



## **REPORT TO TOWN BOARD**

**FROM: Andrew J. Quarnstrom, Township Supervisor**

**DATE: September 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2019**

**SUBJECT: Prosperity Gardens**

**A. Introduction:** The purpose of this Township Report is to provide an overview of the Prosperity Gardens proposal submitted by the Township to assume the operations and assets of Prosperity Gardens, Inc. for community gardening. These resolutions would approve the purchase of property at 301 North First Street from Prosperity Gardens, Inc. for \$9,000 and would approve two license agreements with the City of Champaign for production gardening on City-owned properties located at 306 and 306.5 North First Street and at various addresses over approximately one acre located in the Beardsley Park Neighborhood.

**B. Recommended Action:** The Township Administration recommends approval of the Resolutions.

### **C. Summary:**

In May of 2019, Prosperity Gardens requested proposals to take over all operations of Prosperity Gardens including assets and property. Based on the scope of what Prosperity Gardens does and the mission of the Township, the decision was made by Township staff to pursue the Request for Proposals.

### **D. Background:**

**1. Prosperity Gardens:** Prosperity Gardens is a 501c3 organization whose mission is to provide a hands-on garden-based education and green business employment opportunities. Created in 2010, it has served thousands of youth in our community with its mission in mind. Headquartered in the 300 block of N. First St., Prosperity Gardens has gardens on the east and west side of First Street as well as in the Beardsley Park neighborhood. Prosperity Gardens owns the land at 301 North First Street and holds licenses with the City of Champaign to use the land located at 306 and 306.5 North First Street and in the Beardsley Park neighborhood. Prosperity Gardens, Inc. is in the process of dissolution and was seeking an individual or entity to assume its property and assets, ideally to continue its mission.

**2. CU @ Work:** The Township, in partnership with CU at Home, started the CU @ Work program in August of 2018. At its inception, the program operated one day a week for 5 hours per day. Daily participant numbers ranged from 5-12 with an average number of participants of 8 per day. In February of 2019, the program added another 5-hour workday. Participants receive \$10 per hour of work at the end of their shift and would receive a meal provided by the Township or CU at Home. In addition, participants would have the opportunity to receive case management which is optional but not mandated. As of July 1, 2019, the program has employed over 60 homeless individuals, both men and women.

Much of the work that has been done thus far is beautification work. Crews have done extensive litter abatement throughout Champaign including downtown, mid-town, campus town, and the interstate 74 corridor. Crews have collected over 125 truckloads of garbage since the inception of the program.

In addition to the obvious success of beautification through Champaign, the program has provided income and case management for multiple participants and allowed a few participants to find permanent housing and or permanent employment. It has been widely covered in local media and received syndicated coverage throughout the nation in September of 2018.

**3. General Assistance:** The City of Champaign Township is mandated by State statute to provide General Assistance. The type of assistance the Township currently provides is General Assistance/Transitional Assistance. This format provides a monthly grant for individuals that are unable to work due to a mental or physical disability and are applying for Social Security.

The addition of Prosperity Gardens to the Township's program will allow an expansion of the Township's General Assistance Program to include a Work Fare program. This would allow some residents in the City of Champaign that are currently unemployed but able to work the opportunity to work at Prosperity Gardens for a small monthly grant to help offset costs while they are unemployed. Those accepted to the Township's new Work Fare program will be able to work at Prosperity Gardens as needed and for a period of time while still looking for gainful employment.

**4. History:** Prosperity Gardens was established in 2010. In June 2010, the City entered into a license agreement with the Don Moyer Boys and Girls Club for the construction of a community garden and associated structures at 301 North First Street, the location of the former Champaign Police evidence building. The license agreement was assigned to Prosperity Gardens, Inc. in 2012. In March 2016, the City approved the sale of 301 North First Street to Prosperity Gardens, Inc. Since the purchase of 301 North First, Prosperity Gardens has demolished a portion of the old police evidence building that was not repairable. Additionally, Prosperity Gardens has added some garden sheds, some greenhouse structures, and some outdoor furniture and picnic equipment. In April of 2015, the City Council executed a license agreement with Prosperity Gardens, Inc. for the use of City owned land at 306 and 306.5 North First Street. Prosperity Gardens has been operating raised beds at both locations since that time.

In April of 2016 the City of Champaign executed a license agreement with Prosperity Gardens to establish a production garden for vacant land in the Beardsley Park neighborhood bordered by North Walnut Street, North Street, and North Champaign Street. Prosperity Gardens made significant improvements to the Beardsley Park property including fencing, a walk-in cooler, produce wash sinks and equipment, as well as water and power.

In May of 2019 Prosperity Gardens sent out a Request for Proposals to take over all operations, real property, and assets of the organization, as the organization itself planned to dissolve. The City of Champaign Township, in recognizing the benefit and similarity in missions, submitted a proposal to absorb all operations and all real property of Prosperity Gardens. The Township's proposal was chosen by Prosperity Gardens in July of 2019.

### **5. Proposal:**

The City of Champaign Township's Proposal to Prosperity Gardens includes taking over all aspects of the Prosperity Gardens operations including all property and assets, included as Attachment A. Prosperity

Gardens, Inc. will dissolve as an organization, but the Township will continue to use the name Prosperity Gardens to refer to the program because the name and mission are widely recognized in the community. This includes sale to the Township of property at 301 North First Street. The City of Champaign will terminate its license agreements with Prosperity Gardens, Inc. and enter into new license agreements with the Township to operate production gardens at the properties at 306 and 306.5 North First Street and at 710, 710 ½, 714, and 718 N. Walnut, 53 E. North St., and 709, 709 ½, 711, and 713 N. Champaign Street in the Beardsley Park neighborhood.

