

September 12th, 2011

Re: Reduced Budget Proposal for Live Green Toronto Community Animation Service

Dear Councillor,

In 2008, EcoSpark (then Citizens' Environment Watch) was contracted to deliver the Community Animation service for Live Green Toronto (LGTO) over the four geographic regions of Toronto. Live Green Toronto Community Animation builds the capacity of Toronto citizens to address environmental concerns themselves and mobilizes the population to make this city a better place through volunteerism. In 2010 alone, the service resulted in 8600 volunteer hours, \$500,000 of external funding, and the initiation of 106 environmental projects.

EcoSpark received written notice, dated July 26, 2011, that the LGTO Community Animation contract will not be renewed for 2012.

Given the difficult financial choices Toronto City Council is facing, I am writing to brief you on the impact of this service, and to also propose a cost-effective remedy. This remedy provides Toronto citizens with the skills to address environmental concerns without long-term reliance on the city.

The sudden discontinuation of the service drastically reduces its long-term impact and leaves many community partners struggling to deliver on current or planned projects, rather than maximizing the investment of \$2.1 million made into the project to date. The Community Animation program is a five-year contract (renewable annually) designed to build sustained capacity of our citizenry without a sustained financial investment.

In short: EcoSpark is building a city of volunteers who can plan, fundraise for, and implement environmental initiatives *themselves*, support one another, and not rely on city funding to effect environmental change. A further year is required to complete the capacity building amongst the groups that we – under the TEO contract – have been building for the past 2.5 years.

Recognizing the difficult deficit position the city finds itself in, EcoSpark is proposing a drastically reduced budget that leverages the previous years' investments, while allowing for a wrap-up year during which citizens transition to leading projects themselves.

We propose reducing the staffing of the project from 10.5 staff to 5 and the budget from \$728,698.96 to \$325,433.56.

Expense	Year 4 Contracted Budget	Year 4 Proposed Amendment
Staffing	\$637,198.82	\$297,433.56
Support Costs	21,100.00	13,300.00
Events, Resources and Training	37,600.00	13,200.00
Required other services	32,800.00	1,500.00
Total	\$728,698.82	\$325,433.56

While this reduction means that the number of *new* projects is severely limited, it will allow EcoSpark to continue working with the individuals and community groups we have already engaged, and provide them with skills to continue environmental programming in their city.

In other words, we are requesting that the city spend \$325,000 to ensure return on the investment of the \$2.1 million that has already been spent. This investment:

- enhances the capacity of citizens to provide services that the city may no longer be able to provide;
- protects the reputation of the City of Toronto amongst the thousands of community members with whom we work; and
- will result in increased community building and environmental impact long after the program has been completed.

The focus of the program in the fourth year is to equip individuals and groups with the skills and experience to run environmental projects *on their own*. The reduced program can still deliver this through four community animators who will:

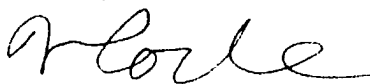
- mentor groups in accessing diverse funding sources and decrease dependence upon LGTO grants;
- train and mentor groups throughout project development and implementation, equipping them to function independently in future; and
- create city-wide and local opportunities for community groups to partner with one another to provide support and share expertise.

EcoSpark has developed this proposal to recognize not only the current financial climate, but also the value of a skilled and mobilized volunteer base and the potential for these volunteers to contribute to our City.

I ask you to consider this proposed solution to complete a project that creates precisely the efficiencies that this City's administration is seeking.

I can be reached by e-mail at Meredith@ecospark.ca or by phone at 647 258 3280 ext. 2005.

Yours Sincerely,



Meredith Cochrane
Executive Director

Encl. 'About Live Green Toronto Community Animation'

About Live Green Toronto Community Animation

Live Green Toronto Community Animation builds the capacity of Toronto citizens to address environmental concerns themselves and mobilizes the population to make this city a better place through volunteerism.

Community Animators have achieved this by: building networks of people and groups who want to undertake green initiatives; mentoring groups in how to raise funds to take initiatives forward; and building community capacity in terms of the skills required to undertake these initiatives.

We are currently in the third year of a five year program. In 2010 alone, our eight community animators:

- Supported groups to secure \$1,000 000 in funding. Over half of this came from funders working with a broader geographical remit than Toronto. So in short, the program brought over \$500,000 into the City of Toronto.
- Mobilized 8600 hours of volunteer work committed to improving and greening Toronto. This does not count the thousands of additional hours that volunteers consequently dedicated once animators had linked them with green groups and projects.
- Surpassed the milestone of 100 environmental projects run by community groups as a result of the program.

