

# A Food Forest for South Markham

**A Youth-Led Initiative for the South Markham Community  
Our Proposal to Plant a Food Forest in a Public Park**



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**Written by:**

The South Markham Food Security Initiative (Shannon Cabrio, Michael Chen, Sarphina Chui, Shivi Darubra, Jessica Jansz, Manav Kainth, and Vikash Nanthakumar)

## Executive Summary

During July-August 2020, a group of 7 university graduates and young working professionals connected virtually to address the issue of food access within South Markham. The Markham residents had initial conversations about creating community gardens, which led to the vision of re-imagined public parks with food forests. The COVID-19 pandemic showed Canadians that the issues of isolation, food access, rising costs of living and racial inequities were real and unignorable. These issues also affected Markham residents. With the support of the “South Markham Connects” pilot program (funded through United Way), the youth called themselves the “South Markham Food Security Initiative” and wrote the proposal that you are reading now. Through our research and consultation with community agencies and residents, we also learned that a food forest can also connect to the Markham’s [Food Charter](#) and the [Greenprint Sustainability Plan](#). This proposal includes a backgrounder on South Markham, youth-led community consultations and support letters written by local community agencies. This proposal makes the case for a public, accessible and local food forest on a park jointly created by the City of Markham and our youth-led, volunteer-run residents’ group.

We thank South Markham Connects for providing support to us to be able to write this proposal and conduct community consultations. We thank SMC’s Paul Newton for his support and his mentorship throughout our group’s development. In addition, we thank the residents who participated in our consultations. Finally, we would also like to thank the community non-profits organizations who gave their time and provided feedback on our idea. Their feedback has been invaluable to our members who wrote this proposal.

## Our Roles and Responsibilities

We see ourselves working in partnership and to be consulted by the City on the design and implementation of the South Markham Food Forest. As a volunteer-run community residents’ group, we would be responsible for the maintenance of the food forest in partnership with local service groups and community agencies.

### **About the South Markham Food Security Initiative:**

Launched in July 2020, the SMFSI is a youth-led residents’ group seeking to work in partnership with the Markham municipality to create a public and accessible food forest where people from all walks of life can access food and engage with their local South Markham community. A barrier-free food forest brings benefits to residents’ mental health, well-being, and food access. The food forest space would provide opportunities to form intergenerational connections. The food forest would enhance the local biodiversity, draw down carbon emissions and improve the environment in South Markham.

## Critical Information and Background of South Markham

For the purpose of this food forest proposal, South Markham is defined within the boundaries of Warden Avenue (West) to Markham Road (East) and 14th Avenue (North) to Steeles Avenue (South). It includes the neighbourhoods of Milliken Mills West, Milliken Mills East and Middlefield. It is located above the City of Toronto, north of Scarborough.

Based on a Needs Assessment and Asset Analysis conducted in South Markham (2020), the stakeholders at the time identified community strengths and challenges that they faced. The top 5 community strengths and assets include the existence of:

- Community services, cultural groups and recreational spaces.
- Active community members who care, support and are interested in community building.
- Community centres and libraries as hubs for youth, seniors and families.
- Coordination of services and partnership development.
- A diverse community made of various cultures, religions, languages and lived experiences.

Some identified community challenges include the need for:

- Accessible, affordable and reliable transportation.
- Decent work, skills-building and training opportunities.
- Accessible space for events, community discussions and gatherings.
- Better communication in multiple languages, accessible signage and various mediums.
- Better access to mental health services.
- Community building through a robust racial equity lens.

## History of South Markham

Since the 1980s, South Markham has been home to diverse immigrant communities. According to Statistics Canada (2016), 92% of the population identified as a visible minority, with 42% identifying as Chinese and 35% as South Asian. Two-thirds of the population were immigrants, and 85% of these immigrants were born in Asia.

## Food Security Statistics

Food insecurity is defined as ‘all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life.’<sup>2</sup> Every two years, the Canadian Community Health Survey (CCHS) uses the Household Food Security Survey Module (HFSSM) to evaluate income-related household food security in Canada<sup>1</sup>, focusing on the household’s ability to afford the food it needs. According to the York Region’s food bank, there has been a 26% spike in food bank demands in 2019.<sup>3</sup> This shows the increased food insecurity we witness within our community. Food banks

have been facing higher demand during the COVID-19 pandemic, which suggests food insecurity has worsened in 2020.

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## Benefits

A food forest provides local residents with economic, social, environmental, community and health benefits. Here are some examples of what trees can do for residents and the environment.

