Strathcona County Urban Agriculture Strategy

DRAFT

September 7, 2016

Presented to Strathcona County Transportation & Agriculture Services

FOR CLIENT REVIEW

Table of Contents

1.0 URBAN AGRICULTURE IN STRATHCONA COUNTY

The Urban Agriculture Strategy is the first of six strategies to be developed in support of the Agriculture Master Plan, approved in June 2015. The subsequent strategies to follow include: Land use and development; Governance; Food and agriculture sector development; Agri-tourism; Agriculture Master Plan Review.

2.0 DEFINING URBAN AGRICULTURE IN STRATHCONA COUNTY

Urban agriculture is the practice of cultivating food in an urban area. It can be growing fruits, herbs and vegetables, or raising animals. It's a growing trend in North America as communities look for ways to increase food security. It supports local, alternate choices to the traditional food system, and allows communities to grow niche foods

2.1 WHERE DOES THIS APPLY?

Direction from the Urban Agriculture Strategy is specific to the urban service areas of Strathcona County including Sherwood Park, Ardrossan, Josephburg, South Cooking Lake, North Cooking Lake, Antler Lake, and Hasting Lake. Although the Strategy may impact those living and working across the County, the application of specific actions will aimed at these urban centres as they have no existing policies to govern the growing, making and distributing of local food and agriculture products.

3.0 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

3.1 ENGAGEMENT PROCESS

Public engagement for the Urban Agriculture Strategy took two forms. A nearly three month explore and assess phase from April 8- July 1, 2016 and a second synthesize phase from August 8-10, 2016. A total of 2253 people participated by sharing their great ideas for urban agriculture and thoughts on our proposed action areas. About 8900 ideas surfaced overall through multiple feedback collection methods, which included:

- Attendance at twelve (12) community events and businesses
- Two (2) distinct online surveys
- Six (6) open house sessions
- An idea wall at the June urban agriculture presentation
- Via e-mail
- Workshops
- Interviews

Stakeholders were informed about the process through a number of channels including:

- Project posters at community buildings including County Hall
- The project website: www.strathcona.ca/departments/transportation-and-agriculture-services/agriculture-services/agriculture-master-plan/urban-agriculture-strategy
- Twitter

- Facebook
- E-news

Overall, the engagement team spent over 85 hours in the community having face-to-face conversations. The following table shows how many participants we've had to date and the number of ideas they have collectively shared.

FEEDBACK CHANNELS AND PARTICIPATION

Feedback Channel	Participants	Ideas
Attendance at Events/Businesses	979	949
Roadshow Open Houses	45	119
Online Survey 1A	161	184
Survey 1B	1051	7456
Workshops	9	188
Interviews	10	N/A
Total	**2253**	**8896**

3.2 ENGAGEMENT OUTCOMES

PHASE 1A

The main question we asked throughout the explore and assess phase of public engagement was:

1. What are your great ideas for urban agriculture in Strathcona County

The primary themes heard in response to this question were support for community and home gardens, backyard chickens as well as bees and beekeeping. These themes indicated aspects of urban agriculture the community sees as most fitting in the Strathcona County context. Although community gardens were the most popular response, not too many people elaborated on why. The conversation around bees on the other hand was primarily reasoned with mention of colony collapse disorder and the need for bees as pollinators.

Conversations about education, awareness and access to information were all top of mind for many participant and had strong ties to other themes. Often these themes would link to other ideas about growing food, such as the importance of having connections to nature and understanding where our food comes from. Education and information tied into this because of their ability to build advocates that give momentum to initiatives trying to get off the ground. Urban chicken keeping had many comments on providing local courses and workshops for those in pursuit of such urban farming efforts.

More generally speaking, participants are keen to see this project become an opportunity for community building in Strathcona County and want to be involved in a variety of capacities.

PHASE 1B

In the second half of The Explore and Assess engagement phase we asked more specific questions, via an online survey, to capture detailed thoughts on the initial themes heard. The questions were naturally divided into three categories based on what we were hearing in phase 1A —production, processing and distribution. We called them Grow, Make and Get. The following is a breakdown of what we asked folks and how they responded in each of these food system areas.

Grow

The grow conversation was by far the most popular topic for folks, with over 2700 ideas shared. Discussion around sustainable practice and community building were the most popular with over 200 mentions of the two combined as reasoning for having chose a particular grow option. The reasons to support sustainable practice mostly leaned toward the environmentally sustainable outcomes of growing food, with some links to social and economic sustainability outcomes, such as mental health and subsidizing household food costs. The community building piece very much overlapped with many of the other themes that emerged including focusing on local sources of food, economic advantages, and being unobtrusive to the community.Two of the most popular "other ideas" shared in the grow section included backyard beekeeping and growing more in public or civic spaces.

> *"Good for human beings spiritually. Mentally and physically. Also environmentally it makes sense. Let's get our county being current and cutting edge"*

> *"Way of the future, sustainability, food cost, bring communities together, better use of land and water then lawns"*

The most common arguments against urban growing in the County were around the keeping of animals and livestock. Although there has been considerable support for backyard chickens, bees and pigs, many worry the lack of responsible ownership could lead to smells, noises and other nuisances that will disturb community peace. Many misconceptions about what we meant by keeping of animals were shared in response to this question including; all chickens carry diseases and that cows and pigs would be raised for meat production.

Some responses led us to recognize there is uncertainty among folks. A number of participants expressed an un-sureness to whether these production areas are feasible or appropriate in urban areas. For instance we heard that residential lots are too small, people will steal the food and animals, and that lots of people will complain about the eyesore it creates. Beyond these uncertainties we also heard many straightforward No's. No bees, no chickens, no pigs, no cows, no goats, no horses, no sheep, etc.

> *"Because of the negative impact on neighbours' allergies, chosen life style and privacy"*

> *"How would this be regulated and maintained? Could anyone have animals or would you be required to take courses and be mentored. Who would pay for these programs and enforce complaints?"*

Make

The processing or "make" conversation leaned heavily on the topic of composting and the environmental impacts associated. The animal husbandry piece of the conversation saw lots of comments on supporting urban

bees and beekeeping with some support for backyard chickens, though more contentious overall. The colony collapse of the bee population seems to very much be at the forefront of people's minds versus chickens that are not seen to be as crucial to urbanize.

> *"Strathcona County is on the edge or agricultural lands, so there is a close tie to the practice."*

> *"Bees need all the help they can get, composting is environmentally friendly and preserves are yummy"*

The fear of inconsiderate neighbours has surfaced in almost all categories but became especially prominent when discussing the reasons why certain make ideas don't fit the Strathcona County-context. Language like unappealing, disruptive, and nuisances were used to describe the potential of keeping animals in an urban zone. Having guidelines and regulations for the keeping of animals is especially important to those feeling uncertain.

> *"Could be disruptive to neighbours if ppl don't know what their doing."*

> *"Nuisance and negative impact such as odour, waste, traffic related to sales, distribution within higher density residential development."*

Get

Local focus was by far the most popular reason people had for wanting to see our "get" ideas flourish. Discussion ranged from improved access to food and healthier food options to less cost for transporting goods and supporting local economies. Some emphasis was put on making our connection to food stronger, particularly amongst kids and young people. This was a common thread in many of the discussions but ties into the get food category because of the mandatory nature of getting food in our everyday life. We may not have to produce or process our food but everyone has to get (buy) his or her food, making it our one contact point with the products we eat.

