

## News Bites

### Urban Agriculture Resolution passed by City of Victoria

Urban Agriculture is a broad term that encompasses a wide range of activities involving the production, processing, marketing and distribution of food in urban and peri-urban areas. Thanks to the efforts of many individuals, community associations, schools, local businesses and enthusiastic folks with a green thumb, there are examples of urban agriculture in pockets throughout the city. There are four community gardens, many school gardens, over 5 neighborhood and community markets, 2 community commons with edible landscaping and a diversity of rooftop, balcony, and backyard gardens, fruit and nut trees, nurseries, greenhouses, flower and herb gardens as well as urban poultry and some small livestock. The “City Farm” on Mason street is a visible example of a little piece of land downtown that produces food for 12 families as well as a local restaurant. Haliburton Community Farm is another farm that sits in a residential neighborhood and provides land, training, and the marketing of vegetables at the farm gate.

The City of Victoria through the hard work of many people in the community and City Staff developed a Community Gardens Policy in 2005. On March 15, 2007, they expanded their support for growing food in the city by passing a specific resolution that recognizes the importance of urban agriculture in our City and by putting forward their intention to support it in the future. The heart of the resolution states:

***The City of Victoria supports in principle the concept of urban agriculture as a valuable community resource and will work to collaborate with the community, neighboring municipalities and Capital Region District to support and encourage Urban Agriculture where possible.***

The resolution in full follows this article.

The process of developing the resolution involved a number of community groups and individuals (including members of the VicWest Community Association, LifeCycles, FoodRoots Distribution Coop, Capital Region Food and Agriculture Initiatives Roundtable-CRFAIR) working with City Councilor and cheerleader Sonya Chandler. A presentation around the *Benefits of Urban Agriculture and Potential role for Municipal Governments* was presented to City Councilors early in the New Year. This was followed up with the drafting and finalization of a resolution and a motion put forward by Councilor Chandler.

The impetus for this work came from the ardent supporters of urban agriculture in the community which is supported through the Putting Food and Food Policy

Project, a joint initiative of CRFAIR and the Healthy Communities Sub Committee of the CRD Roundtable on the Environment. Financial support for this project was provided by VanCity and the Vancouver Island Health Authority's "Community Food Action Initiative" through ActNow BC - the government of BC's investment in promoting healthy choices through a partnership-based, community-focused approach to improve nutrition, increase physical activity and reduce tobacco use.

Now the real work starts in translating "support and encouragement" into planning and policy in many levels with local government. A good example of how this is already happening is in the current Review of the City of Victoria Parks Master Plan. City Staff, and Councilors recently toured local parks in preparation of the Review, the VicWest Commons located on a City owned and managed Park, which demonstrates edible landscaping, was on the tour, and urban agriculture was on the radar at the public input session.

Possible next steps identified by people in the community include conducting an inventory of Parks and other City owned properties as to their potential for supporting urban agriculture initiatives. *So stay tuned...*

## **Urban Agriculture Resolution Adopted May 15, 2007**

**The City of Victoria supports in principle the concept of urban agriculture as a valuable community resource and will work to collaborate with the community, neighboring municipalities and Capital Region District to support and encourage Urban Agriculture where possible. (Resolution)**

WHEREAS Urban Agriculture is a broad term that encompasses a wide range of activities involving the production, processing, marketing and distribution of food in urban and peri-urban areas;

WHEREAS in the City of Victoria there is wide variety of urban agriculture practices which includes 4 community gardens, several school gardens, over 5 neighborhood and community markets, 2 community commons with edible landscaping and a diversity of rooftop, balcony, and backyard gardens, fruit and nut trees, nurseries, greenhouses, flower and herb gardens as well as urban poultry and some small livestock;

WHEREAS the City of Victoria has recognized the importance of community gardens and created a Community Gardens Policy in 2005 and acknowledged community gardens and edible landscaping as a legitimate activity in Parks, as well as supported the development of community gardens via grants and staff support;

WHEREAS urban gardening supports self-sufficiency and access to healthy food for Victoria residents, and is a current and potential resource to our emergency food agencies with over 50,000 people in Capital Region living in poverty and in Victoria a 30-50% rise in use of food banks since 2002.

WHEREAS urban gardens and the marketing and sale of food and food related products have significant and growing economic benefit in the community which is demonstrated by the success of the Moss Street Market which alone generates over \$700,000 annually into the local economy; and

WHEREAS currently we produce only between 5-10% of our food on Vancouver Island and during the storms of 1996 and 2006, when transportation from off the island was inhibited, we started to see a scarcity of certain food items on our store shelves. Urban Agriculture can be a part of a strategy to create greater emergency preparedness, and food self sufficiency;

WHEREAS local food production results in fresher, more nutritious food and eating more fruits and vegetables is seen as a key strategy for improving health and in battling obesity that now effects over 55 percent of adults in British Columbia; and

WHEREAS urban agriculture has positive environmental impacts by increasing biodiversity and habitat, recycling organic matter (waste reduction) recycling and absorbing grey water and precipitation (drainage, water management and conservation), creating green space, and temperature regulation through green roofs; and

WHEREAS, gardening is an important part of our culture and is the number one recreational pastime of Canadians engaging 72% of our population; and

WHEREAS, urban agriculture has been recognized as a core strategy to improving regional food security through the "Regional Food and Health Planning" process conducted by the *Capital Region Food and Agriculture Initiatives Roundtable and the Healthy Communities Subcommittee of the CRD Roundtable on the Environment*.

**BE IT RESOLVED that the City of Victoria Supports in principle the concept of urban agriculture as a valuable community resource and will work to collaborate with the community, neighboring municipalities and Capital Region District to support and encourage Urban Agriculture where possible.**

**ALSO LET IT BE RESOLVED to refer this motion to the Environment and Shoreline Advisory Committee, Advisory Planning Committee, Social Advisory Committee, Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee, and the Downtown Advisory Committee for their consideration and comment**