### Economic Benefits

- **Energy conservation** through natural cooling and sheltering.
- **Increased property value** in close proximity to improved green spaces.
- **Reduced healthcare costs** as a result of inclusive green areas.

### Social Benefits

- **Reduction in crime** in urban areas with presence of vegetation.
- The presence of trees **creates a system of informal surveillance and security**.
- Provides residents with a **sense of ownership** of their local areas.
- Encourages neighbours out of their homes and into public and open spaces, creating opportunities for **informal social contact**.
- When youth view green spaces, they perform significantly better on tests, experience reduced physiological stress levels, and **enhanced psychological well-being**.

### Environmental Benefits

- Supports pollinator and wildlife habitats
- The trees drawdown carbon emissions and produces fresh air
- Trees intercept and absorb stormwater runoff, preventing flooding and erosion
- The tree canopies provides shade
- Native plants support biodiversity
- A food forest provides an additional feature for residents to engage in their parks.

### Community Benefits

- **More inclusive neighbourhoods** by providing a chance for people to connect and bond. A food forest provides an inclusive gathering place for people of all ages and cultural backgrounds. This is especially valuable to a diverse city like Markham.
- Opportunities to learn from others and share knowledge on gardening and cooking.
- Healthier diets due to eating locally grown fresh fruits and vegetables.
- Opportunities to grow cultural-specific fruits and vegetables to meet the needs of a multicultural audience.



- **Easy access to affordable food.** Especially valuable to lower-income residents.
- Food skill development through sharing ideas from various cultures. Valuable to a culturally and ethnically diverse city with residents from South Asian, Southeast Asian and East Asian diasporas.
- Enhanced environmental awareness; people learn that growing food locally means less use of fossil fuels compared to importing food.

#### General Health and Physical Wellbeing

- **Hospital patients who can view trees recover quicker** than patients with no exposure to trees and natural activities.
- **Seniors experienced improved physical health** when they spent time outside engaging in gardening activities.
- **People are more productive and less stressed** with the presence of plants in their homes.
- **Trees protect us from urban air pollution**, reducing the severity of respiratory illnesses like asthma & combat heart disease.

#### Mental Health

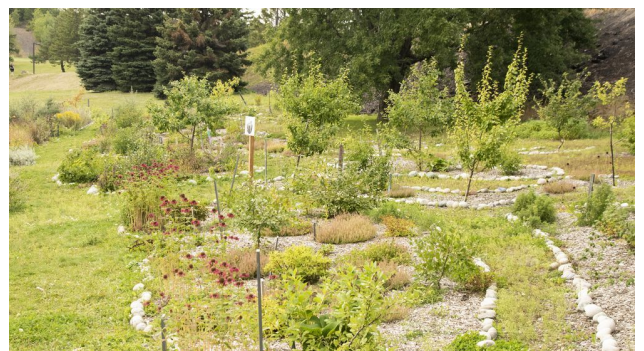
- **Trees combat depression!** Garden walking is used to help treat depression in adults and has been shown to increase memory span, reduce pain and stress, improve self-esteem, improve attention and other emotional and behavioural benefits.
  - **Veterans with PTSD treated with rehabilitation involving nature experiences** have an **improved** emotional and social quality of life, giving more positive mood effects.
  - Reduces the effects of dementia.
  - Natural landscapes (forests and parks) and the availability of public spaces used for general entertainment **aid in treating attention deficit disorders** including ADD/ADHD.
  - Correlations between the use of open spaces and reduced stress, **reduced psychological distress, depression symptoms, clinical anxiety, and mood disorders in adults.**
  - **These all lead to greater happiness and life satisfaction.**
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## Case Study

There are numerous food forests (also referred to as “edible food gardens”) throughout Canada, and plenty in the province of Ontario. Here, we would like to highlight a few case studies to further state the needs for one. But it is to also state that we are not trying to start a new movement, but joining and reinforcing a movement that is already started in other municipalities, yet to be joined by Markham.

#### **Sudbury Food Forest** [Source: Keown, M. K]

Managed by the Sudbury Shared Harvest organization, they created their first food forest in 2017, housing 40 varieties of fruits and vegetables in about 8,000 square feet of cultivated land.



- **Sudbury Shared Harvest is planning on establishing at least one food forest in each ward and each would be small to sustain the city as a whole.**

The land is open to the public. Food is being harvested whenever a volunteer or worker is there to supervise.