> *"These are all great idea that would help the county eat local, healthy food. Lessen transportation costs of importing food."*

> *"All of these help support local producers and that is important to the community."*

Participants did not share a great deal on why they believe the proposed distribution ideas would not fit in the County context. The most popular themes to emerge however were around the impact it could have on the current distribution model and potential for abusing and misusing certain initiatives like public agriculture. To elaborate, participants see new distribution chains as taking demand away from existing businesses and commercial sellers while also seeing the initiative as likely to fail due to being unprofitable.

> *"Anything public is open to abuse and sabotage nothing I would like to consume"*

> *"Cost. Delivery is expensive and who would look after these gardens and who would benefit."*

PHASE 2

During the two days of interviews, focus groups, and planning on August 8 and 9, a number of changes were made to the previously presented strategy areas and their actions.

- The entire Farmer's Market strategy area was removed and will be added to the future work of the Economic Development Strategy of the Ag Master Plan.
- A new strategy area has been added called Education and Coordination.

4.0 TAKING ACTION ON URBAN AGRICULTURE

The Urban Agriculture Plan is a living document, built using a robust framework for action. The contents are a series of key steps that take Strathcona County from its current reality to its desired future of growing food, relationships and the economy. Progress in each action, as outlined in the plan's strategy areas leads to new, more long term actions. This incremental approach toward urban agriculture strategy and implementation will allow Strathcona County to work towards the realization of the long-term vision by breaking down emerging challenges into manageable pieces.

In the following pages, you'll find the urban agriculture vision, goals, strategy areas and actions. You will also find out how sustainable and resilient urban agriculture practice is achieved. You will better understand the influences affecting the future actions for urban agriculture in Strathcona, and see how the insights from community and best practice research have lead to a process of positive change.

4.1 VISION

Urban agriculture is easily accessed and seen in Strathcona County; it contributes to creating a healthy, livable community by helping to grow food, relationships, and economy in our community.

4.2 GOALS

- Build a sense of community, identity, and place;
- Bring people together;
- Connect urban and rural communities;
- Build food literacy and awareness;
- Support local economic development and entrepreneurship;
- Expand food production;
- Build shared leadership;
- Reflect Strathcona County's natural history.

4.3 STRATEGY AREAS AND ACTIONS

4.3.1 Strategy Area A: Community Gardens

Definition

Community gardening is the practice of growing and raising food in a shared garden space for direct consumption. These gardens help build community relationships, a sense of place, and healthy lifestyles while addressing food insecurity and promoting local eating. The land for these gardens can be publically or privately owned, and can be managed as individual allotment plots or as a communal effort of growing and harvesting.

In addition to allowing community members space to grow their own food, community gardens can support a wide range of activities, programs, and partnerships. Garden education, community events, and pop-up cooking classes are natural fits for community gardens. Partners in successful community gardens can range from local government and community organizations to non-profits, churches, schools, youth groups, and senior centres.

Context

Community gardens are excellent at building community and a sense of place. In Strathcona County, and especially in fast-growing Sherwood Park, opportunities for both are needed. Community gardens are relatively low-cost, low-maintenance, and high return community amenities. They are flexible, fitting into small or oddly-shaped areas, perfect for transforming Strathcona County's underutilized public spaces for multiple community benefits.

Because community gardens offer first-hand introduction to gardening and agriculture, they provide opportunities to make important connections between residents and the agricultural heritage of the County, and between multiple generations or residents.

As the Sherwood Park community grows, and more apartments and other high density housing are added to the housing mix, shared gardening spaces will increase in importance as not everyone who wants to garden will have access to a yard.

Finally, residents of the County regularly express interest in community gardens. The current system of community gardens, including public, private, and church-based gardens, is not large enough to accommodate the number of interested residents.

Actions

A.1 Amend the land use bylaw to include "Community garden" as a defined land use.

Supported Goals
- Build a sense of community, identity, and place;
- Bring people together;
- Build food literacy and awareness;
- Expand food production.

Description

A specific land use definition for "Community Gardens" will open greater opportunities to develop community gardens by reducing potential bylaw conflict and by encouraging potential garden organizers with regulatory clarity and encouragement through planning language.

Context

As interest grows in community gardening, it is anticipated that new garden projects will emerge in different parts of Strathcona County. To support these new projects as positive additions to the County, clear planning

language will be a necessary and proactive step to avoid misunderstandings and potential conflict around program activity, land use, County involvement, and purpose of new public and private gardens.

Considerations

Community Gardens should be defined as a principal land use with conditions that support community gardening as a land use suitable for all zoning districts, and should be allowed in all or most zoning districts. Common best practice conditions for community gardens include consideration for management plans, signage, hours of activity, site access, on-site sales, allowed structures, allowed livestock, and site lighting.

Also, the process of developing a community garden bylaw presents an opportunity to engage the community and develop citizen leadership. It is recommended that a process be designed that includes input from resident experts and advocates.

Future Actions

- Develop a draft land use bylaw amendment with citizen input, revise, and approve.
- Publicize the engagement process, encouraging widespread community input.
- Publicize the results of the process as promotional effort around community gardens.

A.2 A County-led community garden initiative, with the County providing public land access.

Supported Goals

- Build a sense of community, identity, and place;
- Bring people together;
- Build food literacy and awareness;
- Expand food production;
- Build shared leadership.

Description

Create a funded program within Transportation and Agricultural Services to expand the number of public and private community gardens in Strathcona County. A staff position should be established to develop and coordinate strategic community garden priorities, and identify avenues to support all types of community gardens in the County.

Context

A number of successful community gardens exist in Strathcona County, but they are too few and too widely spaced to meet the community demand and to effectively support walkable communities. Interest in using public land for community gardens is high, and GIS analysis has shown many opportunities to co-locate new community gardens with community centres, civic buildings, and walking trails as way to combine activity offerings for more users, decrease automobile trips, and increase vibrancy of existing community centres.

Coordination and planning will be needed to expand the community garden offerings within the County and determine appropriate County support for both public and private community gardens.

Considerations

There is a large amount of public land that could support community gardens. Identifying priority public sites for new community gardens will require thoughtful planning that considers compatible co-locations, walkability, distribution, site character, and visibility (to build awareness).

Strathcona County should identify resources that could be made available to either public or private community gardens, such as unused public land, compost, water transport, and gardening instruction, and develop and share a clear list of available resources.

Successful community gardens need strong organizing and community buy-in. As the County scales up its involvement in community garden promotion, it must maintain focus on fostering strong community foundations for each garden. It is not enough to build garden boxes or simply open the gates to gardeners. The County should develop and implement a plan for community garden development that begins with community organizing and requires a certain threshold of community structure before committing physical resources to any new garden. Thresholds for community structure may consist of a number of committed members, a guiding plan or governance document, or other measures. In this way, community leadership builds over time.

Future Actions

- Use the community garden network as channel for multiple resources and programs.
- Invite experienced community gardeners to engage in additional aspects of urban agriculture, such as urban farming, food processing, or teaching others about gardening.

A.3 County promotion and support for independent community gardens

Supported Goals

- Build a sense of community, identity, and place;
- Bring people together;
- Build food literacy and awareness;
- Expand food production;
- Build shared leadership.

