

To:

Mike Greene, City Administrator
City of Lathrup Village
27400 Southfield Road
Lathrup Village, MI 48076
mgreene@lathrupvillage.org

Date: September 30, 2025

Re: Submission for RFD—Proposal for Development by Suburban Sown

Dear Mr. Greene and Selection Committee,

I am pleased to submit Suburban Sown's proposal for the redevelopment of the DDA owned 0.32-acre parcel in Lathrup Village. Our vision is to establish a **community-focused farm and plant nursery** that enhances neighborhood character, supports sustainability, and provides education for residents and visitors. Our approach unites seasonal programming, hands-on engagement, and local wellness with complementary uses that enliven public space and support pedestrian activity consistent with Lathrup Village's redevelopment goals.

Planned improvements include a **2,000 sq. ft. greenhouse, an office, bathroom, and processing building**, as well as **fruit trees, cut flower rows, and an educational gathering area**. We plan to remove invasive species from the site and replace them with native plantings to improve stormwater management and pollinator habitat.

Suburban Sown brings the right balance of **agricultural expertise and business leadership** to ensure success. My background includes a degree in Community Sustainability, a Permaculture Design Certification, and extensive farm development experience. I am joined by my investor and partner, Steve Dion, CEO of Dion Leadership, who provides financial backing and strategic oversight.

We are excited about the opportunity to partner with Lathrup Village and to contribute to a project that delivers both community and ecological value. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Claire Dion
Founder and Farmer, Suburban Sown

Understanding the Request

Suburban Sown fully understands the City's request for a developer that can bring forward a project which is not only financially viable but also contributes to the quality, character, and sustainability of Lathrup Village. We recognize that the City is seeking a partner who can transform underutilized space into a development that provides **community value, ecological resilience, and long-term stewardship**.

Our team has planned meaningful improvements to the **0.32-acre parcel** identified for this project. Work within the next 12 months would include:

- **Ecological Restoration:** Complete removal of invasive species, such as buckthorn, and replacement with a diverse palette of native plants, supporting stormwater management, pollinator habitat, and long-term ecological balance for the surrounding area.
- **Infrastructure Development:** Construction of a 2,000 sq. ft. greenhouse to support year-round propagation of plants, herbs, and nursery stock, as well as plans for an office, bathroom, and processing building to ensure the site can function as a professional, accessible, and compliant agricultural business.
- **Food & Floral Production:** Establishment of fruit trees and cut flower rows to provide both ecological and aesthetic value, while also supporting local food systems and agritourism.
- **Community Amenities:** Design of an educational seating area for workshops, classes, and public events, ensuring that the site functions as a true community asset in addition to being a productive farm.

We understand that the City values not only economic development but also the enhancement of community life. Suburban Sown's approach aligns with this vision by combining productive agricultural use with ecological restoration and public education. By improving soil health, increasing green infrastructure, and creating spaces where residents can learn and gather, the project will directly support both neighborhood vitality and the City's sustainability goals.

Our analysis of the surrounding neighborhood demonstrates a strong opportunity for community integration. Lathrup Village is home to residents who value walkable neighborhoods, green space, and local enterprise. By situating a community-focused farm within this context, we can provide a unique amenity that enriches local life while showcasing Lathrup Village as a leader in innovative suburban land use.

In addition to our ecological and agricultural expertise, our team brings the business leadership and financial backing necessary to ensure that this project is sustainable for the long term. With Claire's experience in permaculture, sustainable agriculture, and community engagement, paired with the investment and strategic guidance of Steve, CEO of Dion Leadership, we are

positioned to deliver a project that meets both the practical requirements of development and the aspirational goals of the City.

In terms of site analysis, the parcel of land is strategically located in an area with a mix of residential, commercial, and green spaces. It is easily accessible by foot and public transportation, offering the potential to attract a diverse group of visitors, including families, young professionals, and local businesses. The neighborhood has shown increasing interest in urban agriculture and sustainability through the establishment of a community and children's garden, which will further the support and success of the farm.

Suburban Sown views this project as an opportunity to partner with Lathrup Village in creating a lasting community asset—a site that demonstrates sustainability in action, fosters community pride, and brings residents together around food, flowers, and shared learning. We have an interest in incorporating the management of the Lathrup Village Community Garden and Children's Garden to continue the support for these ongoing projects. We are committed to working closely with local stakeholders, including residents, schools, and businesses, to ensure the farm meets the needs of the neighborhood while supporting broader environmental and social objectives.