Some of the products being grown include apple, cherry, and plum trees; saskatoon berries; strawberries; gooseberries; asparagus; rhubarb; currants; three varieties of raspberries.

- Everything in the forest is drought-resistant
- The food forest is designed not to require watering after the first two years
- All of the plants can survive the harsh colds

### **Kitchener Community Gardens**

The City of Kitchener currently has 35 community gardens. These gardens are maintained by volunteers and are strictly for public – not commercial – use. These operate on city-owned land and guides are available for residents to start their own community garden project. These are great for neighbourhood bonding and helps to build safe, inclusive communities.

### **Waterloo Community Gardens**

Similar to Kitchener, the region of Waterloo has a number of community gardens available to residents. Additionally, Waterloo also has community school gardens, which also help to promote positive well-being, healthy food education, outdoor education opportunities and academic success.

## **Community Engagement Framework**

First, we would like to point out that there is a widespread excitement from all of the consultations to the idea of a food forest added to Markham. All of the participants in the consultations are excited to use the products that will be grown. There is also a shared understanding, knowledge, and appreciation of Markham's need for more access to nutritious food. This food forest can directly benefit residents who can not access it themselves due to socioeconomic, physical limitations, or financial restrictions. But it is not without benefits that will extend to the rest of the Markham community.

### **Community Feedback**

<b>The community <i>agencies</i> we consulted</b>	<b>The community <i>groups</i> we consulted</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The York Region Food Network</li> <li>- Cornerstone Church's Food Pantry</li> <li>- Centre for Immigrant &amp; Community Services</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Wilclay Women's Group</li> <li>- Island Breeze Seniors Group</li> <li>- CICS Immigrant Youth Centre</li> </ul>

Every group gave us a consensus of further acknowledgment that food security needs to be addressed in Markham. If they did not know about it, we provided them with knowledge and resources on the statistics of food insecurity in South Markham for an agreement that something needs to be done in addition to the relief programs already offered by local government and community agencies. Below are summarized notes from the consultations and meetings.

### Reasons to Approve a Food Forest:

- The inclusion of available fruits and vegetables for those who need it will provide an improved diet for those who can not afford adequate food and are now missing that necessary part of their diet.
  - It allows more people to have access to locally-grown and healthy food.
  - They would not need to worry about waiting in long lines at grocery stores nor additional costs to live a healthier lifestyle.
  - It is an alternative to the bulk of non-perishable food donations from food banks.
- Low maintenance, as the food forest plants, will keep growing and self-sustains itself.
- The more food forests we have, the better it is for the community.
  - It will add many benefits to the community that holds the food forest.
  - As some consultants who said they would not need to take food, they stated that they would still go to admire its beauty and, therefore, add to Markham's community aesthetics and social capital.
  - Residents said they would make an event of going with their family to make a special meal together.
  - There was also interest in the youth to volunteer there.
  - Residents said it would bring a fresh start and addition to the growth of Markham.
- It would benefit the mental health of those around the food forest greatly.
- Environmental Drawdown and Environmental Education
- It is a cultural piece of the community's needs that would include the city's involvement, producing societal benefits.
  - It is about more than just feeding people in need; while that is a great benefit, other benefits are included in the proposal's *benefits* tab.
- Even in the winter, it can be accessible and harvestable (including kale, leeks, and garlic, which can all be harvested in the winter). With the inclusion of an expert, there can be even more activities and food-related programming during the winter months. There can even be a fire pit included in the winter.
- It is crucial to be connected with the land and connect with local seasonality, knowing what food groups can grow in York Region.
- It encourages a conversation on food access, and food security, resulting in increased knowledge on the subject and more efforts to solve it.
- There is an opportunity for diverse cultures and multiple generations of families to come and gather together.
- Importance of community engagement through:
  - Foraging, walking, cooking classes, discussions on the benefits of some weeds, tasting, and a list of more engagement that can happen in the partnership with York Region Food Network

## **Community Suggestions**

- Adjustment to the garden for the wintertime –
  - (1) Adding winter activities, including winter foraging, harvesting winter plants, *(this will require the experience of an expert)*, and the inclusion of a fire pit.
  - (2) Possible idea: Creating an adjacent greenhouse during the winter
  - (3) Storing some of the preservable vegetables during the winter
- We would need these areas to be wheel-chair accessible and volunteers available to assist those who can not harvest the fruit themselves.
- Potential partnerships with nearby schools; bundling garden activities with school students to spread awareness of the program's existence.
- There were complaints about the lack of diversity in the available plants.
  - *We acknowledge that a food forest will not grow every root, vegetable, or fruit, (such as tropical fruits or foods that cannot grow in Ontario) but more people say that more benefits outweigh these critiques.*
- It will require maintenance and accessibility provided by the city and volunteers.
  - It would need to be plowed in the winter
  - A resident said that it would need to be promoted (like other City programs and services) so they can benefit the people they are meant to help.

