

# London Urban Agriculture Strategy [DRAFT: May 5, 2017]

**Whatever the scale — backyard, balcony, and beyond — urban agriculture helps bring communities together, and offers many social, economic, environmental, and health benefits.**

Defined simply and broadly, urban agriculture is the practice of growing, processing, sharing, and distributing food (vegetables, fruit, nuts, and small livestock) within the city. Urban agriculture is an important component of London's social, cultural, educational, economic, and ecological systems, and includes not only individuals growing food for their own use, but also commercial/entrepreneurial activities in which there is a sales component.

This strategy envisions a city that thoughtfully integrates agriculture into its urban fabric, finding ways to grow, process and distribute food for the social, economic and environmental benefit of all Londoners where a wide variety of urban agriculture initiatives are undertaken by individuals, communities, organizations, and businesses with the City playing an active role in ensuring its success.

The aim of this urban agriculture strategy is to help the municipality and the communities of London work together, and support each other, in developing a positive, enabling environment for urban agriculture in the city.

There is currently a great deal of urban agricultural activity in London, and it seems timely to develop a deliberate strategy in order to help coordinate efforts and clarify roles of the City and community stakeholders, in order to focus priorities and identify resources that would assist communities in moving urban agriculture forward.

The development of this strategy has been community-driven, based on extensive consultation that includes public events, information sessions, and surveys. The City of London partnered with Evergreen (a Canadian charitable organization dedicated to making cities flourish) to develop the strategy, and the team would like to acknowledge and thank the hundreds of people who devoted so much time and energy to this initiative.

The recommended priority actions — to be lead by the community, the City, or the two in partnership — are grouped into five broad categories:

- \* **Growing**
- \* **Processing**
- \* **Distribution**
- \* **Food Loss and Recovery**
- \* **Education and Connections**

Along with the recommended priorities, included in each section is a “Growing Into the Future” list of possible initiatives to consider for further action and for inspiration.

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### **The Benefits of Urban Agriculture**

Cities around the world are recognizing the value of urban agriculture in terms of physical and mental health; quality of life; environmental resilience; and community-building. Some of the benefits of urban agriculture include:

- \* Access to nutritious, affordable food.
- \* Physical activity and time spent outdoors.
- \* Mindfulness and relaxation.
- \* Interaction with neighbours and community-building.
- \* Reduction in greenhouse gas emissions when food is produced locally.
- \* Creation of habitat for pollinators.
- \* Stewardship and beautification of land.
- \* Economic development and job training.
- \* Engagement of diverse communities.

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### **What We Heard: Overarching Themes for Urban Agriculture in London**

A number of ideas were repeated throughout the community consultation—ideas that connect with all aspects of this strategy and that could be applied towards implementation and moving urban agriculture forward in London.

- \* Urban agriculture is a priority for the City of London - supportive municipal policies, regulations, and bylaws create a positive environment for urban agriculture, existing barriers that restrict the development of urban agriculture are removed;
- \* Social justice and equity, along with food security and food sovereignty, anchor all aspects of urban agriculture in London;
- \* Indigenous communities are involved in the strategy through outreach and a commitment to engaging Indigenous communities is a priority;
- \* Urban agriculture is accessible to everyone, including people with disabilities and marginalized and racialized communities, in particular;
- \* Health, well-being, and access to healthy, nutritious local food are priorities for the Strategy and implementation;
- \* Entrepreneurial activities are nurtured and located in scale appropriate sites;
- \* A strong food network is supported to take the lead on many urban agriculture initiatives in the city;
- \* Links between urban, peri-urban, and regional producers and consumers of food are cultivated, and coordination and sharing across communities is encouraged;

- \* Urban agriculture promotes organic and ecological practices;
  - \* City staff are enabled to promote urban agriculture and implement the urban agriculture strategy;
  - \* An Urban Agriculture Strategy evolves over time with opportunities for input and feedback; and,
  - \* Provides an opportunity for urban residents to participate in and advance London's food system.
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*[BOX OR SIDEBAR highlighted in some way graphically]*

