

October 26, 2012

Attn: Parks and Environment Committee

Re: Scaling-up Toronto's Urban Agriculture

BACKGROUND:

We are at a pivotal moment in the development of urban agriculture in Toronto. Shortening the distance from our fields to our tables creates a sustainable, diverse and engaged city. To bring large amounts of local foods to our communities we must 'scale-up' our local agricultural industries. Community gardens have improved our neighbourhoods as well as our diets; however, it is time for the City of Toronto to begin crafting policies that focus on larger-scale entrepreneurial urban agriculture.

I am inspired by recent examples of larger-scale agricultural activities in our city such as the Black Creek Community Farm, Canada's first school farm at Bendale Business and Technical Institute in Scarborough, and the Sunshine Garden and Market at CAMH. These initiatives are the beginning of a trend in urban agriculture which satisfies social, environmental as well as economic objectives.

Given the past benefits and future potential for entrepreneurial urban farmers in Toronto, I would like to thank the many contributors to GrowTO: An Urban Agriculture Action Plan for Toronto. I have submitted the GrowTO report to the clerk and encourage members of this committee to read it. The report illustrates the gaps and opportunities faced by this industry and how the City can help. At present some City regulations and policies are stifling the potential of this industry including restrictions on the sale of locally grown food and no process for obtaining temporary use of land. The responsibility for promotion and management of entrepreneurial urban agriculture currently rests with multiple City divisions; this has caused confusion in the industry and hindered its expansion.

Urban agriculture, in all its forms, is an important vehicle for community building, economic development, environmental protection, and health promotion. To unleash the potential of this industry the City of Toronto must remove policy barriers and investigate centralizing urban agriculture management.

Recommendations:

1. City Council receive the GrowTO report, and congratulate the Toronto Food Policy Council and other authors for identifying how the City of Toronto can help promote urban agriculture.
2. The Deputy City Manager for Cluster A be requested to determine which City Divisions should be responsible for the management and promotion of Urban Agriculture and, examine the logistical and financial implications of creating a co-ordinated office dedicated to the promotion and expansion of Urban Agriculture in Toronto.
3. Direct the appropriate City Divisions, as identified by The Deputy Manager for Cluster A, provide the Parks and Environment Committee with a report that identifies:
 - a. where the City of Toronto is already supporting the community in urban agriculture across Toronto;
 - b. what opportunities are available for the City of Toronto to further enhance its support;
 - c. what are the resource implications (either reallocation or new) of the City of Toronto in taking on these opportunities; and
 - d. what mechanism and resources the City will establish to ensure there is coordination and collaboration between all City operations in supporting the community in appropriate urban agriculture activities;
4. The General Manager of Parks, Forestry & Recreation Division respond to the relevant recommendations contained in the GrowTO Action Plan in the upcoming Parks and Recreation Plans.
5. City Council direct the Chief Planner & Executive Director of City Planning, the Director of the Toronto Office of Partnerships, the Toronto Food Policy Council, and other appropriate City Divisions establish appropriate policies and processes to link urban farmers with public and private lands for short- or long-term food production. And; report these findings to the Parks and Environment Committee at or before the October 23, 2013 meeting.

Sincerely,

Mary-Margaret McMahon
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