## **Forming Community Partnerships**

We foresee working with the support of the non-profit agencies that we consulted for their expertise and with service groups to maintain the food forest. For example, York Region Food Network can provide education and training for maintenance of an edible food garden. Another agency like the Centre for Immigrant & Community Services can also assist with gathering youth and seniors to work on the maintenance of the food forest. Additionally, we will also reach out to service groups such as the Scouts and Girl Guides and nearby schools to assist with the maintenance of the food forest once it is planted.

## **Budget Planning**

### **Funding Sources**

The South Markham Food Security Initiative would like to work in partnership with the City of Markham to start a food forest on underutilized city parks in South Markham. As a community group, we are eligible to apply for several grants. However, we would like to work with the city to establish permissions to plant on city property.



Once permission is granted, we are eligible to apply for grants including: Nature's Path (Gardens For Good), Ontario Trillium Foundation, Canada Post Community Foundation, EcoAction Community Funding Program (Government of Canada), Community Conservation Action Program (Wildlife Habitat Canada) and the Trillium ROOTS Community Support Fund.

Municipalities can apply for: the TD Friends of the Environment Foundation Grant, Municipalities for Climate Innovation Program (Federation of Canadian Municipalities).

As much as and wherever possible, the SMFSI would seek in-kind donations from local community agencies and apply for grants to offset the cost of the food forest planting.

## City Costs

Below is a list of possible city costs that we have identified that we would ask the City to contribute to this project because our vision is to plant a food forest on public park lands. This is not an exhaustive list.

- Land and maintenance
- Building permits and locates
- Water supply
- Soil testing
- Site preparation
- Shed and other storage
- Fencing or other delineation like shrubs
- Tools, hoses, hand tools, wheelbarrows
- Plot construction and/or raised beds for additional vegetables

## SWOT Analysis

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Convenient food access to residents</li><li>- Enhanced psychological well-being</li><li>- More inclusive neighbourhoods that encourage social contact and bonding</li><li>- Protection from air pollution</li><li>- Healthier diets due to eating locally grown fresh fruits and vegetables</li><li>- Benefits to Markham's reputation as an innovative, forward-looking city</li><li>- After 2 years, food forest is self sustaining and requires less maintenance</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- High initial costs to create food forest for resident groups</li><li>- Challenge of finding location that is accessible to many residents</li><li>- Challenge of maintaining food forest throughout year, without volunteers</li><li>- Increased cost to city's parks department</li><li>- Challenge of sharing food supply with animals</li><li>- Less space for public gathering</li></ul>

<b>Threats</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Food forests exist in other Ontario and Canadian municipalities</li> <li>- Increasing cost of city-owned land</li> <li>- Effects of changing climate to biodiversity of food forest</li> <li>- Some varieties of fruit trees could be susceptible to insects and diseases</li> </ul>	<b>Opportunities</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Partnering with schools, community centres, service groups and places of worship for shared tree maintenance</li> <li>- Expanding food forests to other parks in Markham</li> <li>- Establishing a formal network of volunteers across the city</li> <li>- Greater awareness and education on sustainable food production</li> <li>- Creation of volunteer opportunities for local high school students and youth</li> <li>- Meeting the Greenprint Sustainability Plan of reaching 30% tree canopy and vegetation coverage</li> </ul>
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## Letters of Support

We asked for and received letters from community organizations and local residents voicing their support for our youth-led, public food forest. Please refer to the Appendix for the attached support letters.

## Markham Council Priorities

The South Markham Food Forest connects to the following sustainability priorities found in the Greenprint Sustainability Plan (2011).

