



AGENDA REPORT

Meeting Date (M/D/Y): 2/18/2014

Subject: Citizens Response to Urban Agriculture

Boards Routed Through:
City Council

Date:
2/18/2014

Description:

Staff are presenting the results of the citizen engagement process pertaining to urban agriculture.

Background:

On March 18, 2013, staff presented an urban agriculture report to Council (Attachment One), which highlighted several examples of urban agriculture activities and how they can contribute to Airdrie's sustainability and overall quality of life. Given the wide variety of options there are for supporting urban agriculture in Airdrie, Council directed staff to undertake a community engagement process to determine what activities citizens are interested in. This report presents the results from that public engagement process.

Citizen Engagement Process:

Using interactive voting boards, staff captured feedback from 148 citizens in person at the Airdrie Home and Lifestyle Show, two engagement sessions at Genesis Place, and two sessions at a booth at the Airdrie Farmer's Market. Citizens were asked to use star stickers to vote on their level of support for three activities on private property (backyard hens, backyard beehives, and frontyard edible gardens) and four activities on public and City-owned property (rooftop gardens, beehives, edible landscaping, and more community gardens). Edible landscaping includes the planting of fruit trees and berry-producing shrubs in place of ornamental landscaping. These citizens were also invited to provide any comments they had on sticky notes.

Additionally, staff received feedback from 141 citizens through an online survey that ran from July 11 through August 1, 2013. Similar to the voting boards used at the events, the survey asked citizens their level of support on the same three activities on private property and the same four activities on public and City-owned property. The survey also invited

citizens to provide comments under each urban agriculture activity and asked them to identify any regulations and/or guidelines they would like to see in place if the municipality were to allow backyard beehives and backyards hens.

The feedback from the 289 responses, including any comments received, has been compiled and is available to help the municipality determine next steps and make decisions regarding how to best support urban agriculture in Airdrie.

Citizen Feedback:

The citizen engagement process indicated very high levels of support for urban agriculture initiatives on public lands and City-owned spaces, and lower levels of support for initiatives occurring on private property.

According to the survey results (Attachment Two), citizen support for public initiatives indicated the following levels of support:

- Community gardens: 94.3% in favour
- Rooftop gardens: 88.6% in favour
- Edible landscaping: 85% in favour
- Beehives on public lands: 57.9% in favour

Citizen support for private/backyard initiatives indicated the following levels of support:

- Front yard edible gardens: 81.6% in favour
- Backyard hens: 57.1% in favour
- Backyard bees: 50.7% in favour

Citizens' concerns and comments are detailed in Attachment Three. The predominant concerns mentioned with regard to public/City initiatives included ongoing maintenance and vandalism. Citizen concerns regarding private/backyard initiatives included allergies to bees and concerns about noise and odours associated with backyard chickens.

Citizen suggestions for supporting urban agriculture included:

- Developing rooftop gardens on a future library building;
- Partnering with the Food Bank to supply them with edible plantings from public gardens;
- Creating signage for edible landscaping;
- Siting beehives away from high traffic areas such as sidewalks, sports fields and playgrounds;
- Developing additional community gardens.

When the City asked about steps it should take to regulate backyard urban agriculture, citizens mentioned:

- Limiting the number of hens and hives permitted on a property;



- Providing guidelines and information on the proper care of backyard hens and bees;
- Prohibiting the keeping of roosters;
- Requiring homeowners with backyard hens and hives to register with the City;
- Establishing minimum lot sizes; and
- Requiring setbacks from the property line for hen coops and hives.

In addition to the survey results, the City received a letter of support from the Airdrie Village Community Association (Attachment Four). The Association expressed support for beekeeping, backyard hens and fruit tree planting in the boulevards.

Next Steps:

The public engagement on urban agriculture that was carried out in 2013 has provided two key things: 1) a catalyst for dialogue among City departments and with the community, and 2) a better sense around community interest in urban agriculture activities. Moving forward both the City and community have the opportunity to take this dialogue to the next level and work together to find tangible ways for urban agriculture to be enhanced in Airdrie.

The relatively high level of support and comments citizens expressed for community gardens, edible landscaping, and initiatives in civic spaces suggests it is important to continue encouraging and supporting community groups and organizations (e.g. Airdrie Food Bank, Airdrie Farmer's Market, Airdrie Horticulture Society) who are working on improving access to local food, community gardening, and providing food support to those in need. It also suggests there is an opportunity for the City to explore ways to lead by example with urban agriculture activities such as edible landscaping, rooftop gardens, and possibly beekeeping on public lands and City-owned spaces.

The backyard hens and beekeeping activities received lower levels of support; however, the 'desirable' rating on the survey sat in the 50-60% range suggesting there are residents who view these activities as something of interest and benefit. On the survey, the votes for 'neutral' and 'undesirable' were roughly split sitting around the 20-25% mark each with a number of people indicating they were 'neutral' on those actions because they needed to know more about them. This suggests that some people are not convinced either way. Collaborating with the community on an urban agriculture pilot project could provide the opportunity for both the municipality and residents to see what considerations need to be given in setting up these activities, assess risks and impacts, and in general see how these activities integrate with the community.

Attachments:

Attachment One provides the March 2013 Council report titled 'Emerging Trends in Urban Agriculture' for background.

Attachment Two provides summary graphs showing citizens responses for the various urban agriculture activities.



Attachment Three is the full survey results with the citizen's comments.

Attachment Four is letter of support for urban agriculture received from the Airdrie Village Community Association.

Alternatives/Implications:

1. That Council accepts for information.
2. That Council directs staff to explore options for a pilot project and report back with a potential implementation strategy.
 - A pilot project can provide an opportunity for the City and citizens to learn more about and observe how the activities integrate with the community. It offers a way to explore the backyard hens and/or beekeeping activities and identify concerns and options for mitigating impacts. A pilot project could involve something at a City facility or park and/or could involve collaborating with interested community groups and individual citizens.
3. That Council directs staff to prepare a report on the regulatory and enforcement processes used by other municipalities with respect to urban agriculture.
 - The report would document possible policy and bylaw options for Council to consider, prior to considering such an option for the City of Airdrie.

Public Relations/Marketing Plan:

A communications plan was developed to encourage participation in the survey. Strategies used included:

- a City webpage banner ad;
- mention on the City Twitter feed;
- advertising on the Genesis Place reader board; and,
- an ad in the City Connections section of the City View Paper.

Additionally, local media support with stories about urban agriculture and the survey.

Boards Routed Through:

N/A

Recommendation: That Council directs staff to explore options for a pilot project and report back with a potential implementation strategy.

Amanda Ginn