Description

Invest County resources as way to support independent community garden planning, installation, and operations. Independently organized gardens add significantly to the quality of life in Strathcona County without drawing heavily on County resources. As community gardens become a higher priority for residents and for the County, the County should explore ways to support their independent development as a low-cost, high return investment in civic engagement and public health.

Context

Independent community gardens are emerging in Strathcona County, but even as excitement grows there is real risk of community gardens failing without adequate support and guidance. By offering facilitation, design, or material support to well-organized community groups, the County can help more community gardens succeed.

In particular, independent community gardens connected with nursing homes and senior centres were identified as key opportunities for County support.

Considerations

Independently organized community gardens are wonderful opportunities for the County to help support valuable community initiative and civic engagement with relatively low investment on the County's part.

A key resource that that County may be able to provide is communication capacity. Using existing communication and promotional channels, the County may help with recruitment, event promotion, or other project needs.

For additional contributions, the County should engage individual gardens to determine the highest needs for easy-to-deliver resources that can help support independently organized community gardens. These resources could include compost or mulch delivered at low or no cost, assistance with water sourcing, educational programming, or facilitation of community partnerships to support the garden's success.

Future Actions

- Develop and deliver workshops on garden organizing.
- Provide assistance or review of site designs.
- Develop do-it-yourself organizing toolkits.

4.3.2 Strategy Area B: Public Agriculture and Edible Landscaping

Definition

Public agriculture refers to food grown in the public spaces of a town or city, which is generally meant as a public or shared amenity. These can be managed by any number of diverse groups, . An excellent example is an urban orchard that requires relatively little maintenance, where harvest and sharing by community members is encouraged. Public agriculture projects take all shapes and sizes, limited only by imagination and access to public space. Successful public agriculture projects typically have the following elements:

- Projects are visible and invite interaction
- Projects have oversight and management
- Food grown is for everyone (though a point person is responsible for completing the harvest)

Edible landscaping can be thought of as a category within public agriculture, though it can extend to private land as well. In this approach, the non-edible plants of an ornamental landscape are simply replaced with edibles that are equally well suited to site conditions and landscaping needs. Fruit and nut trees, vegetables,

herbs, edible flowers and shrubs with berries can be combined to create attractive designs that produce food. Where public agriculture is about filling the public realm with all manner of creative food growing projects, edible landscaping is a particular strategy that replaces ornamentals with edibles.

Public agriculture can also provide important habitat for insects, birds, and small mammals. Bees, in particular, can be supported with intentional plantings of bee-forage plants within an edible landscaping program.

Context

In Strathcona County, public agriculture represents an innovative opportunity to build a sense of place, biodiversity and bee habitat, and seasonal food sources that build food awareness and connect residents to the County's agricultural heritage.

There is a significant amount of available space for public agriculture, from transportation rights-of-way to managed ornamental landscapes, virtually any size plot can be utilized for growing some kind of edibles.

Diversity is a key principle of public agriculture. All kinds of projects fit underneath the public agriculture umbrella, from very small sidewalk planters to large roadside installations. Fostering innovative responses by all kinds of groups will be essential in developing community creativity, empowerment, and ownership of these urban agricultural spaces. In turn, a community filled with diverse food projects will itself become a tool for increased food literacy and a stronger urban-rural connection.

Actions

B.1 Amend the land use bylaw to include "Public agriculture" as a defined land use

Supported Goals

- Build a sense of community, identity, and place;
- Build food literacy and awareness;
- Expand food production.

Description

A new zoning definition that establishes an urban agriculture use around the growing of food in public places, for harvest and consumption by any member of the public. A key differentiation of this use from a Community Garden or Urban Farm is ownership; the produce grown is available to all.

Context

Currently, there is no zoning language to describe "Public Agriculture." A definition of Public Agriculture as a new land use will be a key tool in the creation of consistent and predictable public agriculture projects that contribute to the sense of place, quality of life, and civic vibrancy of Strathcona County. Through this new definition, new projects can be developed in many areas of Strathcona County that contribute the many benefits of public agriculture, and the County can ensure that its interests are preserved.
Considerations

Conditions can be included such as low maintenance plantings, educational signage, invitations to public to participate in maintenance and harvest, and process for registering and sharing locations of projects.

Because this is an emerging land use type, a flexible approach that also includes appropriate restrictions will be needed to both foster creativity and civic engagement, as well as provide clarity on issues of public concern.

The new use should be permitted in as many different zoning districts as possible, especially in urban zoning districts, to allow for these low-cost, low-impact and high-return public uses to emerge in many different parts of the County.

Flexibility in the definition would result from a wide range of appropriate sizes and land use districts. Potential areas of public concern could include unsightliness, pest attraction, point of contact with questions, or proximity to either underground utilities or environmental hazard areas.

The zoning language may also choose to allow certain incentives or allowances for this particular use, because of its many public benefits.

Future Actions

- Design and installation of public agriculture projects.

B.2 Include edibles in regional park planning

Supported Goals

- Build a sense of community, identity, and place;
- Build food literacy and awareness;
- Expand food production;
- Build shared leadership;
- Reflect Strathcona County's natural history.

Description

Create programming statements for Regional Parks in the Municipal Development Plan and Land Use Bylaw that adds edible plantings as a planning component of Regional Parks, helping to build integrated recreational campuses.

Context

As regional parks are planned, there are many opportunities to incorporate low-cost landscape programming centred on food that help establish deep integration of community uses. From community gardens to demonstration beehives or small teaching farms, many possibilities exist. As a first step in exploring food programming in parks, edible landscaping and foraging is a good place to start.

Edible landscaping, when well-designed, provides a low-maintenance addition to the recreational value of a landscape as well as increasing the productivity of the land by providing food and biodiversity. Foraging for food can be an attractive activity bringing unique visitors to a park, and can also provide a new way for visitors of all kinds to experience their park and their natural environment in completely new ways.

Additionally, edible landscapes are quite flexible in size and shape and are effective ways to activate unused pieces of land that are oddly shaped or otherwise difficult to develop.

Considerations

Recreation and Parks should lead this action with support from Transportation and Agricultural Services and expert community voices.

The planning process should identify opportunities for edible landscapes and foraging activities at the Master Planning phase, with implementation to be carried out by either the County, community groups, or public-private partnerships.

Where possible, edible landscaping should be located near or alongside areas of high traffic, to maximize visibility and utilization of the edible resource. Additionally, signage should be placed to explain the edible project and identify plants wherever possible.

Any public foraging should be accompanied by warnings of risk in eating wild plants and clear identification of edible plants. Where risk exists of confusing edible plants with similar-looking dangerous plants, foraging should not be encouraged. In many cases, however, this risk is small and with effective signs or educational programs, risk-free foraging can be supported.

Future Actions

- Development of interactive parks programs involving perennial edibles, planting workshops, or harvesting basics.
- Community-led design and installation of perennial edible gardens, pollinator gardens, food forests, or other edible landscape projects.

B.3 Develop an Adopt-a-Plot initiative to establish edible and pollinator-supporting public orchards and food forests in public spaces, for shared public harvest.

Supported Goals

- Build a sense of community, identity, and place; Bring people together; Build food literacy and awareness; Expand food production; Build shared leadership.
- Build a sense of community, identity, and place;
- Bring people together;
- Build food literacy and awareness;
- Expand food production;

- Build shared leadership;
- Reflect Strathcona County's natural history.