Greenprint Sustainability Priorities	South Markham Food Forest Connections
<b>1 - Social Equity</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Objective: Greater resident involvement in community stewardship</li> <li>● Objective: Promote greater youth involvement in decision making and participation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Local service and resident groups can volunteer to maintain the food forest located within their neighbourhood park.</li> <li>● The South Markham Food Forest initiative is spearheaded by the young professionals of the South Markham Food Security Initiative and supported by an agency with youth involvement.</li> </ul>
<b>2 - Identity and Culture</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Objective: Promote and celebrate all that makes Markham great</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Markham can demonstrate that it continues to start innovative solutions that solve environmental, food security and energy issues.</li> </ul>
<b>3 - Individual Health</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Objective: Promote and support the</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Markham citizens can rediscover their local neighbourhood park. They can</li> </ul>


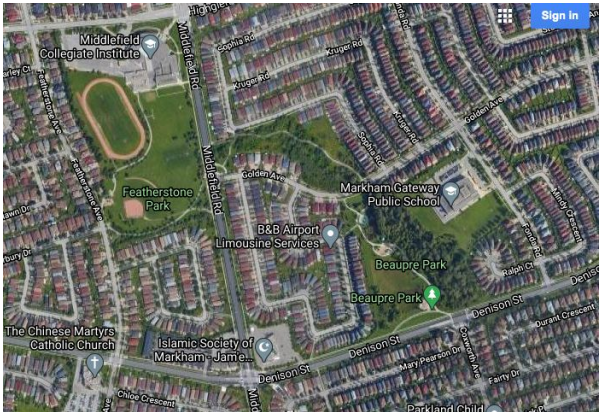
physical and mental health of Markham citizens	harvest their own food and spend time in nature.
<p>5 - Food Security</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Objective: Support education and engagement in the local food system</li> <li>• Objective: Significantly increase food production opportunities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Through partnerships with agencies like the York Region Food Network and the Centre for Immigrant &amp; Community Services, the proposed food forest can meet the objective for education and engagement in the local food system. “Individuals and community groups can coordinate the sharing of knowledge and resources among gardeners and small-scale food growers through networking opportunities and workshop events” (Page 63).</li> <li>• “Individuals and community groups can help to plan and establish community gardens and other food-growing opportunities wherever possible on vacant municipal and private land” (Page 64).</li> </ul>
<p>6 - Access and Mobility</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Objective: Connect communities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The food forest is a food garden within a park that meets this objective. “Individuals and community groups can steward greenways, public lands, and power line right-of-ways by patrolling for litter and path obstructions, planting native plants, and partnering to establish food gardens” (Page 73).</li> </ul>
<p>7 - Education and Skills</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Objective: Facilitate lifelong learning and skills development</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Growing food is a topic under the sustainability curriculum listed on Page 81.</li> <li>• The food forest within a park can also be an “outdoor classroom” as mentioned under Systems Thinking and Ecosystems Integrity on page 82.</li> </ul>
<p>11 - Ecosystem Integrity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Objective: Increase biodiversity</li> <li>• Objective: Reach 30% tree canopy and vegetation coverage Town-wide</li> <li>• Objective: Develop and support wildlife habitat</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Planting native fruit and nut trees ensures that the forest is self-sustaining and provides habitat for pollinators.</li> <li>• Planting native fruit and nut trees achieves Markham’s goal of reaching</li> </ul>

	<p>tree canopy and vegetation coverage.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Planting native flowers, fruit trees and vegetation ensures that there is additional habitat for pollinators and wildlife.</li> </ul>
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## Our Vision for an Accessible Food Forest

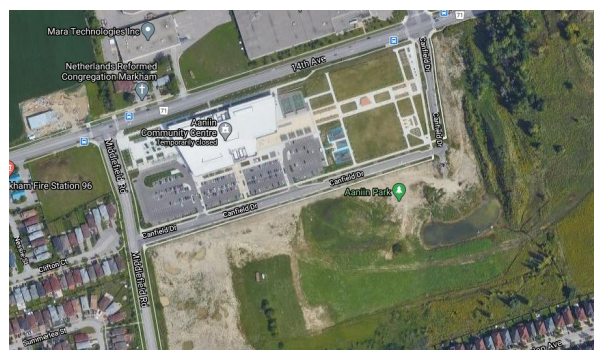
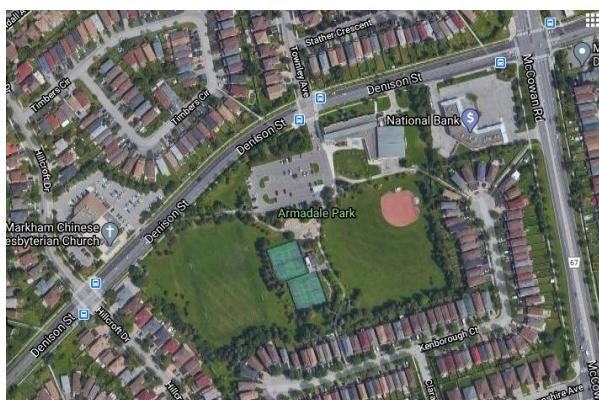
### Re-imagined Park Locations

Our team looked at possible locations for the South Markham Food Forest by re-imagining current public parks as possible sites for urban municipal nut and fruit trees. We looked at accessibility and benefits to the surrounding community. At the same time, we acknowledge that the City’s internal Public Realm, Parks and Forestry departments may already have long-term plans for these parks. We hope that our input will go into these decisions.

