



AGENDA REPORT

Meeting Date (M/D/Y): 3/18/2013

Subject: Emerging Trends in Urban Agriculture

Boards Routed Through:
Corporate Planning Team
City Council

Date:
2/7/2013
3/18/2013

Description:

Staff is presenting information on urban agriculture, including several examples of different urban agriculture activities, and how it can support the overall sustainability of a community.

Background:

A growing number of municipalities are embracing urban agriculture as part of their overall commitment to sustainability and are recognizing that it can contribute to the social, economic and environmental objectives of their communities. Public interest in local food and urban agriculture is also increasing with many people seeing it as a way to have more control over what they eat, to know where their food comes from, and to enhance their self-sufficiency. Over the past year, the City of Airdrie has received inquiries from residents wishing to have backyard hens and/or backyard bees, which suggests there is public interest in Airdrie too. This report provides background information to help start a dialogue both internally at the City and within the whole community regarding urban agriculture opportunities in Airdrie.

Urban Agriculture is the practice of producing a range of foods, such as fruits, vegetables, eggs, honey, and grains in urban areas that have not traditionally been dedicated to food production. Urban agriculture differs from rural agriculture in terms of land area used, scale of operations, off-site impacts and scale of livestock permitted. Urban agriculture is different from backyard gardening in that produce can be grown for more than one household or the food produced can include more than vegetables and fruits (e.g. eggs, honey).

Urban agriculture can contribute to Airdrie's overall sustainability and help achieve many of the social, economic and environmental goals in the AirdrieOne Sustainability Plan.

Contributes to social sustainability

- Community gardens and other urban agriculture sites can help further reinforce the friendly, small town feel that Airdrie citizens value by bringing people together to work, learn and socialize.
- Urban agriculture aligns well with the pioneer spirit that defined the early settlement of western Canadian communities including Airdrie.
- Provides opportunities to engage citizens in repurposing underutilized public spaces and vacant lots for growing of food to benefit the whole community.
- Helps enhance community safety as urban agriculture sites can animate an area with more 'eyes on the street' and instill a sense of community pride in an area.
- Recreational nature of gardening and its ability to appeal to all ages has been shown to increase physical activity and reduce stress.
- Enhances food security of a city by empowering residents with ways to access affordable, fresh food and increase their own self-sufficiency.


Contributes to economic sustainability

- On average 14% of household spending goes to food in Canada, which makes growing your own food a tempting option for reducing costs and stretching the family budget.
- Innovative economic development and income generation opportunities exist with the startup of local food businesses.
- Local food production will become increasingly important to economic sustainability as fuel and transportation costs increase.

Contributes to environmental sustainability

- Growing and consuming local food reduces people's carbon footprint* with less "farm to fork" distances compared to the average 2,400 km travelled by imported food.

***Carbon footprint:** the total amount of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions produced by an activity or organization, usually expressed in equivalent tons of carbon dioxide (CO₂).

- Ecologically improves urban green spaces with more plants filtering pollutants from the air and creating habitat for pollinating insects and birds.
 - Helps people develop a greater appreciation for farm preservation and the impacts of using pesticides/other chemicals.
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- Supports stormwater management and water conservation through opportunities to use rainwater for watering urban agriculture sites.
- Opportunity for more waste diversion of organics by producing compost for urban agriculture activities.

Urban agriculture activities are as diverse as the participants themselves and can involve a range of options and scales:

- **Public landscaping treatments**

Some municipalities have contributed to their community food supply and supported their local food banks by substituting ornamental landscaping plants along boulevards and in parks for edible landscaping plants, such as fruit trees and berry bushes. The City of Vancouver provides both the aesthetic benefit of boulevard trees and makes food accessible for their community by using apple trees on some city streets. The City of Whitehorse maintains a trail network that gives their citizens access to wild harvesting areas containing many food plants which grow in their region, such as raspberry and Saskatoon berry bushes. Since 2009, the City of Calgary Parks Department has been planting a variety of fruit trees and berry bushes in four city park locations as part of a community orchard research project. The research project is focused on increasing opportunities for local food production and testing what plants will thrive in the Calgary climate to help form plans for planting more community-oriented orchards in their neighbourhoods.