*London has taken many steps to support a strong, resilient food system.*

- \* *The Community Food Assessment, completed in June 2016, outlines actions needed to enhance the local food system and promote food security, and includes a section on community-based urban agriculture.*
- \* *The City's new Official Plan promotes community gardens and municipal investment in local food production, and includes the goal of eliminating food deserts (areas where nutritious and affordable food is not available).*
- \* *The Community Garden Strategic Plan, completed in September 2015, outlines the many ways the City is committed to improving community gardens on public land in London.*
- \* *London's Food Charter, developed by the Child & Youth Network and endorsed by Council in 2011, envisions the city as a food-secure community.*
- \* *In partnership with the Middlesex-London Health Unit and the London Community Foundation, the City of London has helped to develop a local Food Policy Council, which guides actions and policies related to London's food system.*
- \* *The City has a number of existing, related plans, policies, and strategies—for example, for pollinator protection and for the promotion of naturalization—and these plans, policies, and strategies complement the urban agriculture strategy and, together, help build a healthy city.*
- \* *The City of London is developing an online Urban Agriculture Inventory—an interactive inventory based on public input—documenting existing assets, identifying available resources, supportive organizations, and potential lands that could be used for urban agriculture, in an effort to facilitate connections between urban agriculture and local government and community priorities.*

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## **Guiding Principles for London's Urban Agriculture Strategy**

- 1) London's Urban Agriculture Strategy is a living, dynamic strategy that facilitates action and complements the region's vibrant rural agricultural sector.
  - 2) London's Urban Agriculture Strategy is part of the London Plan's broader city-building strategy for planning vibrant, healthy, safe and fulfilling neighbourhoods.
  - 3) London's Urban Agriculture Strategy promotes education, training, and food literacy for everyone.
  - 4) London's Urban Agriculture Strategy strengthens urban agriculture assets by documenting and facilitating initiatives on public, private, and institutional land, and protecting and enhancing local food infrastructure.
  - 5) London's Urban Agriculture Strategy enhances the natural environment and builds ecological resilience in the face of climate change, conserves resources, and enhances biodiversity.
  - 6) London's Urban Agriculture Strategy creates an enabling policy environment for urban agriculture by encouraging the development of supportive municipal policies, regulations, and bylaws, and removing policy barriers.
  - 7) London's Urban Agriculture Strategy supports community-based decision-making and leadership, and promotes partnerships and collaboration.
  - 8) London's Urban Agriculture Strategy engages diverse communities by recognizing the social and cultural importance, and promoting access to healthy, local, culturally appropriate food.
  - 9) London's Urban Agriculture Strategy facilitates links and coordination across communities and organizations.
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The following five broad categories, under which priority actions are grouped, were identified through a community process — first at a community meeting on February 4, 2017, and then further refined through a follow-up survey.

An integral aspect of the urban agriculture strategy is to determine roles and responsibilities with regards to implementation. The next phase of the strategy will focus on this.

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## **GROWING:**

### **Top Priorities:**

#### **1) Urban Farms:**

An urban farm can take many forms—individual plots for commercial produce sales, or a community farm growing food collectively for a food bank, as just two examples. Likewise, the scale can vary—from a demonstration plot to a small commercial operation.

### **What We Heard from the Community:**

There was a great deal of interest in developing an urban farm in London, but access to land was an issue.

### **Actions:**

- \* Determine community interest in and capacity for involvement in an urban farm.
- \* Develop a vision and model (including management structure), and identify lead partners for the farm project.
- \* Determine the most appropriate location and size for an urban farm, and how the City could facilitate access to a suitable area of land.
- \* Develop business plan to implement the proposed vision and model.
- \* Evaluate bylaws and zoning rules with respect to their role in enabling urban farms.

## **2) Urban “Foodscaping”:**

Making food production “visible” within the everyday life of the city—for example, through food-growing projects on boulevards and in parks—is a key feature of “foodscaping” the city. Also referred to as edible landscaping, one way this is effectively achieved is to provide people with multiple access points for involvement in urban agriculture, which enhances the public realm and helps to ensure inclusivity in public space.

### **What We Heard from the Community:**

There was a great deal of interest in inserting food production into urban spaces through, for example, community gardens, food forests, edible boulevard plantings, and public orchards, and in particular through utilizing unused, abandoned, or neglected land where Municipal plans are not in place for other uses long-term.

### **Actions:**

- \* Evaluate the potential of public land available in the city for public foodscaping.
- \* Distribute supportive resources such as topsoil, mulch, compost, and rain barrels to public food-growing projects along with education materials to ensure proper and safe usage of the resources
- \* Ensure access to reasonably priced soil tests.
- \* Coordinate seed exchanges through community centres, libraries, etc.
- \* Provide educational materials regarding environmentally responsible and safe urban foraging that doesn’t harm natural areas.
- \* Explore ways to encourage institutional involvement in foodscaping of landscapes at places such as churches, hospitals, etc.
- \* Replace municipal planter box plantings with native fruit/nut/edible species where a maintenance program is in place.
- \* Examine existing food forests for potential expansion.