<p><b>Middlefield Corners</b></p> <p>Our team chose Middlefield Corners because there are no other current recreational uses than as a walkthrough. It is located in the middle of a residential area. This can be an optimal place to plant fruit and nut trees for the surrounding community. There are potential opportunities for the local schools and service groups to take care of the food forest.</p>	<p><b>Beaupre Park</b></p> <p>Our team chose this park because it is located in a residential area with adjacent schools and places of worship. There would be an opportunity for local residents and students to access this food forest. This food forest would add to the existing children’s play areas. There are potential opportunities for the local schools and service groups to take care of the food forest.</p>
	
<p><b>Armada Park</b></p> <p>Our team chose this park because it is in the centre of the South Markham boundaries and is accessible by local transit and car.</p>	<p><b>Aaniin Park</b></p> <p>This was chosen because it was located near a major community centre and high schools. It is located at a major intersection (14th</p>

Armada Park is close to Armada Community Centre, which also houses a community kitchen. The food forest could benefit the seniors and young families living in the area and using the community centre programs and services. There are potential opportunities for the seniors and service groups to take care of the food forest.

Avenue and Middlefield Road.) There is also an open space. It would benefit the community because the adjacent community centre is already a community hub. This food forest could provide food that could be cooked in the Aaniin Community Centre's teaching kitchen. There are potential opportunities for local schools and service groups to take care of the food forest.



## Possible Native Trees, Shrubs and Plants

Based on the Sudbury Shared Harvest's Delki Dozzi Food Forest Plant Guide, this is a list of native trees, shrubs and plants that they included in their food forest. We would plan for these trees, shrubs and plants to be included in our vision of the food forest including cultural specific vegetables that can be grown in our climate.

Edible Fruit and Vegetation	Pollinator Plant (* denotes that it is NOT edible)
Apple ( <i>Malus pumila</i> )	*Baptisia - Blue False Indigo ( <i>Baptisia australis</i> ) and Yellow Wild Indigo ( <i>Baptisia sphaerocarpa</i> )
Asparagus ( <i>Asparagus officinalis</i> )	Bee Balm, also known as wild bergamot ( <i>Monarda didyma</i> )
Black Chokeberry, not to be confused with Chokecherry. ( <i>Photinia melanocarpa</i> , also known as <i>Aronia melanocarpa</i> )	Blue Vervain, also known as Wild Hyssop. ( <i>Verbena hastata</i> )
Buffaloberry, also known as Soapberry, Foam berry, Soppolallie ( <i>Shepherdia</i> )	*Butterflyweed, also known as Milkweed ( <i>Asclepias tuberosa</i> )



canadensis)	
Catnip, also known as Catmint (Nepata cataria)	*Comfrey (Symphytum species)
Cherry (Saskatchewan dwarf sour cherry) (Prunus x kerrasis)	Echinacea or Purple Coneflower (Echinacea purpurea)
Cherry Plum (Prunus cerasifera)	*Lupine, perennial (Lupinus perennis)
Chives (Allium schoenoprasum)	*Prairie Coneflower (Ratibida columnifera)
Currant, Red, Pink (a variety of red currant) and Black(Ribes rubrum ; Ribes nigrum)	*Purple Prairie clover (Dalea purpurea)
Garlic Chives (Allium tuberosum)	Silver Sage, also known as Prairie Sage (Artemesia ludoviciana)
Good King Henry (Chenopodium bonus-henricus)	*Wild Columbine (Aquilegia canadensis)
Gooseberry (Ribes hirtellum)	
Haskap, also known as Honeyberry (Lonicera caerulea)	
High bush cranberry (Viburnum trilobum)	
Hosta (Hosta species)	
Oregano (Origanum species)	
Pear (Pyrus species)	
Plum (Prunus salicina)	
Raspberry (Rubus species)	
Rhubarb (Rheum rhabarbarum)	
Saskatoon berry, also known as Serviceberry (Amelanchier alnifolia)	
Sea Buckthorn, also known as Seaberry (Hippophae rhamnoides)	
Strawberry, everbearing/day-neutral	
Sunchoke, also known as Jerusalem Artichoke (Helianthus tuberosus)	
Sweet cicely (Myrrhis odorata)	