- **Use of public open spaces**

Sometimes people lack the yard space and conditions to grow their own food at home; however, community gardens can provide the proper space and conditions, along with the opportunity to meet neighbours and create lasting friendships. Recognizing there are many benefits to community gardening, there are municipalities that support this activity by allowing it on publicly owned lands, boulevards, rights-of-way, park spaces, and vacant lots.

The Airdrie Horticultural Society (AHS) has a community garden that provides residents the opportunity to rent a garden plot with quality soil and water in a secured area at the Monklands Soccer Park. A testament to



citizen interest and the garden's success is the fact that there are yearly waiting lists for garden plots and this trend continues even with a recent expansion of 60 more plots. In addition to meeting individual needs, the community garden also contributes to the community by growing root vegetables such as carrots, beets and potatoes for donation to the Airdrie Food Bank.

- **Use of civic spaces**

There are cities that allow the use of civic spaces for urban agriculture activities and community engagement. Since 2010, the City of Vancouver has hosted two beehives on the roof of their City Hall and has a volunteer beekeeper who manages them. The City of Richmond has a rooftop garden on their Library/Cultural Centre, which hosts outdoor arts events and engages all ages of residents in various food gardening educational programs. The Town of Perth helped their local food bank establish a community garden on municipal lands that are within walking distance of the food bank. The produce from this garden is given to low-income gardeners who help with it, and the rest goes to support programs run by the Perth Food Bank.

- **Urban agriculture in the local market**

Some municipalities promote local food production by hosting or supporting farmers markets, which provide local farmers and artisan vendors places to sell their products. Places like Edmonton and Red Deer have included strategically locating farmers markets as part of their strategies for increasing activity in their downtowns. Airdrie has a farmers market where many citizens buy local produce and support small businesses and entrepreneurs. Since 2009, it has grown from 20 vendors to over 60 vendors each week.



The business community and schools can also be supporters of local food and urban agriculture in a city. Some restaurants have noted the growing interest in local food and now market their use of locally-sourced foods on their menus. Many schools have incorporated fruit and vegetable gardens as part of their landscaping, which provides students with valuable learning about where food comes from and helps support local food production as the food produced is often shared with the local community.

- **Residential urban agriculture activities**

To encourage urban agriculture activity at the residential scale, some municipalities have reduced limitations to growing gardens in front yards and in some places even allow vegetables to be grown on boulevards in front of homes. The City of Edmonton allows front yard gardening and partners with their local horticultural society to run a 'Front Yards in Bloom' awards program, which includes an edible front yard award category. The City of Calgary also allows front yard gardens and has a Healthy



Yards program, which encourages people to convert traditional grass lawn areas into more natural, water conserving landscapes.

A growing number of cities, including Airdrie, are getting requests from their residents to relax livestock regulations, although the keeping of livestock might be considered by some as high risk with health and nuisance concerns associated with noise, odour etc. There are cities that have chosen to mitigate these risks through regulated policies, along with additional resources and guidelines for those interested in keeping livestock. Some U.S. and Canadian cities that allow backyard hens are Seattle, Chicago, New York, Brampton, Kingston, Saanich, Victoria, and Vancouver. Some U.S. and Canadian cities that allow backyard beekeeping are San Francisco, New York, Denver, Toronto, Vancouver, Richmond, Saanich, and Delta.

For backyard hens, regulations may specify the maximum number of chickens, no roosters, the size of coops, proper storing of feed, and provisions requiring the owner to properly nourish and care for the chickens. An example of this is the animal bylaw for the District of Saanich, BC, which allows up to five chickens on a single family residential property with an area greater than 557 m² (6,000 ft²). Their bylaw also requires that:



- Hens may only be kept for personal use;
- No roosters are permitted;
- Owners are required to register their hens and to reside on the property where the hens are kept;
- Hens are to be kept in a building and enclosure that is to be located in the rear yard of the property, at least 3m from rear property line, 3m from any door or window. Each hen is to be provided with 0.37 m² of indoor coop space and 0.92 m² of roofed outdoor enclosure. The maximum area of the coop and enclosure should be less than 9.2 m²;
- The hens should not be allowed to run at large;
- The coop and enclosure needs to be well maintained and cleaned, manure shall be cleaned up and stored, and chicken feed stored in a vermin proof container.