Description

A new program, administered by Transportation and Agricultural Services in partnership with Recreation and Parks, linking community groups with appropriate, pre-selected public locations for public agriculture. This program could include spaces in parks, along greenway trails, or around community centers. Once linked, the community group would take on management of the site and agree to maintain the location in accordance with County needs and expectations. In this program, all harvests will be open to the public. The Adopt-a-Plot initiative should strive for visible projects that are well promoted, and work to enable interested parties to engage public spaces in proactive ways.

Context

Many types of groups could be interested in this program, including County employees, high school horticulture clubs, youth organizations, church groups, or permaculture practitioners. Local experts emphasized the combination of low maintenance, high educational potential, and opportunity for civic participation by diverse residents.

Considerations

Adopting community groups should have horticultural expertise, a mission that supports County agricultural goals, and a viable membership that will be responsible for the plot in the long term.

Creating a list of pre-approved plots throughout Strathcona County will encourage interested groups and will streamline a matching process. Pre-approved plot list should consider site access, drainage, visibility, conflict with adjacent uses or underground utilities, conflict with future development plans, wildlife patterns, and County desire to promote community projects in certain areas.

The County should create a standard agreement template to use with partner organizations, that includes a written plan to address design and installation strategies, long-term plan for maintenance, harvest plan, and community engagement plan.

County and community expertise can be combined to develop design standards and suggested plant lists can be developed to promote successful installations.

Future Actions

- Community-led and managed public agriculture projects on public land.

B.4 Mapping of edible trees and shrubs in the public realm

Supported Goals

- Build a sense of community, identity, and place;
- Bring people together;
- Connect urban and rural communities;
- Build food literacy and awareness;
- Expand food production;
- Build shared leadership;
- Reflect Strathcona County's natural history.

Description

A collective community effort to create a shared online database of publicly-accessible edible trees and shrubs in Strathcona County.

Context

Interest was discovered among some residents in expanding the opportunity for all County residents to forage from the landscape of Strathcona County, as a way to connect to natural heritage, learn about traditional foodways, supplement their diet, and build new social opportunities. A crowdsourced map that includes locations of accessible edible plants in the County could be a learning tool, an opportunity for civic engagement, and a means to get people outside and moving.

By supporting a community-led effort to map edibles, the County could help empower many positive behaviours among people of all ages.

Considerations

Ownership of the database and its use should be considered, as this may impact liability and the ability of the owner to encourage foraging broadly.

Ownership of plants and property laws should be respected when designing the map and instructing people on its use.

Issues of safety need to be included, especially warnings about the risk of eating wild plants. Only plants that individuals are able to positively identify as safe should be consumed, and the risk must lie with the forager to determine the plant's identification and safety.

The actual map itself could be produced as a printed brochure or poster, an online resource, or both.

Future Actions

- Organized harvests followed by group canning projects.
- Donations of some harvests to the food bank.

B.5 Develop signage identifying edible plants

Supported Goals

- Build a sense of community, identity, and place;
- Bring people together;
- Build food literacy and awareness;
- Expand food production;
- Build shared leadership;
- Reflect Strathcona County's natural history.

Description

A system of low-cost, easy to produce signs that can be located next to publicly-accessible edible plants, identifying them, their uses, natural history, and harvest tips.

Context

As an important element in any successful edible landscaping or public agriculture project, clear and informative signage are an opportunity to build continuity of the project across the County, extend the County's brand and presence as part of healthy eating and physical activity initiatives, and to enlist the energy and knowledge of community members.

Considerations

The process of creating, printing, and placing signs should be standardized, open to the public, easy, and inexpensive. Projects such as walkyourcity.org have pioneered low-cost public signage systems and may provide a template of design-it-yourself signs that could be filled out by community members, printed by the County, and installed by the community member that created it at the edible plant they want to identify.

Sign design and guidelines for locating signs should align with Strathcona County's standards.

Signs should include disclaimers about risks of eating wild plants, and links to resources for more information.

Sign content should include common and Latin names, illustrations of the plant, common uses, and particular natural and cultural history connections to Strathcona County.

Each sign should be mapped digitally as well as located physically, and this digital location should be made available to the public and to mappers of edible plants in the County.

Future Actions

- Expanding citizen-led signage programs to other County urban agriculture initiatives.
- Themed walking or biking tours developed around edible plants.

4.3.3 Strategy Area C: Urban Farms

Definition

Urban farming is the commercial practice of growing and raising food within the boundaries of a city, town or municipality where large-scale farming is less feasible or desirable than in rural areas. Urban conditions such as typically smaller available land area and diverse neighbouring land uses mean that urban farms lean towards higher per square foot productivity, less mechanization, more focus on produce and less on livestock. Of course, creativity and innovation are the norm in urban farming, and typical scales of operation range from the individual farmer on a very small plot to capital-intensive commercial enterprises that can incorporate technologically-advanced growing methods. This variety of methods and reliance on creativity are important, as urban farms can be located in all kinds of challenging spaces: on relatively small urban lots, on rooftops, in transportation rights-of-way, in greenhouses or even indoors and in shipping containers.

Some urban farms are built exclusively for education, training or re-entry programs. Many are built to improve food access in a specific community or to continue traditional culinary cultures. Many are for-profit ventures, relying on innovative business models and farming methods to make urban farming financially viable. For others, food justice is the reason to develop urban farms in their communities, which means improving access to fresh food for economically disadvantaged communities.

Context

Urban farming will be vital for bringing agricultural heritage and value for farmland into the urban portions of Strathcona County. With more farmers and local farm customers in Sherwood Park, a greater awareness of agriculture and its importance in Strathcona County should result.

Small-scale, entrepreneurial urban farmers add energy to the local economy, add vitality to local farmers markets, and serve as urban ambassadors for local food. As new urban farmers succeed, they may grow into the next generation of small or medium sized diversified farmers in rural areas of the County, helping maintain a portion of the County's rural agricultural economy.

Urban farming, as part of a growing local food movement, naturally attracts a young, creative class to a community. Attracting this demographic through urban farming opportunities or incentives could add diversity to the County's current professional class, and increase local entrepreneurship. Without looking too far afield, Strathcona County's current youthful demographic may see urban farming as an outlet for local creativity that can foster an innovative spirit and sense of community among local youth.

Actions

C.1 Add urban farming definitions to the land use bylaw

Supported Goals

- Build a sense of community, identity, and place;
- Connect urban and rural communities;
- Support local economic development and entrepreneurship;
- Expand food productions

Description

An urban farming use category that provides regulation and allowance for diverse types and scales of commercial growing within the urban service areas of Strathcona County.

Context

Local comments on urban agriculture suggested that streamlining the start-up process and eliminating potential red tape or other barriers would lead to greater interest developing in urban farming. Land use opportunities can present an invitation to new ideas and new investment. Through staff collaboration among key Departments, urban farm definitions will be a proactive measure to allow and attract appropriate outdoor, greenhouse, indoor, or rooftop farm operations to the urban service areas of the County.

Many jurisdictions across Canada have explored and added urban agriculture zoning language, including the recent changes in Edmonton, where urban agriculture definitions were added to the Zoning Bylaw in 2016.

