relax and connect with other people.

Sometimes success can't be measured with data and can only be witnessed in person:

- Seeing kids with butterfly nets running around the garden trying to catch cabbage butterflies to remove them from the garden,
- grandparents teaching their grandkids about when to pick a tomato and how to identify a weed from a vegetable plant,
- seeing residents visiting the garden just to walk around and look at the different gardens,
- seeing kids watering the plants in the children's garden area,
- seeing strangers come together and build relationships that were started at the community garden,
- seeing people pick vegetables right off the plant and share it with those around them or take a bite off a tomato that was picked seconds before,
- seeing people's pride and love for their community grow again.

Barriers to success, entry or obstacles:

- Trying to keep up with the water demand was difficult. Certain weeks were very hot with very little rain. Public works had to fill up the 4 water tanks twice a week instead of once a week. This took a lot of man hours because they had to fill up a tanker truck 3 times to properly fill all 4 containers. The addition of a recently installed fire hydrant near the garden will help alleviate this obstacle for the 2017 growing season.
- Keeping up with the weeds around the garden plots and other areas of the garden. I think we all know that pulling weeds is a full time job, so imagine that on a larger parcel that was once a field of weeds. Being an organic garden means no chemicals can be used to kill the weeds!
- Limited village staff didn't allow us to complete all of the projects we wanted to accomplish the first year. We wanted to build a sensory garden and walking path, but it's difficult to find volunteers for that type of work. Hopefully we can complete them in 2017.

Sustainability of the project:

The village has a 5 year lease on the property with the Fox Lake Fire Protection District. We hope that our agreement will extend beyond the 5 years or that the village can purchase the property from the District.

Future plans or expansion of the project:

The Village will be building a sensory garden for those with sensory deficit disorders. It will include the use of different plants to stimulate all the senses. A multi-textured walking path to walk on barefoot, and a water wall to pour water through various pipes and watch where it goes.

The village would like to eventually start a multi-vendor Farmer's Market at the property where gardeners can host a booth to sell their vegetables and fruits.

We built a bed for a gardener who is handicapped and in a wheelchair. We'd like to build several more ADA compliant garden beds.

We want to work with our local veterans to offer plots for free and work with them to help us with various projects at the garden.

We'd like to build two more plots for staff to garden on to donate the yields directly to the food pantries.

Results and achievements:

- 70 Garden plots built and reserved for the inaugural year.
- The project helped build community pride.
- Organizations, volunteer groups/residents, and businesses contact the village to ask, "How can I help at the Community Garden." Typically we have to ask for help or volunteers, so this was great to see the community supporting the project and offering to help.
- Excellent articles written in the Lake County Journal and Northwest Herald highlighting the garden's success.

Innovative components of the project:

- ADA compliant raised garden beds available for handicapped gardeners
- Monthly gardening classes to educate gardeners and residents on various gardening topics hosted at Village Hall and at the garden
- A local chef put on a demonstration for the gardeners on how to cook the various vegetables gardeners were growing. Gardeners were able to pick vegetables right off their plants and the chef would teach them how to prepare them.
- A pollinator garden that consists of wildflowers was built to attract butterflies and bees (pollinators) to the garden to help pollinate the vegetable and fruit plants. The garden was built by a local resident who started a GoFund Me page to collect donations for the installation of the soil, compost, flowers, and other materials.

Ease of replication by other municipalities:

A community garden is something every community should have. They can be installed in pockets of various neighborhoods, in existing parks, or on vacant land the municipality owns. They can consist of 10 garden beds or 1,000. Providing water is the most difficult part. Some community gardens don't provide water and gardeners have to bring their own. Work with your local extension office to help you plan and design your beds. Take the time to plan it out. The Village of Fox Lake signed the intergovernmental agreement in February and opened the garden with 70 raised beds in May. This took a lot of weekends with employees and volunteers donating their time, talent, and treasure to get it ready for opening day. Create a committee to handle the day-to-day operations and give them a decent budget to work with. Fox Lake budgeted \$10,000 for the first year and accomplished a lot with \$3,900 still in the budget.

If a community is interested in starting a community garden, please contact us at Fox Lake. We'd love to help you grow!