- \* Consider education, awareness and information exchange events between municipal staff and community volunteers regarding foodscaping opportunities in the city.
- \* Ensure good management practices are undertaken to prevent pests and locate edible trees in locations where they can be safely maintained over the long-term.

### **3) Urban Livestock:**

It is possible to raise food-producing animals such as hens, quail, bees, and fish within the urban environment, though it is important to do so within the context of a strong regulatory framework that ensures animal welfare and reduces the risk of pests and diseases.

#### **What We Heard from the Community:**

There was a great deal of interest in urban livestock, in particular backyard hens and bees, throughout the public consultations. There were strong opinions in favour of and opposed to promoting urban livestock in London, though a compromise position could include a Backyard Hen Pilot Project in the city.

#### **Actions:**

- \* Compile existing public health research into the risks and benefits of backyard hens from a public health perspective.
- \* Compile existing research into bylaws that allow backyard hens in other Canadian cities and look into these cities' experiences with backyard hens, including benefits and problems associated with backyard hens and how those cities addressed the issues.
- \* Investigate a Backyard Hen Pilot Project in London.
- \* Ensure that animal health, security, and welfare are priorities in the potential development of enabling urban livestock policies and pilot projects.
- \* Survey current research on the effects of urban beekeeping on native pollinators in cities to ensure that urban beekeeping does not adversely affect native pollinators.

[BOX OR SIDEBAR:

### **Growing Into the Future**

- \* *community greenhouses, with greenhouses heated by waste*
- \* *community hydroponics*
- \* *community composting*
- \* *community orchards*
- \* *vertical gardens*
- \* *rainwater collection*
- \* *aquaponics*
- \* *planting and maintaining fruit trees on new developments*
- \* *incentivizing food production on private lands with owners of apartment buildings and other institutions*

- \* *green roof bylaw requiring developers to include green roofs and/or living walls in developments*
- \* *creation of an “Agrihood,” a neighbourhood where many urban agriculture opportunities are integrated into the design and fabric of the neighbourhood*

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## **PROCESSING:**

### **Top Priorities:**

#### **1) Community Kitchens:**

Community kitchens are integrated into existing community facilities to create spaces where people come together to learn about food preparation, processing, and preserving, often from a social equity approach for marginalized and racialized communities.

#### **What We Heard from the Community:**

There was strong support for creating facilities such as community kitchens in various neighbourhoods in order to encourage local food processing and to address social justice issues related to marginalized and racialized communities.

#### **Actions:**

- \* Inventory existing facilities that could be used for inspected community kitchens and community garden programs.
- \* Investigate health regulations related to food safety in the context of community kitchens and other forms of food processing.
- \* Make modest upgrades to kitchen facilities to enhance food safety.
- \* Work with public health to provide food handler training for community kitchen users.
- \* Facilitate community access to appropriate kitchen spaces.

#### **2) Resource Sharing:**

Tool libraries, seed swaps, and other forms of sharing and lending help make resources such as seeds and tools available to the public at no cost and serve to facilitate community projects. Examples include gardening equipment such as rototillers, heritage seeds, which are in general commercially unavailable, and food processing equipment such as dehydrators.

#### **What We Heard from the Community:**

Access to tools — both for growing food and processing food — can be a barrier for people, so a method of sharing tools would be helpful.

**Actions:**

- \* Investigate existing tool libraries and tool- and resource-sharing projects in other cities to see if these models could be used in London.
- \* Inventory possible locations and community partners to facilitate a site for sharing of resources.
- \* Provide small grants to support the purchase of key tools for shared use.

**3) Mobile Assets:**

Equipment, such as a cider press or bake oven that is mobile and can be moved from place to place within the community to facilitate projects.

**What We Heard from the Community:**

There are many creative ways to create community events and celebrations around food, such as making cider communally or baking pizzas in an outdoor oven, and these events and projects could be facilitated through mobile assets.

**Actions:**

- \* Investigate the feasibility of mobile cider presses, bake ovens, and other forms of mobile food processing that would also support community events.
- \* Provide modest grants to facilitate purchase of shared assets.

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[BOX OR SIDEBAR:

**Growing Into the Future**

- \* *community canning,*
- \* *community preserving,*
- \* *community dehydrating*

*END OF BOX]*

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**DISTRIBUTION:**

**Top Priorities:**

## **1) Farmers Markets:**

Opportunities for local markets, where small-scale, local growers, along with regional farmers, can sell food, and increase the availability and accessibility of nutritious, fresh, healthy food for residents.

