



Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago

Press Release

Allison Fore

Public and Intergovernmental Affairs Officer

312.751.6626

allison.fore@mwrdd.org

100 East Erie Street, Chicago, Illinois 60611

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Mega plants sprout from MWRD biosolids at Franklin Park garden

The sunflowers in Franklin Park this summer soar to nearly 12 feet tall and the corn husks reach 18 inches thanks in part to a valuable resource recovered by Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago (MWRD) that is spurring plant growth across Cook County to new heights.

Last year, Franklin Park Mayor Barrett Pedersen and Franklin Park Deputy Commissioner of Utilities Andrew Smolen converted a narrow strip of grass parallel to the northbound lanes of the Tri-State Tollroad into a bountiful garden. They contacted the MWRD, and the MWRD donated and delivered 127 tons of Class A exceptional quality (EQ) biosolids last October.

It turns out that 127 tons of EQ air-dried biosolids from the MWRD had such a dramatic effect that Mayor Pedersen and Deputy Commissioner Smolen urged MWRD officials to come check out what they had created. MWRD Commissioner Kari K. Steele, MWRD Biosolids Manager Ahmad Laban and Environmental Soil Scientist Dominic Brose visited the Franklin Park garden recently and were impressed with what they saw.

"I greatly commend Mayor Pedersen and Commissioner Smolen for their efforts in transforming an unused piece of property into a fabulous mini-farm," said Commissioner Steele. "I think this is a stunning example of putting recovered resources to work."

Biosolids are an environmentally friendly product of the water treatment process that supplies organic matter and improves soil structure and porosity to allow plants to more effectively utilize nutrients. Under the Illinois Environmental Protection Act, signed into law in 2015, biosolids were formally recognized as a safe, beneficial and renewable resource that should be used locally. Rather than being hauled off miles to distant farms and landfills as in years past, the biosolids are now beneficially reused here in Cook County. Air-dried biosolids look and feel like dark, fine-textured topsoil, and are used on turfgrass at golf courses, athletic fields, parks and other recreational areas, and for restoration of brownfields and other disturbed lands.

"The Franklin Park community has continued to be a tremendous partner," said MWRD President Mariyana Spyropoulos. "Whether it's promoting sustainability practices, keeping an eye on small stream management and working toward stormwater solutions like rain barrels, oak trees or other green infrastructure, we hope others see this success story and participate in helping us protect our environment one community garden at a time."



From L to R: Franklin Park Village Trustee Andy Ybarra, MWRD Managing Civil Engineer Ahmad Laban, MWRD Commissioner Kari K. Steele, Franklin Park Village President Barrett Pedersen, Franklin Park Utilities Deputy Commissioner Andrew Smolen and MWRD Environmental Soil Scientist Dominic Brose check out the sunflowers in Franklin Park's new garden that rose from a bed of MWRD biosolids to astonishing heights.

In addition to corn and flowers, the village is growing pumpkins and about 180 oak trees that came from the MWRD's Restore the Canopy program to help manage stormwater. Franklin Park officials are seeking to donate the food produced to a local food bank. Franklin Park, which celebrates its 125th anniversary in 2017, has been a leader in promoting natural lawn care, composting, recycling, water conservation, energy-efficient vehicles and sustainable construction practices. The village and Franklin Park District also have an additional community garden, vegetable garden and butterfly garden, and Commissioner Smolen is a certified arborist.

"When the MWRD approached us regarding the use of biosolids we were thrilled to work with them," said Mayor Pedersen. "We will soon harvest the corn grown near our pumping station. We are always seeking alternatives to using chemicals and to find ways to promote sustainable practices. Everything we do with the MWRD always turns out green for our Village."

Communities and organizations interested in using MWRD's air-dried biosolids or compost are urged to contact the MWRD at biosolids@mwrdd.org or learn more by visiting www.mwrdd.org.

Recovering Resources, Transforming Water

Established in 1889, the MWRD (www.mwrdd.org) is an award winning, special purpose government agency responsible for used water treatment and stormwater management in Cook County, Illinois.