Considerations

A number of different subtypes for urban agriculture such as 'Urban Farm,' 'Hydroponic/Aquaponic Farm,' 'Rooftop Farm,' and 'Market Garden' can be developed to allow flexibility of commercial uses based on underlying zoning districts. Each type can expect different types of traffic, visibility, and intensity of activity, and these characteristics can be incorporated into responsible zoning district use regulations.

Work with community members through an ad-hoc task force to outline the needs and approach to urban agriculture zoning.

As with any zoning activity, care must be taken to minimize potential for nuisance, public safety hazard, or conflict with other uses. In the case of urban farms, land use conditions can be included to govern farm size, type, allowance of various structures, hours of activity, allowance of animals, and site management plans in different zoning districts.

Future Actions

- Promote the new land use definition in the community.
- Support start-up urban farmers through partnerships or incentives.

C.2 Develop a County-supported youth farming and entrepreneurship program with a place-making urban focus

Supported Goals

- Build a sense of community, identity, and place;

- Build food literacy and awareness;
- Expand food production;
- Support local economic development and entrepreneurship;

Description

A new program coordinated by Transportation and Agricultural Services to introduce youth to the activities and opportunities of urban agriculture, with the goal of empowering entrepreneurial spirit, increasing knowledge of agriculture and food, and fostering healthy behaviours.

Context

Young people are a relatively large demographic in Strathcona County. Including young people not only as participants in urban agriculture but actually as leaders in new agricultural ventures will seed the conditions for generational change around food literacy, understanding and interest in farming, and the overall vibrancy of Strathcona County as a place. This is a key demographic to engage. Building on the success of school-based collaborations by Transportation and Agricultural Services, new efforts could extend to other youth organizations as potential partners.

The urban areas of Strathcona County are relatively low in community character and tend to miss an intimate sense of place. A youth urban farm centre, with gardens, retail markets, hydroponic growing as well as public art and other activity could help create a vibrant place that reflects creativity, innovation, and positive energy within the urban service areas of the County.

Considerations

Partnering with youth organizations with clear missions and strategic plans will help maximize long-term impact, ability to connect with County youth, and overall success of the program.

Partnering with farmers markets or other existing urban food initiatives may smooth a start-up phase by helping identify multi-use sites, shared costs, and increased traffic to future events and entrepreneurial activities.

Work to develop leadership and creativity among youth. Use multiple aspects of the urban food system, such as growing, processing, and selling food at markets to engage youth in planning, design, and making.

Establish a primary space to host activities and serve as a canvas for urban agriculture activities. Elements such as gardens, converted shipping containers, market sheds, kitchens, and gathering areas can be creatively configured to make an energetic, unique public space that also serves the educational and developmental needs of County youth.

Future Actions
- Urban Incubator Farm to provide growing space and technical support to start-up urban farmers.

C.3 Develop a campaign to promote and support urban farming in Strathcona County

Supported Goals

- Connect urban and rural communities;
- Build food literacy and awareness;
- Support local economic development and entrepreneurship;
- Expand food production.

Description

An information campaign to educate residents and potential urban farmers about the possibilities surrounding urban farming in Strathcona County.

Context

During the first phase of engagement, there was a relatively small level of interest and/or knowledge about urban farming. In the initial implementation of this strategy, an important foundational step is to build an understanding about this aspect of urban agriculture.

Small-scale, entrepreneurial urban farmers add energy to the local economy, add vitality to local farmers markets, and serve as urban ambassadors for local food. As new urban farmers succeed, they may grow into the next generation of small or medium sized diversified farmers in rural areas of the County, helping maintain a portion of the County's rural agricultural economy. This aligns with other areas of the Agriculture Master Plan.

Considerations

An information campaign could capitalize on assets in the region, including existing youth and school groups, the University of Alberta Faculty of Agricultural, Life & Environmental Sciences. It could also bring in external experts with deeper experience in urban farming.

The information campaign should be provided and distributed through a variety of channels - speakers series, online videos, toolkits and best practice reviews.

A successful information campaign to increase urban farming activity should be designed in conjunction with supportive efforts such as clear land use bylaw around urban farming, access to resources, and expanding local food markets, so that the new interest and energy developed is effectively fostered into viable urban farms.

Future Actions

- Engage interested individuals or groups about where the opportunities and barriers are for urban farming in the County.

4.3.4 Strategy Area D: School Agriculture Program

Definition

Urban agriculture in schools comes in the form of garden classrooms, indoor growing demonstrations, shared-use community gardens, horticultural training gardens or greenhouses, tech-enabled vertical growing hydroponics and aquaponics systems, and many other variations.

Among these types, different age groups and curricula can be engaged and lesson plans can be designed to minimize added teacher effort while maximizing learning outcomes. In addition to learning outcomes, of course, garden-based education can reduce behaviour problems, improve healthy food choices, increase physical activity among students, and actually lead to new entrepreneurial energy.

Context

School-based agriculture initiatives are a strength of the County, with a number of existing school agriculture initiatives in the County, from elementary to high schools.
Because of the relatively large youth population in Strathcona County, a robust urban agriculture strategy will need to connect with this population and capitalize on the creativity, energy and potential influence of youth. School based programs are effective at introducing a new generation to farming and agriculture, and creating the conditions for new ideas and energy around agriculture.

It is also expected that children, once excited about gardening, will carry that excitement home. As Strathcona County begins supporting different aspects of urban agriculture, the excitement of children and the resulting engagement of entire families will help bring residents to urban agriculture efforts such as community gardens, urban farms, and farmers markets.

Actions

D.1 Foster growing opportunities at every school in the County

Supported Goals

- Bring people together;
- Build food literacy and awareness;
- Expand food production.

Description

Work with existing school garden leaders and the ongoing support from Transportation and Agricultural Services to compile a set of best practices and toolkit for starting new school gardens. Focus on replicating the bright spots of successful school gardens, and expanding existing momentum to reach all schools.

Context

School gardens have been implemented successfully at many schools in the County already. With the many demonstrated benefits that accompany school gardens, this action should be seen as a 'quick win' of simply

adding resources to expand a successful model. The ongoing efforts of Transportation and Agricultural Services should be continued and expanded to junior and senior high schools.

Considerations

Different kinds of gardens and different curricula can have different learning outcomes, and can foster different kinds of experiences. When looking for best practices and bright spot programs, be sure to assess the garden's outcomes in order to replicate the kinds of gardens for the desired outcomes.

The costs of garden installation and management should be considered as part of creating a replicable model, in order to match resource levels with new programs.

Different grade levels will benefit from different types of gardens and the different types of instruction that they afford. Pay close attention to grade-level-appropriate garden spaces and curriculum.

Future Actions

- Networks of garden educators that share knowledge, resources, and progress.

D.2 Increase educational opportunities around urban agriculture, technology and entrepreneurship in schools

Supported Goals

- Connect urban and rural communities;
- Build food literacy and awareness;
- Support local economic development and entrepreneurship;
- Build shared leadership.

Description

Build results-based experiential education programs that combine multiple learning areas around a core of hands-on urban agriculture projects.

Context

As part of the effort to engage Strathcona County youth in urban agriculture, school curricula can be implemented that lean on agriculture, technology, and entrepreneurship to build creative and innovative educational experiences.

Considerations

As with any new educational program, participation and leadership from teachers and administrators is vital to success.