Thyme (Thymus serpyllum)	
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## **Sustainability**

Maintenance of a food forest is specially required within the first 1-3 years of planting the trees and shrubs. Our group is composed of local youth and community members and we would take on the maintenance of the trees. We would enter in partnerships with local non-profit agencies (e.g. Centre for Immigrant & Community Services, York Region Food Network) and service groups (e.g. Scouts groups, Knights of Columbus, Guide groups) to assist with the planned and future maintenance for the food forest. This is so that the burden and costs of maintenance do not fall onto the City's Parks and Forestry departments.

## **Next Steps**

Our next steps include submitting this proposal to our Ward 7 and 8 councillors and the Markham Environmental Advisory Council for review. We wish to work with the city council to start the process of planting and creating a food forest in a public park in South Markham.

## **Conclusion**

Food insecurity is a growing concern facing our communities, and it is incumbent on us as a community to institute solutions to ensure no resident is left behind. The food forest is an effective garden solution that offers a return on investment in different fields like food access, environmental benefits, social equity and community engagement. During this COVID-19 pandemic period, it is an ideal time to set this plan in motion. We are a passionate youth-led group with community and resident support. The quarantine time presented us with a unique opportunity where we wanted to plan for a better and unified South Markham. We are proposing to partner with the City of Markham to plant the South Markham Food Forest and to see it come into fruition.

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## Appendix

*Please see the attached support letters we received in support of this food forest initiative.*

**Letter of Support from the York Region Food Network**

**Letter of Support from the Centre for Immigrant & Community Services**

**Letter of Support from the Cornerstone Food Pantry**

**Letter of Support from interested resident, Jill Kelly**

November 23, 2020

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing on behalf of York Region Food Network (YRFN) in support of the South Markham Food Security Initiative's food forest project.

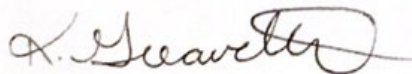
YRFN is a respected regional hub for food security, working towards the vision of Food for Health – Food for All. YRFN drives change through education and advocacy, and we connect and empower people to access healthy food. We operate community food programs as a way to build food skills, social networks and connect residents to local food. YRFN is also the home of the York Region Food Council, a multi-disciplinary collaboration of food system actors that work together to create and support initiatives that foster food sovereignty and community development.

YRFN believes it is crucial to have community spaces where people can come together to learn about food and food sovereignty, and engage in practices that build community. Launched in July 2020, the South Markham Food Security Initiative (SMFSI) is a youth-led group that seeks partnership with the municipality in order to create an accessible food forest in South Markham. As an organization that has coordinated and managed urban agriculture projects in York Region since the mid-1990s, YRFN supports SMFSI's proposal to develop a food forest. Based on consultations that YRFN has conducted, community members want more community gardens and urban agriculture spaces in their communities to learn about food growing, to form social connections within their neighbourhoods and to gain the physical and mental health benefits that come with being outdoors. SMFSI's proposed food forest would benefit residents' mental health, create opportunities for people to better connect with the environment and encourage people to form social and intergenerational connections within their own neighbourhood. SMFSI is committed to addressing climate change and championing sustainable practices. This project offers countless opportunities to the residents of Markham and it align with the City of Markham's Greenprint Sustainability Plan and the Markham Food Charter.

YRFN would love to see SMFSI's proposed food forest become a reality. We would be happy to offer SMFSI in-kind support for this project in the form of consultation and materials.

Please feel free to reach out to me with any questions.

Sincerely,



Kate Greavette  
Executive Director



**Head Office**

2330 Midland Avenue,  
Toronto, ON M1S 5G5  
Tel: 416-292-7510  
Fax: 416-292-9120

**Toronto Integrated  
Service Centre**

402-3850 Finch Avenue  
East, Toronto  
ON M1T 3T6  
Tel: 416-293-4565

**LINC Centre**

501-4002 Sheppard  
Avenue East, Toronto  
ON M1S 4R5  
Tel: 416-299-8118

**North York Centre**

1761 Sheppard Ave.  
East, Ground Floor,  
Toronto, ON M2J 0A5  
Tel: 416-493-7510

**Woodside Square  
LINC Centre**

202-1571 Sandhurst  
Circle, Toronto  
ON M1V 1V2  
Tel: 416-292-6558

**Immigrant**

**Youth Centre**

2-5284 Highway 7 East  
Markham, ON L3P 1B9  
Tel: 905-294-8868

**Markham South  
Welcome Centre**

Unit 8, 7220 Kennedy  
Road, Markham  
ON L3R 7P2  
Tel: 905-479-7926  
Fax: 905-479-2603

