

October 23, 2013

To: Parks and Environment Committee
City of Toronto

Re: **Urban Agriculture Action Plan
Staff Report and Recommendations**

Dear Members of Council,

I am an architect and urban designer with the firm DTAH, a practice with a 40 year history of designing public places and spaces across our great city. I was a volunteer member of the GrowTO working group and am here today to thank City Council and staff, as well as the many others involved for the substantial efforts that have led to the recommendations before you today, and to ask that you support their adoption.

My own involvement in projects like the Artscape Wychwood Barns and Evergreen Brickworks has provided me with an appreciation of how important the issues of food and health and their link to city planning and the critical challenges of community revitalization have become to the residents of this city.

In the case of the Wychwood Barns, the inclusion of The Stop Community Food Centre, a production greenhouse, community gardens, commercial kitchen, outdoor bake oven, and associated farmers market was arguably the catalyst that helped bring that project to reality, a new idea of a community hub that has enriched that entire neighbourhood, while providing a valuable model in our quest to achieve a more sustainable city through community revitalization.

It was the farmers market at Evergreen Brickworks coming along very early in the development of that project, which brought people down to that isolated site in the Don Valley to discover just what a special place it was and to provide a hint of its great potential as a unique community meeting place.

Our firm was also involved in the development of the Black Creek SNAP project, a sustainable neighbourhood action plan for the Jane Finch community sponsored by the TRCA and the City of Toronto to develop a neighbourhood wide strategy for sustainable development. Perhaps not surprisingly, in a neighbourhood with poor access to healthy food choices, and the highest rates of diabetes in the city, food security was the highest priority identified by residents. In response to that feedback we completed a mapping analysis which demonstrated that local residents could produce about a quarter of their annual recommended vegetable and fruit diet using about a quarter of the land available in the area. The priority of local



residents interested in a sustainable future was not related to water or energy conservation, or other potential obvious environmental matters, but rather the importance of good access to healthy local food.

The revitalization of the Black Creek Farm, one of the key urban agriculture projects described in this report, is an important milestone in the effort to respond to that challenge in that neighbourhood, a neighbourhood that is clearly undernourished and in need of the kind of investment so apparent in other parts of our city.

These projects are just a few examples of many local neighbourhood based efforts that demonstrate the incredible appetite in this city to scale up the effort of delivering enhanced opportunities for urban agriculture. They have helped inform the recommendations in this report, the result of countless hours of community involvement and engagement, as well as great work on the part of city and agency staff.

The recommendations are comprehensive, they build on the work already underway and represent a practical and cost effective means of moving forward in the effort of improving access to local food. I look forward to their adoption and the improvements they will bring as part of our larger collective efforts towards city wide community revitalization. Thank you.

Yours truly,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'JOE LOBKO'.

Joe Lobko OAA FRAIC LEED AP BD + C
Partner
DTAH