Use successful existing models as templates for new programs, to be adapted by Strathcona County teachers, administration, and partners such as local businesses, local growers, or Transportation and Agricultural Services.

The school system itself needs further exploration in terms of staff interest, current offerings, and potential alignments between existing programs and new classes related to urban agriculture.

Future Actions

- Develop school-based urban farming enterprises.
- Develop academic concentrations or vocational programs built around urban agriculture, technology, and entrepreneurship.

4.3.5 Strategy Area E: Urban Livestock - Chickens, Pets, Bees

Definition

Urban livestock includes the raising of chickens, bees, rabbits, and animals such as small-breed pigs and goats. With so many different kinds of animals that can be kept for so many different purposes, the topic of urban livestock is complex. In some cases animals are used to produce food, such as eggs or honey. In some cases the animal is the food, such as rabbits or non-laying chickens. In other cases an agricultural animal bred for small size is being cared for as a pet, with no food production purpose at all.

With each type of animal different considerations come into play to create safe, nuisance-free, and humane conditions for each animal to be kept in an urban environment. Even with the best intentions, it is sometimes not appropriate for every type of animal to be kept in every urban location. Types of neighbourhoods, key issues for residents, and planning goals all must be considered alongside health and safety concerns when making decisions to introduce livestock into urban areas.

Context

Residents of Strathcona County expressed a wide difference of opinions on this subject, perhaps reflecting the complexity of the subject. There was a great deal of support for backyard chickens, but also substantial concern. Similarly, many people expressed interest in bees, but many others expressed concerns over keeping bees in urban neighbourhoods. Beekeeping is a generally safe practice, with successful beehives kept in urban spaces in many Canadian communities. This does not, however, mean that beekeeping should be allowed everywhere, especially where such a large number of voices have concerns, without careful consideration. Many of the concerns over beekeeping centred on hives in close proximity to children and houses, and worry over stings and allergic responses.

Keeping of any urban animals, including livestock, is an individual decision with potential impact on neighbours, especially in dense residential neighbourhoods. Potential negative impacts can be lessened through thoughtful policy and responsible animal keeping. Many benefits result from keeping different kinds of animals, from companionship to nourishment. In examples across the country, effective policies are opening the doors for urban livestock and their benefits. Not all jurisdictions have adopted policies allowing all kinds of animals, however.

The approach of this strategy area is not to advocate for one side or the other, but to find incremental steps forward that minimize negative impacts, offer avenues for involvement and learning, while developing experience-based local knowledge for the County to inform future animal policy and practice.

Actions

E.1 Pilot project for urban backyard chickens

Supported Goals

- Build a sense of community, identity, and place;
- Bring people together;
- Connect urban and rural communities;
- Build food literacy and awareness;
- Expand food production.

Description

A limited scope urban chicken program with close oversight and periodic review of performance and outcomes, used to evaluate the possibility of broad allowances to keep chickens in Strathcona County's urban service areas. Chickens kept in low-density zoning districts, acreages and rural areas would not be subject to the pilot project.

Context

Urban chicken keeping is growing trend across Canada, and enthusiasm around the issue has been noted in Strathcona County. At the same time that interest in chickens is high, however, there is also significant concern among residents about negative impacts of urban chicken keeping. Concerns include animal welfare with untrained owners, noise, pest attraction, manure runoff, and spread of untreated poultry disease to commercial flocks. In other municipalities, notably in Edmonton, pilot projects have proved useful as ways to trial new chicken policies before full enactment.

Considerations

Any chicken policies would be governed by a revised Animal Control Bylaw, and would include different allowances and requirements for chicken keeping based on zoning districts.
For lots where current Animal Control Bylaw allows chicken keeping, no rule changes are suggested. This pilot project would apply to urban zoning districts where urban livestock are currently prohibited.

Suggested details of pilot project: Each pilot project chicken keeper should register with the County; no more than 4 hens allowed, no roosters; hens should be minimum of 5 months old and be sourced from a regulated hatchery; owners need to complete a course on chicken health and management; coops need to be inspected and offer protection from extreme temperatures and from predators; particular fully-flighted breeds should be avoided or prohibited; neighbors should be informed; potential biosecurity issues of disease reaching commercial chicken flocks should be addressed by limiting household pet interactions with backyard chickens, excluding wild birds and other animals from coop area, and requiring a simple biosecurity checklist for participants.

Pilot project participants should receive resource list for certified breeders, area veterinarians, and other resources.

Future Actions

- Review and assess the outcomes of this backyard chicken pilot program. Based on the review, decide on further implementation.

E.2 Replace current Animal Control Bylaw with new separate bylaws: revised Animal Control (for livestock) and Alternative Pets

Supported Goals

- Build a sense of community, identity, and place;
- Bring people together;
- Connect urban and rural communities;
- Build food literacy and awareness;
- Reflect Strathcona County's natural history.

Description

Two separate bylaws are proposed to replace two existing bylaws, to better clarify the complex issues of keeping animals in urban settings.

The revised Animal Control Bylaw would maintain oversight for all agricultural animals in the County, including urban backyard chickens by way of a new pilot project. The new Alternative Pets Bylaw would create a new class of animals that include exotic pets as well as animals that are traditionally kept as agricultural livestock, but have been bred as pets and whose owners intend to keep them solely as pets, deriving no food or other animal product from them.

These proposed bylaws are envisioned to provide flexible, comprehensive, and up-to-date regulations for domestic animals throughout the County.

Context

This action is a proposed solution to a complicated set of regulatory needs: updating the Animal Control Bylaw to allow for limited urban livestock for agricultural purpose and finding a productive resolution to the issue of small livestock being kept solely as pets. The Animal Control Bylaw is due for revision, creating an opportunity for an integrated revision that takes a strategic approach to creating updated rules that respond to the changing desires and concerns for Strathcona County residents.

Considerations

The Wildlife Act, the Alberta Agricultural Pests Act, and other related federal and provincial regulations should be seen as the key starting point in developing language in these updated and new bylaws. The updated and new bylaws should not duplicate or confuse issues presented in existing applicable law.

Clear definitions of "Agricultural Animals" and "Pets" will be essential to the application of these bylaws. It is suggested that any animal that produces any physical product for human consumption or use be classified as "agricultural" and thus regulated by the Animal Control Bylaw. Any animal that is kept purely as a pet, regardless of species, will be regulated by the Alternative Pets Bylaw. However, following higher jurisdictional authority, no animals that are regulated by the Wildlife Act or Agricultural Pests Act will be included as allowed animals.

Pets that don't spend time outdoors should not be included in these bylaws.

The Animal Control Bylaw should largely remain intact, with the following key changes: add clarity around its oversight of "agricultural" animals; add language allowing a backyard chicken pilot project in the urban service areas.

The Alternative Pets Bylaw should require alternative pet owners to register their animals.

The Alternative Pets Bylaw should include and govern "Exotic Pets."

The Alternative Pets Bylaw should ensure that pet owners receive a list of comprehensive animal care resources, such as veterinarians and registered breeders in and near Strathcona County.

The Alternative Pets Bylaw will need to include restrictions on allowed animals to protect public health and welfare and public and private property. Prohibitions on animal species and breeds should be applied based on size, potential safety threat if an animal escapes, level of noise an animal produces, amount of waste an animal produces, and potential threat to commercial agriculture through disease vectors. It may be useful to consider the example of a large dog as a standard of acceptability on many of these criteria.