**Immigrant Women  
Resource Centre**

Unit 5, 7220 Kennedy  
Road, Markham  
ON L3R 7P2  
Tel: 905-415-9763

**Email:**

info@cicscanada.com

**Website:**

www.cicscanada.com

January 11th, 2021

Markham City Council  
101 Town Centre Blvd  
Markham, ON L3R 9W3

Dear Markham City Council,

I am writing on behalf of the Centre for Immigrant and Community Services (CICS) in support of the South Markham Food Security Initiative's (SMFSI) food forest project.

CICS is a multi-service agency serving and helping newcomers integrate into all spheres of Canadian society. We provide diverse, professional and innovative services to help accomplish this vision. Within York Region and Toronto, CICS provides services including Early Year, Children and Youth, Family, Senior, Employment, Language and Training, Settlement as well as Community and Volunteer Engagement programs. We also manage a Community Garden at our Scarborough head office to produce organic community-grown food, volunteer projects, as well as workshops for the community.

As a result of COVID-19, CICS continues to support and empower newcomers, recent immigrants, and low-income families experiencing social and economic hardship in these challenging times. We responded quickly to emerging COVID-19 needs in our community by, for example, starting a Food Pantry. Due to the loss of income, household food insecurities have emerged as a critical and deepen need. It has been reported that one in four people (25%) are not eating for an entire day. As the numbers continue to increase, our weekly pantry food demands now exceed weekly food supplies.

To gain a comprehensive understanding of resident needs, CICS has been active in studying the South Markham demographics through our involvement in numerous community research projects. As per our findings, it is crucial to address the issues of food insecurity and inequities in the immediate and foreseeable future. To address this issue, we believe a sustainable solution would be to plant a public food forest. There are food forests in Toronto and Ottawa, Sudbury, Guelph and Kingston. It may be time for Markham to consider having a food forest as well.

CICS believes in SMFSI's public food forest initiative. Not only does this address the needs for local food production, it has environmental benefits such as increasing biodiversity and sustainability. A food forest also acts as a gathering place for marginalized groups such as immigrants, youth and seniors to interact with one another without the stigma that often comes with receiving social benefits. We foresee this benefitting residents' physical and mental health, creating opportunities for people to connect with the environment, and encouraging residents to form social and intergenerational connections within their own neighborhoods within the City of Markham.

We would love to see SMFSI's proposed food forest become a reality in South Markham and are happy to provide SMFSI with continued support of consultation and mentorship.

Please feel free to reach out to me with any questions.

Sincerely,



Ally Lui  
Program Director, Youth and Family Services  
Centre for Immigrant and Community Services  
7220 Kennedy Road, Unit 8, Markham, ON L3R 7P2  
905-479-7926 ext. 3222 | Direct: 905-305-4124



9680 Ninth Line, Markham, ON L6B 1A8  
905-294-3554 ext 3663  
pantry@cornerstonechurch.ca  
<https://cornerstonechurch.ca/food>

November 27, 2020

To the City of Markham,

Cornerstone Pantry is a food bank running out of Cornerstone Christian Community Church supporting Markham Stouffville residents in need. Since we started in 2015, we have seen a steady increase of food requests from families every year. However with the COVID-19 pandemic, requests have increased at least **6-fold** and the year is not even over yet!

I am writing this as a testament that we need to find more ways to address the issue of food insecurity, which is why we are excited to hear about the South Markham Food Security Initiative proposal for a community garden. We fully support this initiative as it would offer great health benefits to families in our community.

Kindest regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Tina Li".

Tina Li  
Cornerstone Food Pantry Committee Member

December 1, 2020

South Markham Food Security Initiative  
Attn: Michael Chen

Dear Michael,

I'm writing in support of your group's initiative to establish a community food forest in south Markham.

Having experience facilitating a number of community greening projects across the City, I know first hand both the social and environmental benefits this type of project will enable.

This initiative will provide the community with publicly accessible food and a place to socialize and gather, while also providing viable habitat for a diversity of wildlife.

I fully support this project and look forward to watching it grow.

Sincerely,  
Jill Kelly  
Markham resident