

Community Inquiry About City of London Food Security Team and Urban Agriculture Strategy

Environmental Stewardship and Action Community Advisory Committee | April 3, 2024

Executive Summary

ESACAC engaged with community members searching for current information about urban agriculture from the City of London. This report includes questions from the community and a synthesis of relevant background information.

Questions for City staff:

1. Which staff are currently involved with the City of London Food Security Team?
2. How can the Food Security Team be contacted for community engagement?
3. When will the next report on the Urban Agriculture Strategy be presented to Council, if at all?
4. What is the status of the Urban Agriculture Steering Committee?
5. Should agenda items related to agriculture and community food security be addressed to the [Planning Community Advisory Committee](#) reporting to the Planning and Environment Committee? Agriculture is not explicitly listed in [the terms of reference for ESACAC](#) but there are linkages between community food security and climate change adaptation.

Background

City organizing

Previously, the City of London had an [Agriculture Advisory Committee](#). When the terms of reference for advisory committees were revised in 2021, some items from the committee's mandate related to agriculture were incorporated into the mandate for the [Planning Community Advisory Committee](#). The Planning Community Advisory Committee reports to the Planning and Environment Committee (PEC).

In November 2017 Council adopted the [London Urban Agriculture Strategy](#). The Strategy identifies five broad categories for actions that support urban agriculture: growing, processing, distribution, food loss and recovery, and education and connection. Under each category, community-identified priorities were described, and a series of actions were identified to achieve these priorities. For each action, roles were identified for each of the partners (Urban Agriculture community, Agencies, and City). This Strategy was intended to be driven by the urban agriculture community with City and agency support.

The Goals of the Strategy are to:

1. Develop a strategy to direct urban agriculture efforts in the City of London;
2. Address all aspects of urban agriculture within the city and present policy and regulation amendments where necessary;
3. Determine the roles and responsibilities of the City and community in the implementation of the strategy;
4. Address gaps that may exist in providing for urban agriculture; and,
5. Outline criteria for pilot site selection and/or urban agriculture projects.

In the following years, community gardens have been one of the focal areas of the Strategy that have led to successes. There have also been by-law changes consistent with goals of the Strategy. These include allowing more frequent "garage sales", which allow for residentially grown produce to be sold, as well as allowing for farm gate sales on non-agricultural designated land. The City has participated in various food security projects, such as approving the creation of a Food Hub in Cavendish Park. However, overall, actions taken directly under the Strategy have been described by some participants in the community as "far and few in between".

The City previously engaged with an Urban Agriculture Steering Committee consisting of community members. A summary of activities by this committee in 2019 is provided in an [April 2020 staff report to the Planning and Environment Committee](#). The last known task for the committee in 2020 was to compile an [update](#) for City Council. It is believed that this Steering Committee is no longer active; its future is unclear.

The City formed a Food Security Team in 2020 consisting of staff representatives from different divisions. This Team is briefly mentioned on page 38 of the Climate Emergency Action Plan support document [Overview of City Plans and Strategies that Support Climate Action](#). The status and membership of the Food Security Team is unknown; no information about the Team could be found on the City's website.

In June 2021, John Fleming from the Human Environments Analysis Lab (HEAL) at Western presented a report to the City titled [Making Urban Agriculture Easy](#). The report provides a summary of barriers as well as recommendations for creating an enabling policy and regulatory environment for urban agriculture.

In November 2021, [a staff report was presented to the Planning and Environment Committee](#) regarding encouraging the growing of food in the urban areas. In December, City Council passed amendments to the London Plan and Zoning By-law focused on the regulations for growing food within the urban growth boundary, the development and use of greenhouses in association with urban agriculture, and shipping containers used to grow food in association with urban agriculture.

There is currently little public information about urban agriculture available on the [City of London website](#). Similarly, there is a lack of public information on what has been done since 2021, and lack of direction on what should be done to further advance the Urban Agriculture Strategy.

Previous urban agriculture contacts at the City included:

- Chuck Parker (since retired)
- Isaac de Ceuster (since transferred)
- Justin Adema in Planning (since reassigned)
- Karen Oldham (since retired) administered the LCRN grant to support multi-phase assessment
- Councillor Hadleigh McAlister, member of the Middlesex London Food Policy Council
- Vanessa Kinsley, Neighbourhood Development including community gardens. According to the Deputy City Manager
- Michelle Dellamora, Manager, Community Initiatives and Plans
- Mike Fabro previously engaged with the Middlesex London Food Policy Council

Community organizing

[The Middlesex London Food Policy Council](#) was formed in 2016 with a purview of London as well as Middlesex County. The Food Policy Council was unofficially involved with the development of the City's Urban Agricultural Strategy.

In recent years, the Food Policy Council has focussed on the [multi-phase assessment of community food security](#) facilitated by a London Community Recovery Network grant from the City of London. The assessment involves research on sustainable food systems and community food systems. The Food Policy Council maintains a [Local Food Directory](#) resource that could be made more robust with support from the City. [Phase 3](#) was completed in November 2023 and involved an environmental scan of municipal food system policies and practices. Next steps for the Food Policy Council include analyzing the results of the multi-phase assessment of community food security, producing recommendations and identifying action items. The Food Policy Council is interested in presenting the outcomes of the multi-phase assessment to the City, but they are unsure who at the City to contact about this.

One theme that emerged from Phase 3 of the assessment is the need for a staff member or team from the municipal government to be continuously responsible for food. The current lack of clarity on this front

in London is creating hesitancy and slowing much-needed action in the community. For example, when it comes to seeking information about agriculture-related requests, such as for building greenhouses, accessing land for growing food or changes to zoning, there is limited understanding in the community of who at the City should be contacted for support. Well-established groups like Urban Roots with a network of volunteers have an easier time navigating the City while smaller or newer groups may face barriers. A thriving local food system requires dedicated facilitation that doesn't fall to patchwork volunteer efforts.

Under the current severe economic conditions, there are concerns from the community about the sustainability of existing urban agriculture initiatives. According to the [Middlesex London Health Unit](#), as of 2023 roughly 1 in 6 households in Middlesex-London faces food insecurity. Food security should also be considered in terms of emergency preparedness; local food supply is an important emergency preparedness strategy in the face of current supply chain instability. For instance, it has been estimated that in the event of a border closure (for whatever reason) we have approximately 8 days of food supply.

Potential Recommendations

1. Community food security and the Urban Agriculture Strategy should be included in the next version of the Terms of Reference for ESACAC, given linkages to climate change adaptation. This recommendation could be forwarded to the Governance Working Group that will be reviewing advisory committees soon.
2. Request an update on the Urban Agriculture Strategy from the City.
3. Determine the appropriate staff person and department to assume responsibility for Urban Agriculture Strategy and food security.
4. Dedicate a City of London website page to the Urban Agriculture Strategy and related resources.

References

Background and food security map

https://www.londonenvironment.net/urban_agriculture

Middlesex London Food Policy Council Community Food Assessment

<https://mlfpc.ca/resources/2022-community-food-security/>

London Urban Agricultural Strategy (2017)

<https://assets.nationbuilder.com/londonenvironmentalnetwork/pages/1364/attachments/original/1606510759/2017-Nov-UAS-Final.pdf?1606510759>

City of London Community Garden Annual Report (2023)

<https://london.ca/sites/default/files/2024-01/Community%20Garden%20Report%202023%20Jan%2011.pdf>

Who is being consulted?

Susan Smith, Ellen Lakusiak, Jess Cordes from Middlesex London Food Policy Council.

Richard Bloomfield from Urban Roots/Western University.

City Councillor Skylar Franke