Developer Organization and Capacity

- **Entity:** Suburban Sown Farm and Education Center, LLC (new LLC to be established), run by Claire Dion.
- **Structure:** Small operational team consisting of founder, program coordinator (to enter after 12 month site development is complete), and seasonal horticultural staff/educators.

a. Developer Team Partners and Roles

- **Claire Dion, Developer/Project Manager** resides at 30129 Fairfax St, Southfield MI, 48076
 - **Relevant Experience:** B.S. in Community Sustainability and Agricultural Food Systems; Permaculture Design Certification; local government experience, experience developing an 11-acre permaculture-based tea farm in Plymouth, MI; work experience on four farms; hosting community workdays as invasive species removal technician.
 - **Role:** Lead planning, design, and implementation of the farm-based project; day-to-day management; social media/marketing; coordination of community events; oversight of farm operations and staff.

- **Steve Dion, Strategic Advisor & Investor** resides at 10737 Stoney Point Drive, South Lyon MI, 48178
 - **Relevant Experience:** CEO of Dion Leadership, with over 30 of expertise in organizational leadership, executive coaching, and business development. Experienced in providing strategic vision and financial oversight for organizational growth.
 - **Role:** Provide financial investment, high-level strategic direction, leadership coaching for team development, and business sustainability planning.
- **Consultants and Contractors (as needed):**
 - Greenhouse Technician (TBD): Nifty Hoops, located in Ann Arbor, MI will support the site layout, infrastructure design, compliance, and build of the greenhouse infrastructure.
 - Construction/Contractors (TBD): Infrastructure buildout, utilities, and site improvements.

(1-page resume for Founder, Claire Dion, included in appendix. Steve Dion's resume and financial support letter will be sent following proposal submission, but no later than October 15).

b. Positive Team Continuity

The proposed team represents a strong balance of hands-on agricultural experience and strategic business leadership. Claire and Steve have worked together closely to shape the vision and financial structure of Suburban Sown, ensuring continuity between planning, financing, and implementation.

c. Additional Background Information:

I, Claire, bring four years academic knowledge and 5 years of hands-on experience in agriculture, with a particular focus on nursery management, horticulture, and small-scale urban farming. Over the course of my career, I have successfully operated my own nursery business, where I managed everything from plant cultivation to sales, community outreach, and event coordination. This experience has provided me with a deep understanding of the technical and logistical challenges of running an urban farm, including site preparation, crop management, soil health, and pest control.

In addition to my practical experience, my background in local government has provided me with valuable insight into the regulatory processes involved in land use, permitting, and community engagement. I have successfully navigated zoning laws, negotiated with local agencies, and built strong relationships with stakeholders to ensure project success. This skill

set will be crucial in the development of the urban farm, as I will be able to effectively manage permitting requirements, coordinate with city officials and state regulatory staff, and engage with community members throughout the process.

This project aligns with my passion for both sustainable agriculture and community development. The farm will serve as a living example of how urban spaces can be repurposed for food production, while also providing a space for the community to learn and engage with the food system. I am committed to creating a vibrant, welcoming, and educational space that fosters sustainability, environmental stewardship, and community connection.

d. Project Synopsis:

- **Scope:** The development of an urban herb and flower farm, including raised garden beds, greenhouses, and community spaces for educational workshops and events.
- **Budget:** The budget for the project will include costs for site preparation, soil testing, infrastructure (fencing, raised beds, greenhouses, water systems, office and processing building with bathroom), and plants and materials. A detailed budget will be submitted upon request.
- **Schedule:** The development is expected to be completed in phases over a 12- 16 month period, with the first phase focused on site preparation and installation of infrastructure, followed by planting and the launch of community programs.

e. Anticipated Development Schedule (tentative):

- **February–April 2026:** Planning, permitting, and seeding; infrastructure pre-development and site preparation.
- **May–June 2026:** Initial construction phases (e.g., utilities, greenhouse, utilities, storage).
- **July–October 2026:** Begin planting and setting up farm operations, hosting first community engagement events, and market testing.
- **November 2026:** Infrastructure completion; financial and operational review.
- **December 2026:** Reflection and evaluation. Planning for full opening in May of 2027.

This project leverages both my agricultural expertise and my experience in local government to create a valuable resource for the community. I am confident that my qualifications make me a strong candidate for developing this urban farm and look forward to the opportunity to contribute to the City's goals for sustainability and community development.

Additionally, there is potential to partner with local restaurants, businesses, and market vendors to create mutually beneficial relationships. These partnerships could involve supplying fresh herbs and flowers to restaurants or hosting pop-up markets on the farm. As the city increasingly embraces green spaces and sustainable urban initiatives, I believe this project will align with and enhance those efforts.

Separate Financial Information:

As per the City's request, I have submitted the required confidential financial information in a separate sealed envelope. This information is for myself as the one with ownership interest in the development, while Steve Dion's financial information will be sent following proposal submission, but no later than October 15.

Summary Statement

Suburban Sown seeks to partner with the City of Lathrup Village to transform our nursery business into a **community-focused farm and educational hub** that will serve residents and visitors for years to come. Our mission is not only to grow plants, herbs, and make value-added products, but also to cultivate a space that supports **education, sustainability, and community well-being**.