For backyard beekeeping, some cities have no specific bylaws or permits about bees, but instead have a set of guidelines with enforcement only occurring in response to complaints, while other cities have regulations in place. For instance, regulations could include certification of the beekeeper, fresh water located on the property for the bees, a minimum lot size, limit to number of hives/bees, hive distance to property line, and requiring a barrier around hives (such as a shrub) to

force the bees to fly up to look for pollen rather than through a neighbour's yard. Saanich's Animal Bylaw permits the keeping of no more than four beehives on single family residential lots greater than 465m² (5,005 ft²) at a distance of at least 6.05 m (20 ft) from any property line. The Calgary and District Beekeepers Association has developed 'Guidelines for Safe Urban Beekeeping,' which highlights several important considerations to responsibly manage honeybees in the city and prevent them from becoming a problem for neighbours. Examples of recommendations found in the guideline include using a fence or vegetation to encourage bees to fly upward a minimum of 2 m when they leave the hive and providing a constant onsite source of water accessible to hives at all times from early spring through late fall.

Airdrie Currently Supports


The Airdrie Horticultural Society Community Garden and the Airdrie Farmers Market are examples of urban agriculture activities that are already established and supported by both citizens and the municipality. Municipal support for these activities has included:

- Provisioning leasing arrangements for the Airdrie Horticultural Society's Community Garden on municipal land at Monklands Park.
- Providing the Community Garden with access to Parks Department expertise and gardening materials such as recycled Christmas tree mulch and pathway gravel.
- Economic Development supporting the Airdrie Farmers Market in their search for a new location with room for expansion and increasing resident interest.

Next Steps for Airdrie

The City of Airdrie has an opportunity to further encourage local food production and take advantage of the role urban agriculture can play in working towards many of the AirdrieOne Sustainability Plan goals. Additionally, recent inquiries received from residents regarding backyard hens and beekeeping suggest there is public interest in supporting more urban agriculture activities in Airdrie. However, it is currently unclear as to the level of community interest and how prevalent some urban agriculture activities are within Airdrie. A key starting point in moving forward will be a dialogue among internal departments and with the community to help determine future direction for the municipality and identify any development and/or updating of regulations that will be needed.

Some next steps for the City of Airdrie may include:

- Continuing to encourage and provide support to the Community Garden and the Airdrie Farmers Market.
 - Initiating discussions among key departments (e.g. Planning, Parks, Corporate Properties, Community Development) to identify options for leading by example with urban agriculture activities in civic spaces.
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- As part of the revision of the Municipal Development Plan, address areas of urban agriculture for the City to support, such as farmers markets and community gardens.
- As part of the update report for the AirdrieOne Sustainability Plan, undertake community engagement to determine interest in home-based urban agriculture activities (e.g. backyard hens, beekeeping, front yard gardens).
- Identify any regulations/standards needed to help manage urban agriculture activities

Boards Routed Through: The Corporate Planning Team was supportive of the direction given in this report at their February 7, 2013 meeting, and it was recommended that both initiating internal department discussions and community engagement on urban agriculture be included as key next steps.

Alternatives/Implications:

1. Council accepts this report for information.
2. Council directs staff to undertake community engagement to determine interest in home-based urban agriculture activities.

Corporate Communications: Staff will work with Communications to develop a public engagement plan for urban agriculture.

Recommendation: That Council directs staff to undertake community engagement to determine interest in home-based urban agriculture activities.

Amanda Ginn
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Presenter:	Amanda Ginn/Tracy Corbett
Attachments:	n/a

