

November 17, 2021



c/o Councillor Anna Hopkins
Chair – Planning and Environment Committee

Planning and Environment Committee

Re: Encouraging the Growing of Food in Urban Areas of London

In response to the Covid-19 Pandemic, and to further our goal of providing food to those that need it in the London Community, the Food Bank undertook to construct a greenhouse in the rear yard of our warehouse property early in 2020.

We quickly became aware of how difficult it is to grow food in this way in the City of London. While the zoning applied to our site would allow for the construction of a commercial greenhouse on our property (for the purposes of selling plants, bushes and trees), it would not technically allow for a permanent greenhouse for the purposes of growing food. This issue lay with an antiquated zoning by-law that didn't recognize, nor accommodate for, growing food within greenhouses in London's urban areas. The Official Plan similarly didn't make it clear where food could be grown and this presented issues for zoning amendments and variances to do so.

Similarly, the zoning by-law made it unclear where converted shipping containers may be permitted for the purposes of growing food. The Food Bank found this disconcerting as there is a trend towards adapting shipping containers with high tech equipment that can allow for large amounts of food to be grown within confined spaces. It was even difficult to understand whether, and where, vacant buildings could be used to grow food in urban areas. Furthermore, it was clear that lot coverage restrictions, high parking standards and expensive site planning requirements could render many urban agriculture proposals infeasible.

Staff within Planning, Development Services and Building worked closely with us to help us through these processes for the Food Bank site. However, the broader City-wide issue remained – it was incredibly difficult to grow food within greenhouses, shipping containers and within buildings in London's urban areas. All of this confused us, as we knew that Council had recently adopted an Urban Agriculture Strategy that promoted the growing of food in appropriate locations throughout London's urban areas.

We approached City Council on this subject in the Summer of 2020 and were very grateful for Council's direction to staff to prepare amendments to relevant planning and development policies and regulations so that growing food in London's urban areas was more easily achievable. In response to this direction, the Food Bank secured John Fleming, on a pro bono basis, to collaborate with City Staff and prepare a background study which reviewed existing policies and regulations and made various recommendations for changes.

We have been collaborating with Planning Staff through 2021 and we are delighted to see Staff's report headed to the Planning and Environment Committee on November 22nd, 2021 entitled "Encouraging the Growing of Food in the Urban Areas of London". City Staff have done a wonderful job of formulating changes to the Official Plan and Zoning By-law that will make urban agriculture easier in London. We think the policies strike a good balance between accommodating urban agriculture in appropriate locations and protecting the amenity of surrounding lands. We believe the changes being proposed represent a measured, but effective, approach to eliminating the current barriers to growing food within urban areas of London.

We wish to thank Council and Staff for all of their good work on this subject. As the cost of food continues to rise, together with the inflationary costs of housing and living in general, the challenge for Londoners to afford nutritious food is at an all-time high. And, unfortunately, we expect that this challenge will continue to grow and affect evermore Londoners in the future. This initiative by City Council can make a real difference by allowing individuals, institutions, industries and businesses across the City to use their lands and buildings to grow food that is so badly needed. These changes support our vision for London as a food city, where everyone has access to the food they need and where no one goes hungry.

Sincerely,



Glen Pearson
Co-executive Director, London Food Bank



Jane Roy
Co-executive Director, London Food Bank