This project will bring direct benefits to the local community:

- **Stormwater Management & Ecological Resilience:** By planting a diverse habitat of native perennials, flowers, and fruit trees, the farm will contribute to improve **stormwater infiltration and reduced runoff**, helping the City meet ecological and infrastructure goals. Native plants also provide critical pollinator habitat, strengthening local ecosystems and ensuring long-term resilience.
- **Beauty & Quality of Life:** The addition of vibrant gardens, flowering plants, and fruit trees will enhance the **aesthetic value of the neighborhood**, creating a welcoming green space that residents can enjoy season after season. By replacing underutilized land with thoughtfully designed farm features, Suburban Sown will add a distinctive and attractive character to the City.
- **Education & Community Engagement:** We will host **workshops, classes, and volunteer opportunities** that empower residents to learn about gardening, food production, herbal medicine, and sustainable land practices. By teaching hands-on skills, from planting a home garden to understanding the role of native plants, Suburban Sown will equip the community with knowledge they can apply in their own yards and lives.

- **Economic & Social Value:** As both a **local business and community resource**, the project will create opportunities for residents to access locally grown plants and products, attend educational events, and engage with a working farm right in their neighborhood. This aligns with the City's vision of fostering vibrant, mixed-use spaces that combine economic development with community enrichment.

Our background includes developing and managing farm projects across Michigan, from an 11-acre permaculture-based tea farm to smaller-scale community initiatives. These experiences demonstrate our ability to integrate **food systems, education, and ecological stewardship** into projects that are financially viable and community-centered. With the added expertise of our partner and investor, CEO of Dion Leadership, we bring both the **technical agricultural skills and the organizational leadership capacity** needed to deliver this project successfully.

Suburban Sown envisions this farm as a **living classroom and community anchor**; a place where sustainability is visible, where food and flowers grow side by side, and where residents come together to learn, connect, and celebrate the natural beauty of Lathrup Village.

Thank you for your consideration.

Submitted by,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Claire Dion". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Claire" and the last name "Dion" clearly distinguishable.

Claire Dion
Founder and Farmer, Suburban Sown

CLAIRE DION

WORK EXPERIENCE

Gateway Farm, Value Added Program

March 2024 - Present

Harvest and Processing Manager

- Managed workflow for efficient harvesting and processing operations across multiple crop varieties.
- Developed and maintained standard operating procedures for drying, storing, and packaging herbs to maximize shelf life and flavor.
- Utilized a commercial kitchen to process raw herbs into value-added products, including herbal teas.
- Trained and guided seasonal staff on processing techniques, safe food handling, and quality control.

City of Ferndale, City Manager's Office

April 2021- September 2023

Zero Waste Program Coordinator

- Implemented Southeast Michigan's first municipal compost drop off program, reaching participation of 800 households within 1 year while educating residents and businesses on composting techniques and benefits.
- Secured over \$450,000 in grant funding from state and private sources, supporting projects of waste reduction and recovery initiatives, recycling infrastructure, stormwater quality, and urban agriculture.
- Enforced sustainable landscaping compliance and assisted residents in choosing native plants, offering guidance on species, planting techniques, and maintenance for enhanced ecological value.

City of East Lansing, Parks and Recreation

March 2019- November 2019

Environmental Stewardship Coordinator

- Used GIS to track invasive species trends, creating eradication plans to improve park areas.
- Developed educational content for social media, print materials, and in-person workshops.
- Led bi-weekly volunteer projects, training 300+ volunteers, removing 2,000+ pounds of invasive plants and planting 40+ species of native flora to preserve ecosystem health.

MSU Tollgate Farm and Education Center

June 2018- August 2018

Educational Leader

- Led youth in educational activities focused on promoting food system awareness and agricultural practices.
- Utilized 160 acres of farm and forest to create lesson plans and enriching experiences that fostered a connection to the natural world and discovery science.

EDUCATION

Permaculture Design Certification

September- April 2024

Oregon State University

Bachelor of Science in Environmental Studies and Sustainability

May 2020

Minor in Sustainable Agricultural Food Systems

Michigan State University, East Lansing, MI

Environmental Sciences Masters Exchange Program

January- March 2020

Specialized areas included climate change adaption and globalization of food production

Wageningen University & Research, Netherlands

PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

Residential Initiative on the Study of the Environment (RISE): MSU, East Lansing, MI

2016- 2019

- Cooperative training greenhouse management, animal husbandry, bee keeping, and vermicomposting.

Suburban Sown Proposed Site Plan:



- Native Plant Rows
- Office and Processing Building
- Seating
- Greenhouse
- Driveway
- Materials Bay
- Flower and Herb Rows
- Fruit Tree Guilds
- Fence Line
- Signage

Suburban Sown Development Inspiration Images:

