

Proposal for a Sustainable Food Systems Park Garden City Lands, Richmond, B.C., Canada



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The Need

In September 2006, the Richmond Food System Assessment commissioned for the Richmond Poverty Response Committee uncovered the following issues in Richmond:

- Richmond is at risk for food security, given its geographic location and dependence on food imports.
- The number of farms in Richmond has dropped from 247 in 1996 to 182 in 2001.
- Only one of the four community gardens is accessible by public transit.
- There are no food-related social enterprises (buying clubs, food co-ops, community-supported agriculture) or farmer's markets promoting local food consumption.
- The locations of the Richmond Food Bank were not readily accessible by public transport. (This situation has subsequently been improved.)

According to the City of Richmond's Official Community Plan (OCP), the population of Richmond is expected to grow to 212,000 by the year 2021. Much of this growth is planned for the City Centre, where there is a shortage of green space and parks. While the increase in population will result in a greater demand for food, the farming community in Richmond is aging, and the rate of replacement is low. Richmond needs more locally grown food.

To counteract these issues, the Richmond Poverty Response Committee requests that the area known as the Garden City lands be kept in the Agricultural Land Reserve and developed as a Sustainable Food Systems Park. This land would be used to grow culturally-appropriate, organically produced food and would provide a number of services to the community.

The benefits of a farm on the Garden City lands would be:

- **Environmental:** The urban farm would shorten the distance between production and consumption, improve the local micro-climate, act as a carbon sink by absorbing CO₂, increase environmental biodiversity, and use urban waste (solid organic waste used for compost).
- **Social:** The farm would improve the appearance of the neighbourhood, organize local citizens, attract tourists from abroad, provide access to income-generating opportunities, and improve access to fresh, nutritious food.
- **Economic:** A greater percentage of the value of the food grown in Richmond and then consumed locally would remain in the community.

1. Vision Statement

The Sustainable Food Systems Park will be a place to promote a local food system with access to affordable and nutritious food for everyone in Richmond. It will:

- Promote sustainable agriculture.
- Include space for growing native edible plants on land reserved for organic farming, a restaurant featuring locally grown food, a teaching kitchen, and community supported agriculture (CSAs).
- House a new Richmond Food Bank location with garden plots accessible to clients.
- Provide space for cooking clubs and other activities that support food access and security and foster self-reliance as well as a sense of belonging and community.

2. Goals

- To develop an accessible, barrier-free food centre that is an example of urban agriculture.
- To increase the local production of affordable, culturally appropriate food.
- To support new and established farmers.
- To increase the number of local food enterprises with a focus on youth and First Nations.
- To educate the community in environmental stewardship, organic farming, and safe food handling practices.
- To develop a community meeting space to counteract the isolation caused by immigration, age, and poverty
- To develop a unique public space that would be accessible by trails and link to the city's park system and that would attract tourists from around the GVRD and from afar.

3. Concept Elements

Although a number of elements will be part of the Sustainable Food Systems Park, the land in its entirety will be managed as one unit, thereby ensuring that all development on the land adheres to the goals of the park. Water issues, in particular the impact of development on drainage, will need to be addressed over the entirety of the property, rather than section by section.

Agricultural

- Leased acreage for Richmond farmers (approximately 5 acres each)
- Community farms (1 to 3 acre lots for CSAs)
- Group Allotment gardens for individuals and non-profit agencies
- Apiary and honey house
- Heritage orchards
- Demonstration blueberry, cranberry fields
- Seed-saving storage (freezers)
- Equipment storage sheds and equipment pool
- Composting systems, water conservation
- Free range chickens and ducks
- Greenhouses and cold frames
- Water reservoir to enhance drainage and be a resource for irrigation needs

Economic

- Organic local food restaurant
- Local farmers market
- Economic social enterprises—supporting small businesses to market sauces, salsas, dried herbs, honey, and fruit products grown on the Garden City lands
- Commercial kitchen accessible to entrepreneurs
- Green power systems, including solar and geothermal

Educational

- Teaching/demonstration farm fields (UBC, Kwantlen Horticulture)
- Continued education programs
- Community teaching kitchens
- Perinatal nutrition and support program for low-income pregnant women

Social Support

- Future Richmond Food Bank Centre
- Public trails
- Outdoor gathering spaces
- Cob houses for trainees/apprentices to live in + a caretaker

Concept Details

The Richmond Food bank has been in need of a new home. Despite an upgrade in 2007, no option is equal to the possibility of being housed in a Sustainable Food System Park on the Garden City lands in terms of combining the requirements of accessibility, affordability, and community partnership as well as. This will allow Food Bank clients to access the community gardens and farm. In this way, the Richmond Food Bank will incorporate a valuable community food security measure, thereby increasing the sustainability of the whole food system within Richmond. Food Bank clients, volunteers, and the community at large will be able to create a system that promotes social change and fosters self-reliance.

Land prices in Richmond have made it increasingly difficult for new immigrants and new farmers to begin farming. A number of different plot and acreage sizes will enable the public to grow food according to their own needs. Individuals and families wanting to grow as much of their own food as possible will have access to allotment gardens. Community groups and hobby growers who want to make the step into commercial production will be able to access large size plots and acreages. Lastly, commercial growers will be able to rent larger acreages as well as access communal equipment such as tractors and tillers.