### **What We Heard from the Community:**

There was broad support for farmers' markets of various scales, including linkages with regional farmers, throughout London in public venues such as parks.

### **Actions:**

- \* Identify where there is demand for new farmers' market across London.
- \* Work with community members and local farmers to assess the feasibility of starting new markets.
- \* Provide supports for farmers' markets in public places and community hubs.

## **2) Local food-procurement:**

Bylaws that mandate municipalities to purchase locally produced food help create a market and economic support for food that is grown and processed within the region.

### **What We Heard from the Community:**

There was broad support for a local food-procurement policy that would serve as an economic incentive for entrepreneurial urban agriculture activities, along with support for regional farmers, and as an important way to strengthen the local food system, increase food security and address food sovereignty.

### **Actions:**

- \* Assess the amount of food purchased by the City of London and affiliated agencies, and how much of that food is local.
- \* Investigate the potential economic impact of a local food procurement policy at all City-run facilities.
- \* Review how other municipalities have approached local food procurement policy development.

## **3. Direct Food Sales:**

Although many people engage in urban agriculture in order to grow food for private consumption, there are others who do so as an entrepreneurial, economic activity either to supplement their income or as their primary livelihood.

### **What We Heard from the Community:**

There was broad support for the idea of enabling small-scale economic development through food production, processing, and distribution.

### **Actions:**

- \* Investigate bylaw issues related to food sales on private property and community gardens.
- \* Investigate health and safety regulations related to food sales on private property and community gardens.

[BOX OR SIDEBAR

## Growing Into the Future:

- \* *mobile markets*
- \* *regulations allowing residential sales of produce*
- \* *small-scale farmers markets*
- \* *neighbourhood market permits*
- \* *food trucks selling food produced and processed in the city*

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## FOOD LOSS AND RECOVERY:

### Top Priorities:

#### 1) Food Waste Recovery:

Food waste recovery can take many forms, from collecting blemished or excess food from various facilities and distributing or processing it in various ways, to large-scale composting programs that recycle food into a valuable soil amendment.

#### What We Heard from the Community:

There is a great deal of concern about the amount of food that is wasted, not only in terms of the cost of discarding it in landfill, but particularly about the missed opportunity for seeing food “waste” as a resource that can be used in multiple ways, such as composting or distributing it to processing projects in order to extend shelf life.

#### Actions:

- \* Investigate the potential for community, vermi-, and mid-scale composting.
- \* Investigate the feasibility of instituting a food recovery project with partners such as restaurants and grocery stores, including health and safety issues.
- \* Investigate the feasibility of composting at restaurants and grocery stores.
- \* Provide public education promoting the idea of reducing food waste.

#### 2) Community Composting:

Food scraps and garden waste comprise a valuable resource that can be turned into “garden gold” through composting.

#### What We Heard from the Community:

There was strong and vocal support for encouraging the composting of food and garden materials in London, whether at the community or residential scale. Community gardens and urban farms are particularly in need of quality compost in order to build soil health and productivity.

#### Actions:

- \* Promote backyard composting of residential food and garden waste, through an education campaign that includes information about proper composting methods to reduce the potential for pests.
- \* Investigate potential linkages between rural compost production and urban users of compost in food-growing projects.
- \* Provide public education regarding composting.

[BOX OR SIDEBAR

## Growing Into the Future

- \* *mid-scale composting facility*
- \* *neighbourhood vermi-composting*
- \* *system for exchanging compostable materials for finished compost*

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## EDUCATION AND CONNECTION:

### Top Priorities:

#### 1. Food Hub:

Different communities define food hubs in their own distinct way. However, what distinguishes the idea of a food hub is that it is a place (whether physical or virtual) in which a community's food-related resources can be found — for example, a community kitchen where people come together to cook, or a tool library where people come to borrow shared equipment, or a distribution centre where a farmer's market is held, a Community Shared Agriculture (CSA) project's produce is distributed, or food from urban or regional farmers are aggregated for sale.

#### What We Heard from the Community:

However a food hub is constituted in London, the strong message from the community was that gathering and sharing information and resources in order to advance urban agriculture was an important priority. As well, there was a great deal of interest in the ways that urban agriculture can bring communities together through celebration and enjoyable events related to growing and eating food. There was also interest in linking a food hub with food banks, to ensure that food is accessible to all.