The effect that the Animators and the volunteers have on the City of Toronto truly comes to light when looking at the 106 green projects that are coming to fruition as a result of the Community Animation Program. To name only a few examples, these projects include: training on community gardening; tree planting and maintenance; a Spanish language website focusing on green issues; a green roof that doubles as space to support community activities; and a pollinator garden. Each of these projects builds new skills, strengthens communities and has an important environmental impact. Four case studies are outlined below.

- In the North region, 16 people were trained to in turn provide training to others in their communities on container gardening. This addressed both food security and environmental issues. These 16 people have - to date - run 21 other training sessions for over 338 new volunteers who can now have the skills to grow their own food. This train-the trainer approach was so successful that the Toronto Green Community secured funding to run the project on an ongoing basis.
- In the South region, two neighbourhood groups were connected in 2009 and began the Leslieville/Riverdale Tree Project. During the first year, volunteers planted and stewarded 193 front yard shade trees and almost 50 back yard trees.
- In the West region, a small community-based not-for-profit organization serving Latin American women, developed a Spanish-language Live Green website. This website focused on air quality and other environmental issues as well as providing support for the community in undertaking green initiatives themselves.
- In the East, the North Scarborough Salvation Army wanted to transform a barren corner into a community and pollinator garden. Animators provided: expertise in how to run information sessions; strategies to gain community support; contacts with key partners such as the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority; and guidance on how to apply for funding. The Salvation Army has now secured funding and is initiating the project in partnership with the TRCA.

Deputation for Budget Committee
Meredith Cochrane
December 7th, 2011

Thank you for the opportunity to speak. My name is Meredith Cochrane and I am the Executive Director of EcoSpark, the lead NGO that has been delivering the contract for the Live Green Toronto Community Animation service. I chose to speak today because overseeing the program has given me a very clear view of what it provides to the City of Toronto – both its environment and its people.

The Live Green Toronto Community Animation program was approved unanimously by council in 2007. It aims to reduce carbon emissions through equipping individuals to undertake activities within their communities.

As you all know, the draft budget terminates the Community Animation service, effective December 1st. The sudden discontinuation of the service drastically reduces its long-term impact and leaves many community partners struggling to deliver on current or planned projects, rather than maximizing the investment of \$2.1 million made into the project to date.

I recognize the difficult financial choices that Toronto City Council is facing. Today, I am proposing to you a cost-effective remedy. This remedy provides Toronto citizens with the skills to address environmental concerns without long-term reliance on the city. To achieve this, we request one additional contract year of community animation with a drastically reduced budget. Many councillors are already aware of this proposal. In fact the majority of the 44 councillors, have signed a letter stating that they want this reduced budget proposal to go forward.

The Community Animation service was designed as a five-year program to build sustained capacity of our citizenry without a sustained financial investment. In other words, EcoSpark is building a city of volunteers who can plan, fundraise for, and implement environmental initiatives *themselves*, support one another, and not rely on city funding to effect environmental change. We have just reached the end of the third year of a five year program.

One astute councillor provided an analogy that illustrates the importance of this. If we were operating an airline and making budget cuts, we wouldn't cut the fuel while the plane was in flight. These animators are the fuel that are driving a new movement of volunteerism, environmentalism and self reliance. Without the Community Animation service, the fledging movement loses the power that is driving it.

If there were another way to provide a service as effective and meaningful as Community Animation I would not be standing here. Community Animators live and volunteer in the communities they work with and have built a strong and trusting relationship with them.

With 25,000 people reached, and 106 green projects led by communities and supported by animators, the program has undoubtedly achieved its environmental objective. It has however, done much, much more than this.

- In its second year alone, it brought \$500,000 of new money into the city. Some of this money was invested in creating new green jobs.
- In terms of volunteerism, citizens devoted 8600 hours of work to environmental initiatives in 2010 alone.
- Over the course of the project, we reached over 70 groups based of underserved communities, minority populations and new Canadians. Assistance with projects was provided to 30 of these groups.

I urge you to consider this reduced budget proposal. It will allow you to maximize the \$2.1 million invested in the Community Animation program to-date and will result in a movement of self-reliant, capable and motivated citizens. If you would like to discuss this further with me, please do not hesitate to get in touch. I can be reached on 647 258 3280 extension 2005 or at Meredith@ecospark.ca. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,



Meredith Cochrane
Executive Director, EcoSpark