A number of social enterprise and community economic development opportunities would exist on the site. A restaurant, using produce grown on the adjacent land would provide a much-needed outlet for local produce. In addition, a teaching kitchen would be able to train young people in food preparation and provide skills development. The produce could also be channeled through a market stall, run by local youth. Tilling and harvesting equipment housed on-site could be made available to rent and provide an income opportunity for a local entrepreneur. Larger plots of land could be also leased to local farmers. Beehives could be developed on-site and then rented to local berry growers. Green waste from the surrounding apartments could be composted on site, with finished compost sold back to local apartment gardeners. Worm bins could be developed and then sold to the surrounding community

Keeping the Garden City lands in the Agricultural Land Reserve and developing a Sustainable Food System Park would put the city of Richmond on the world map as a forward-thinking community well positioned in terms of food security. The demand for such a park is high and a number of agencies are keen to participate in the formation of a Sustainable Food System Park.

4. Potential Partners

Community Food Security: Richmond Food Bank, Richmond Poverty Response Committee, Richmond Fruit Tree Sharing Project, Richmond Family Place, Community Kitchens (FSGV), RAISE, Terra Nova Schoolyard Society, FarmFolk/CityFolk, City Farmer, City of Vancouver Food Policy Council, Food Secure Canada, Vancouver Coastal Health Authority, Environmental Youth Alliance Group, SPEC

Health/Wellness Agencies: Vancouver Coastal Health Authority, RADAT/Pathways, Garrett Wellness Centre

Other Richmond Organizations: Richmond Nature Park, Richmond Agricultural Advisory Committee

Educational: UBC, Kwantlen University College School of Horticulture and Institute for Sustainable Horticulture, Langara College, Richmond School District, etc. The opportunities to educate and attract young people in food production are enormous. Some examples:

- The University of British Columbia has already expressed an interest in partnering with such an endeavor. Students at UBC would be able to gain practical skills under a co-op degree program. Educational opportunities through a UBC Farm extension and through volunteering or mentoring would allow many who otherwise would not farm at all to develop and grow their confidence and skill level.
- Kwantlen College's Richmond campus is steps away from the Garden City lands and a number of partnerships with the College's horticulture, business, and ecology departments are possible.
- Access to continuing education services could be provided for farmers in such areas as seed saving, organic pest control, and produce marketing.

5. Successful Urban Farming Projects

Successful urban farms and community gardens have been cited worldwide. Some examples:

- The 27- acre Centre for Agroecology and Sustainable Food Systems in Santa Cruz, California
- The LifeCycles Project, Victoria, BC
- The Environmental Youth Alliance's Youth Garden in Vancouver, BC

- The City of Montreal has the largest community garden program in North America. For \$10 a year, over 12,000 urban gardeners have access to 8,195 garden plots, each about 200 square feet, located in 97 sites. Each garden is administered by a volunteer committee that administers the funds and property of the gardens and acts as a liaison with the city administration. The city in turn provides a horticultural consultant to each garden to provide technical advice and ensure that all the gardeners use organic gardening practices. The city also provides each of its nine districts with a manager to supervise all the gardens. The city stipulates that a minimum of five varieties of plants must be grown, with flowers making up no more than ten percent of the area. The waiting list to get into some of the gardens is almost two years long.
- The City of Seattle provides 4,600 urban gardeners with 1,900 garden plots. One of the sites connected with the City of Seattle's P-Patch program is Marra Farm, 4.5 acres of historically preserved farmland and restored creek located in the South Seattle neighbourhood of South Park. It is surrounded by industrial areas, and it is home to a high concentration of food-insecure and ethnically diverse immigrant communities. Marra Farm is a productive green oasis that generates over ten tons of organic produce each year for low-income families. It also offers youth employment training and market garden activities, nutrition classes for elementary school children, and a place for community members to grow and harvest traditional foods. For the past three years, the youth crews have been making pesto from basil grown in the garden and selling it at the Columbia City Farmers Market.
- In the Davenport West neighbourhood of Toronto, The Stop Community Food Centre (The Stop) works to increase people's access to healthy food in a manner that maintains dignity, builds community, and challenges inequality. Programming includes community kitchens and dining, urban agriculture, a food bank, drop-ins, civic engagement and prenatal and postnatal nutrition and support. The Stop provided access food, information, and advocacy, as well as social and recreational activities, to over 16,500 people in 2006. The Stop's 8,000 sq. ft. community garden and greenhouse produced over 2,400 pounds of fresh food. By the year 2008, the Stop will be expanding its programming to a new site, The Green Barn, a former TTC streetcar maintenance barn. A year-round greenhouse, sheltered garden, community kitchen, and outdoor wood-burning bake oven are all planned for the new space.

6. Research Sources

Publications

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http://ville.montreal.qc.ca/pls/portal/docs/page/librairie_en/documents/Montreal_Community_Gardening_Program.pdf

Seattle Youth Garden Works,
<http://www.sygw.org/marra.shtml>

The Stop Community Food Centre,
<http://www.thestop.org/agriculture.php>