#### Actions:

- \* Investigate various food hub models and consider which model would work best in London.
- \* Identify a leadership group that would manage the development and implementation of the food hub.

- \* Research and prepare a feasibility study and business plan for a food hub.

## **2. School Gardens:**

School gardens serve many important functions and offer many benefits: they connect children to food production and thus enhance their understanding of the food system; they make food production “visible”; they can be connected to the curriculum and thus create an engaging learning environment; they can serve as community “hubs,” increasing parental and community involvement in the school; they can be used as an entry point for other sorts of environmental education.

### **What We Heard from the Community:**

There was a great deal of interest in promoting the use of schools as sites of urban agriculture activity and in integrating gardens at every school in London.

### **Actions:**

- \* Create linkages between school boards, the City, community groups, and parent councils in order to promote the goal of a garden in every school.
- \* Broad engagement of school boards to increase the number and capacity of school gardens.
- \* Understand food systems-related curriculum linkages relevant to elementary and secondary school education.
- \* Support the development of curriculum connections and teacher training materials related to school gardens.
- \* Support teachers and schools to bring agriculture into the classroom through connections with farmers.

## **3. Community Education and Training:**

As a component of urban agriculture, community education and training can take many forms, from workshops at garden sites to written materials in various languages spoken in the community.

### **What We Heard from the Community:**

There was a great deal of interest in the many ways that education and training can be integrated into urban agriculture activities, particularly as it relates to environmental sustainability in terms of biodiversity, pollinator health, organic production, climate change, etc. It was noted that many newcomers to London already have a great deal of knowledge about urban agriculture and could be an important resource for knowledge sharing. As well, many people felt that youth education should be a priority.

### **Actions:**

- \* Develop educational materials around composting, soil health, and organic food production, in various languages, and distribute these materials to the community at large.
- \* Develop workshop and training materials related to ecologically sustainable urban agriculture that promotes no-till production, biodiversity, heritage seeds, organic methods, and pollinator health, among other environmental issues, and their links to urban agriculture.
- \* Develop city-wide events such as spring planting and fall harvest festivals in order to celebrate food growing and community gathering around cooking and eating together.

[BOX OR SIDEBAR:

## **Growing Into the Future**

- \* *Urban farm for high school students.*
- \* *Promotional campaign on urban agriculture.*

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## **IMPLEMENTATION APPROACHES:**

Throughout the consultations, a number of ideas reoccurred which related to implementing this strategy. These ideas overlapped the key areas of growing, processing, distribution, food loss and recovery, education and connections.

### **1. Engage institutions and other levels of government:**

- \* Outreach to hospitals, schools, churches, businesses, universities and colleges, etc. to consider possible urban agriculture engagement and activities.
- \* Advocate for provincial and federal policies that support urban agriculture.

### **2. Pilot project grants:**

- \* Develop a granting program to support urban agriculture initiatives.
- \* Develop granting program to support entrepreneurial initiatives.

### **3. Metrics and data collection:**

- \* Utilize evaluative tools for measuring progress of the urban agriculture priorities.
  - \* Utilize evaluative tools for measuring the impact of urban agriculture initiatives.
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## **BOX: Local Actions**

*[THERE WILL BE SHORT PROFILES OF LONDON'S COMMUNITY URBAN AGRICULTURE GROUPS AND PROJECTS THROUGHOUT THIS DOCUMENT, HIGHLIGHTED IN SOME WAY—or example, a BOX OR SIDEBAR ON UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN STUDENTS' PLAN TO CREATE AN URBAN FARM. THE SUBJECTS OF THESE PROFILES WILL BE DETERMINED THROUGH FEEDBACK TO THIS DRAFT STRATEGY DOCUMENT. END of BOX]*

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APPENDIX to be developed:

## ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Once the priority action items are finalized, a detailed section on roles and responsibilities for implementation will be added. For example, the roles and responsibilities of the City, the community, and the London Food Policy Council will be identified, along with the following categories or characterizations of their involvement: lead, enabling, or supporting.

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APPENDIX to be developed:

## POLICY IMPLICATIONS

A detailed section on policy implications will be developed once the priority actions are finalized. For example, how does existing policy prevent a particular priority from being implemented? How can policy language be strengthened to enable urban agriculture?

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APPENDIX to be included:

- \* the importance of the rural agriculture sector (rural urban linkages; map of built area of London)
- \* details about the strategy development
- \* terms of reference
- \* engagement materials
- \* survey results