

"Green light," given for Vanier community garden

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EMC News – Vanier's green thumb fans have finally be given the green light to start planting the community garden in Richelieu Park this spring.

The two-year wait was somewhat torturous, but ultimately worth it, for Vanier resident Marguerite Beaulieu.

"We got a green light from the City and Department of Health," said Beaulieu to applause at the Together for Vanier Working Group on Beautification at the offices of the Vanier Business Improvement Area (BIA) on the evening of Tuesday, March 16.

Beaulieu finally received the results of the soil testing done at Richelieu Park by the University of Guelph, and while no high levels of contamination – such as lead or oil – were found, high levels of selenium were discovered in the soil.

"I thought that was rather

strange. It's a higher rating than they'd like," said Beaulieu. "We are authorized to do the garden in raised beds only," which suits her just fine since that had long been the plan anyway, to have 40 plots, 8 x 4 in size, 18 inches off of the ground, with some boxes 24 inches high to accommodate gardeners in wheelchairs. "Perhaps we should do them all 24 inches high," Beaulieu surmised.

Further to this good environmental news "we got our grant," of \$5,700 from the City of Ottawa, indeed, for more than she had originally asked for. Now there is only about \$4,000 left to raise for the garden. Some of the costs have been covered by gracious benefactors, while the rest will be offset by fundraisers.

Before a final number of plots is chosen however, Beaulieu has sought the help of the Vanier Community Service Centre, 192 Du-

puis Street, to set up a community survey.

"We want to do a survey to see how many people are interested in having a plot," she said. "We're not going to build 40 if only 20 people are interested."

Already, with the early arrival of spring this year, Beaulieu and her crew were chomping at the bit to get digging.

"We want to do it this spring. We have the momentum. We have the energy. We want to do this this year," said a clearly delighted Beaulieu. "We've had such an overwhelming support from our community."

Along with a number of elementary schools who are interested in participating, "we've got two high schools on board and they will build the boxes and another high school will build the tool shed which will be an exact replica of the Sugar Shack," on the other side of the park.

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"What's going to make us different from other community gardens [is that] we will get different organizations to sponsor a plot," reported Beaulieu, something she sees as a necessary step since "we need the money to buy equipment." While there is no price set yet per plot, "we're costing it our right now."

Beaulieu stressed that the garden will be for everyone, regardless of income, and that "we are targeting families who cannot afford the \$50 or \$60 we may be charging," per plot.

One of the sponsor groups already on board is the Vanier Museopark, 300 Avenue des Peres Blancs, which will grow heritage vegetables as a kind of outdoor exhibit. Once they ripen, those vegetables will then be donated to the Partage Vanier food bank at 161 Marier Avenue.

While watering the Richelieu Park rink over this past winter proved to be an issue, Beaulieu has found a solution to tapping into a water supply.

"Water, we've got that all figured out. We will have water barrels," she said, likely with one barrel at the end of each row. "It'll be all organic, no chemicals allowed."

While decorations will be welcome for people to personalize their plots, Beaulieu hopes that, aesthetically, people will draw the line at kitsch, so leave the pink flamingoes at home.



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Garden coordinator Marguerite Beaulieu appears excited by the news that the Vanier community garden in Richelieu Park has now become a "shovel ready" project.