The Alternative Pets Bylaw should also require, at the discretion of the reviewing official, a site management plan describing as needed the animal's space allotment, confinement materials and construction, direction of slope, manure handling practices, location of immediate neighbours, and biosecurity precautions.

In certain instances, there may be overlap between bylaws for single species, based on whether the animal is kept for agricultural purposes or as a pet. For instance, rabbits can be raised as meat animals or as pets. Depending on the stated intention of the owner and observed care and use of the animals, the animals would be governed by either the Animal Control Bylaw or the Pets Bylaw but not by both. In the event that an owner claims the animals as both pets and agricultural animals, or claims them as pets but uses them for agricultural purposes (such as chickens for eggs or pygmy goat for milk), the rules in the Animal Control Bylaw would take precedence.

Essentially, the keeping of pets in Strathcona County should be expanded in scope, while the keeping of agricultural livestock should remain more closely regulated.

Future Actions

- Periodic review and revision of bylaws to ensure their efficacy.

E.3 Bee Healthy Strathcona County: Revise planting guidelines to incorporate pollinator habitat into ornamental landscapes.

Supported Goals

- Build a sense of community, identity, and place;
- Connect urban and rural communities;
- Build food literacy and awareness.

Description

Revise the plant lists and planting guides that are used by crews maintaining Strathcona County's ornamental landscaping. This can create a significant amount of new habitat and forage for insects and birds in the County. Native plants and non-invasive exotics that are low-maintenance, attractive, and productive for insects and birds can be added to planting lists and design guidelines.

Context

Ornamental landscapes are managed throughout Strathcona County, and are typically managed as aesthetic resources only. By introducing the idea of pollinator and bird habitat into the planting strategy, a virtually no cost change can result in transformation of many County landscapes into high performance integrated fabrics of sustainable biodiversity and beauty.

Considerations

Care should be taken to avoid plants that may attract pests.

Different planted areas are used for perennial and annual plants. Both types of plantings should be included in these revisions.

Design standards should be taken into account, and maintaining County aesthetic standards should be a priority.

Similar to the recommended edible landscaping program, a series of signage in key locations can highlight the presence of these plantings and inform the community about their benefits.

Future Actions

- Continued dialogue about positive impacts Strathcona County can have on local bee populations.
- Locating of demonstration beehives in or near large plantings of pollinator friendly plants.

E.4 Bee Healthy Strathcona County: Beehives installed as demonstration projects in lower-traffic areas

Supported Goals

- Bring people together;
- Connect urban and rural communities;
- Build food literacy and awareness;
- Support local economic development and entrepreneurship;
- Expand food production;
- Reflect Strathcona County's natural history.

Description

A limited number of beehives, placed and managed by experienced beekeepers, located at select sites in the urban service area as demonstration projects to provide education about bees and beekeeping, honey sales to support educational programming, and increased dialogue about bees and the threats facing them.

Context

While the reactions to backyard beekeeping were mixed and somewhat polarized, the concern about bees in general and the need to support healthy bee populations tended towards consensus, with support for overall strategies to support bee health in County policy. Strathcona County residents are interested in helping healthy bees.

The demonstration project proposed here is designed to increase bee education, support bee colonies, and introduce new groups to the many issues around bees, while avoiding residents' concerns about beehives located throughout residential neighbourhoods or in close proximity to high traffic areas and people with bee allergies.

Considerations

Demonstration hive project should be developed in partnership with a professional beekeeper.
Hives should be located in clusters of 2 to 6 hives per location.

Locations should be away from high traffic areas, allow for group access for education, and should include a fenced or other barrier to prevent people from coming into contact with the hives without permission.

Frequent educational programming should be offered for all ages, and should be led by the beekeeper of the hives visited.

Honey produced should be sold to offset installation and educational costs.

Demonstration hive locations could be on public or private property (as Apiculture Bylaw allows), on grade or on accessible rooftops. To the greatest extent possible, demonstration hive locations should be universally accessible by people of all ability levels.

Future Actions

- Expanded honey production under a collective label of Strathcona urban beekeepers.
- Continued dialogue about positive impacts Strathcona County can have on local bee populations.

E.5 Bee Healthy Strathcona County: Amend Apiculture Bylaw to allow demonstration beehives in additional land use districts

Supported Goals

- Connect urban and rural communities;
- Build food literacy and awareness;
- Support local economic development and entrepreneurship;
- Expand food production.

Description

Review and revise the current Apiculture Bylaw to increase opportunities for urban beekeeping, beekeeping education, and the demonstration of responsible beekeeping in urban areas. This bylaw change would allow demonstration beehives (see E.4) in the urban service area of Strathcona County, limiting the number and location of beehives, and allow for hives as demonstration projects that can be used to safely explore the inclusion of beehives in the urban service areas.

Context

While the reactions to backyard beekeeping were mixed and somewhat polarized, the concern about bees in general and the need to support healthy bee populations tended towards consensus, with support for overall strategies to support bee health in County policy. Strathcona County residents are interested in helping healthy bees.

This proposed action is designed to encourage County policies that support bee health and public awareness, without introducing beehives to backyards, residential districts, or high traffic areas.

The current Apiculture Bylaw effectively restricts beekeeping from the urban service areas by limiting permissible zoning districts. Allowing beekeeping in select urban districts will increase educational opportunities around the overall importance of bees and their current crisis, and will improve the ability of local beekeepers to take advantage of existing and proposed bee forage plants in the urban service areas.

Considerations

This proposal is not meant to allow beekeeping in residential districts. Instead, the intention is to allow responsible beekeeping on low traffic industrial, institutional, or civic sites within the urban service areas.

Conditions should apply to new beekeeping operations within the urban service area, such as: all hives to be sited by or under supervision of a professional beekeeper; hives' primary use will be educational and

demonstration, and secondary use can be sale of honey; all urban hive sites and urban beekeepers must register with the County.

Future Actions

- Review and revise Apiculture Bylaw as needed.

4.3.6 Strategy Area F: Home Gardens

Definition

A home garden is a small area of land or raised bed used for growing food on or around a house or apartment complex. A home garden is typically planted and maintained by a single person or family. Home gardens can be located anywhere on a lot, depending on allowances by local bylaws or neighbourhood ordinances.

Maintaining a home garden is an important aspect of urban agriculture, providing a close, daily connection to the act of growing food. Home gardens are vital in creating a full spectrum of food system participation and food literacy, and can also help a family increase its fruit and vegetable consumption, leading to better public health.

Context

As part of a complete urban agriculture strategy for Strathcona County, home gardens should be recognized as a critical layer in a healthy urban agriculture system. Home gardens allow people of all ages easy access to the experience of gardening. In family settings, in particular, a home garden provides a unique platform to share values about food, create new food memories, and learn about the ways food ties us together. Additionally, home gardens provide a way for neighbours to create stronger connections, building critical social fabric. By intentionally supporting home gardens and gardeners, Strathcona County is laying the foundation for greater participation in urban agriculture in the future.

Actions

F.1 Promotion and advocacy around residential gardening opportunities

Supported Goals

- Build a sense of community, identity, and place;
- Bring people together;
- Build food literacy and awareness;
- Expand food production.