If approved by the Town Board, the Township will purchase all personal property as well as real estate at 301 North First St. for \$9,000.00. This is less than the Township's initial offering of \$15,000 and intended only to cover Prosperity Gardens current costs and not allow for net proceeds. The purchase price includes the real estate in addition to all personal property currently located at 301 North First. Additionally, the cost includes the new walk in cooler at Beardsley Park, gardening equipment including lawn mowers and tools, a school bus, and two commercial refrigerators. The price also includes an amount equal to the real estate taxes Prosperity Gardens paid on the property for the 2018 tax year, payable in 2019. Prosperity Gardens has applied for an exemption of property taxes for the 301 North First St. property for the 2018 tax year. The exemption has been approved by the Board of Review, but Prosperity Gardens is awaiting confirmation of exemption from the Illinois Department of Revenue. Should that exemption be granted, and a refund given, the Township will receive the refunded amount of approximately \$3,353.82, effectively lowering the purchase price further. The purchase price includes all permanent property at the various locations as well as the following personal property:

- Riding Lawn Mower
- Commercial Refrigerator (Model G3-2R)
- School Bus (XXXXXXX)
- Gspan Gothprem High Tunnel with Film
- All remaining miscellaneous property at all locations.

**E. Alternatives:**

1. Approve the purchase of 301 North First Street and associated personal property listed in the purchase agreement from Prosperity Gardens, Inc. in the amount of \$9,000.00, and approve two license agreements with the City of Champaign for property located at 306 and 306.5 North First Street and 710, 710 ½, 714, and 718 N. Walnut, 53 E. North St., and 709, 709 ½, 711, and 713 N. Champaign Street in the Beardsley Park neighborhood.
2. Do not approve the purchase of 301 N. First Street and associated personal property from Prosperity Gardens, and/or do not approve the license agreements with the City of Champaign for property located at 306 and 306.5 North First Street and 710, 710 ½, 714, and 718 N. Walnut, 53 E. North St., and 709, 709 ½, 711, and 713 N. Champaign Street in the Beardsley Park neighborhood, and provide direction to the Township Supervisor.

**F. Discussion of Alternatives:**

**Alternative 1** Approve the purchase of 301 North First Street and associated personal property listed in the purchase agreement from Prosperity Gardens, Inc. in the amount of \$9,000.00, and approve two license agreements with the City of Champaign for property located at 306 and 306.5 North First Street and 710, 710 ½, 714, and 718 N. Walnut, 53 E. North St., and 709, 709 ½, 711, and 713 N. Champaign Street in the Beardsley Park neighborhood.

**a. Advantages**

- Allows the Township to expand its mission in working with the most at-risk in Champaign.
- Will reinvigorate desperately needed programming centered around at-risk youth and the homeless that would otherwise be nonexistent if Prosperity Gardens ceases operation.
- Prosperity Gardens continues to be an anchor of progress in the North First St. corridor.

**b. Disadvantages**

- Requires additional costs to the Township. Although the Township will recognize additional personnel costs as well as operational costs, the Township will be able to absorb those costs without increasing revenue. The Township will continue to use and build upon the partnerships with other agencies including the University of Illinois, Don Moyer Boys and Girls Club, the University of Illinois Extension, and Champaign Unit 4 Schools as well as others. Additionally, the Township will work to partner with other agencies and business to offset costs for programming and capital improvement.

**Alternative 2** Do not approve the purchase of 301 N. First Street and associated personal property from Prosperity Gardens, and/or do not approve the license agreements with the City of Champaign for property located at 306 and 306.5 North First Street and 710, 710 ½, 714, and 718 N. Walnut, 53 E. North St., and 709, 709 ½, 711, and 713 N. Champaign Street in the Beardsley Park neighborhood, and provide direction to the Township Supervisor.

**a. Advantages**

- No additional cost to the Township.

**b. Disadvantages**

- It is possible that the programs and benefits provided by Prosperity Gardens may never return.
- The Township couldn't expand its General Assistance program or its CU @ Work program to include Prosperity Gardens.
- Continued degradation of Prosperity Gardens property and infrastructure.

**G. Community Input:** The public has had the opportunity to provide input on the Prosperity Gardens project at previous Township meetings when the Township Supervisor has advised the Board on the

Township's intent to submit a proposal. Input can also be made by the public during the public comments section of the meeting at which this item is considered.

**H. Budget Impact:** The Township will be adding 1 FTE employee to oversee the operations of Prosperity Gardens as well as work with the CU @ Work program. The Township currently funds a 1/4 employee for the CU @ Work program so Prosperity Gardens will require a net 3/4 new employee. The cost of the new employee and the costs of operating (power, water, etc.) the 301 N. First St. will be the only significant reoccurring costs. In the future, the Township may increase its part time season staff as needed and as demand increases.

The Township will have one-time costs over the next few years to make renovations to the 301 N. First St. property. These improvements will be brought forward to the Board as needed and as required by the Township's purchasing policy.

As noted previously, no additional taxing revenue will be needed. The Township will attempt to find relative grant funding as well as partner with agencies to offset costs.

**I. Staffing Impact:** Approximately 10 hours of legal, planning, and Township administration were used in preparation of the report, contract, and Resolutions. An additional FTE employee will be added to staff as noted in the report.

Prepared by: Andrew Quarnstrom  
Township Supervisor

Reviewed by: Jennifer Bannon  
Township Attorney

Attachment A: Township Prosperity Gardens Proposal