Description

An informational campaign to make clear to Strathcona County residents what and where they are allowed to grow or raise on residential properties in different zoning districts in the County.

Context

Through the engagement process it was clear that many residents had interest in home gardening, but at the same time many had divergent impressions around what kind of home gardening was allowed in the County. In particular, many believed that front yard gardens were prohibited, while County codes do not, in fact, include such a restriction. By providing clear information on what gardening is allowed, more residents should be excited to begin or enlarge their gardens.

Considerations

Local garden supply centres may be enthusiastic partners in either sharing information or sponsoring a program that encourages home gardens.

An effective campaign will utilize multiple media channels to reach a diverse audience.
The information shared should be clear and encouraging, and also should explain the constraints or limits to responsible home gardening are.

Placement of home garden information can occur in alignment with other initiatives in this document, such as community gardens, edible landscaping or school projects.

Future Actions

- Measurement project looking at number and size of home gardens over time, before and after informational campaign.

F.2 Share programs and courses on home gardening across the community.

Supported Goals

- Build a sense of community, identity, and place;
- Bring people together;
- Connect urban and rural communities;
- Build food literacy and awareness;
- Expand food production.

Description

Create a central resource of all garden programs, classes, and workshops in Strathcona County and the Capital Region. Make this list public, and share broadly.

Context

Interest in home gardening is growing, and the activity provides many benefits. By linking the full range of resources available for home gardening to new or curious home gardeners, more people should engage in this activity.

A number of garden businesses are already connecting to the Strathcona County gardening community in educational and charitable ways. Where possible, these business outreach efforts should be encouraged, expanded, and treated as a network of resources and expertise that can be grown and strengthened.

Gardening resources as diverse as compost, horticultural education, and promotional capacity exist in County departments.

Garden resources also exist in schools, churches, and senior centres..

Existing community gardens are especially strong community-based repositories of gardening wisdom.

All of these resources could ultimately be networked together to build a robust web of inspiration and support for Strathcona County gardeners.

Considerations

Creative outreach and research will be needed to develop a thorough and user-friendly list of garden resources.

Garden-related businesses should be seen as potential partners. A resource that lists their activities should be seen as a mutually-beneficial effort between garden businesses, gardeners, and the County.

Once created, update the resource list at least annually, and share through as many channels as possible.

Future Actions

- Expansion of garden groups and gardening efforts into a County-wide gardening network to address technical, policy, and community issues around gardening.

4.3.7 Strategy Area G: Education and Coordination

Definition

As implementation of these strategy areas begin, public and private Strathcona County resources will move towards the actions described above. As this begins, efforts in education and coordination of action will be critical in building momentum, maintaining direction, and realizing a full return on these invested resources. Well conceived efforts in education and coordination will cross all of the other strategy areas, tying people, expertise, and investment together into Strathcona County-specific urban agriculture, food system, and community results.

Education efforts include work with all ages, in many different settings, about all kinds of urban agriculture areas. Many of the actions above call for education in one way or another. Within this overall strategy, education includes any sharing of knowledge, in formal classrooms or in passing conversations at a chokecherry bush along a park trail.

Coordination refers to the act of linking energy and information together. In thinking about the multi-layered system of a new urban agriculture strategy, bringing individuals and teams into productive, collaborative relationships will be essential as a way to capture the full potential of each new project.

Context

In many large and small ways, education and coordination already exist around urban agriculture in the County. Education occurs at gardening workshops at Salisbury Greenhouse, and at Bev Facey High School. Coordination occurs when Transportation and Agricultural Services reaches out to community garden leaders to check in on needs and offer County resources such as wood chips in response, or when a resident mobilizes public support around a particular urban agriculture issue.

The purpose of education in the setting of this strategy is to explore more educational opportunities for all, in both active and passive ways, and to achieve new levels of awareness of food and agriculture for all residents of the County.

The purpose of coordination in this context is to pull efforts together, build community and social connections along the way, and create opportunities for important dialogue around all aspects of agriculture, to keep the entire Agricultural Master Plan moving forward.

The two areas work in conjunction, of course, and they provide essential connectivity between the big ideas uncovered through community engagement. In thinking about the Grow, Make, and Get of urban agriculture, it is clear that these three aspects of urban agriculture must be coordinated, and that pulling each of the areas along to its full potential will require education, coordinated education, so that everyone who is interested can take part.

Actions

G.1 Structured stakeholder conversations on key implementation areas of the Urban Agriculture Strategy.

Supported Goals

- Build a sense of community, identity, and place;
- Bring people together;
- Connect urban and rural communities;
- Build food literacy and awareness;
- Build shared leadership.

Description

Invite diverse urban agriculture stakeholders into facilitated working group to continue dialogue started in this strategy process, and to become an informal advisory body for urban agriculture projects and policy.

Context

During the engagement phase of this strategy, many diverse urban agriculture stakeholders were brought together to work collaboratively on particular questions of policy and action. The new and existing relationships that this process supported represent high value social capital that can be captured for effective community input, network building, and coordination. By pulling these stakeholders back together in facilitated dialogue, the potential of this social and civic capital can be realized.

Future phases of the Agriculture Master Plan are likely to recommend creation of a food policy council for Strathcona County. By pulling urban agriculture stakeholders together now, the foundations for smart choices about council formation can be placed, and future leaders of Strathcona County's agriculture sector may be identified and developed.

Considerations

Community dialogues and networks are successful if they are supported by a central backbone entity that helps pull people together, facilitates communication, reaches out to gather resources, and maintains a vision and purpose behind the network. This open-ended dialogue will have much greater eventual impact if well facilitated and supported. The County is best placed to play this coordinating role.

Future Actions

- Develop Food Policy Council for Strathcona County.

G.2 Education in all actions.

Supported Goals

- Bring people together;
- Build food literacy and awareness;
- Support local economic development and entrepreneurship;
- Expand food production;
- Build shared leadership;
- Reflect Strathcona County's natural history.

Description

Create a metric of achieving at least one educational goal in each action included in this strategy.

Context

Sharing knowledge will be essential in strengthening the connection Strathcona County residents have to food, to farmland, and to the rural history and urbanizing present of this place. Many residents commented on the importance of education in building urban agriculture, and threading this through the implementation of the whole strategy will provide an integrated and inclusive attention to urban agriculture education.

Considerations

There are different kinds of education that would be part of this action. This would include general awareness, opportunities for involvement, and skill development.

Pre-existing communication channels, such as the urban agriculture e-news mailing list and the County's social media accounts, provide a good foundation to distribute educational information.

An annual, coordinated approach to the educational component of urban agriculture will generate more impact than an ad hoc approach.

Future Actions

- Evaluate educational metrics at the conclusion of the 3-year implementation cycle, re-evaluate and adjust for the next implementation cycle.

5.0 NEXT STEPS AND REVIEW PROCESS

This draft plan is the focus of a second phase of community engagement. During September 2016, the community will be asked to provide their thoughts on all key elements of the draft plan, including vision, goals, strategies and actions. This input will then be considered and a revised and final strategy will be prepared for presentation to Council for approval in late November.

The intended structure of the strategy is that the actions found within this document are achievable within 3 years. Upon the end of a 3-year cycle of action, the County can evaluate successes and lessons learned and then create a new 3-year cycle of actions. In this way, there is a continual process of action, reflection and adaptation in order to grow urban agriculture in Strathcona County over time.