

**TO:** CHAIR AND MEMBERS  
SOCIAL PLANNING COMMITTEE

**DATE:** 2021 January 13

**FROM:** DIRECTOR PLANNING AND BUILDING

**FILE:** 76500 20  
*Reference: Urban Agriculture*

**SUBJECT: PROPOSED FOOD SYSTEMS STRATEGY**

**PURPOSE:** To propose a framework and approach for a Burnaby Food Systems Strategy.

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**RECOMMENDATIONS:**

1. **THAT** the Committee request Council to approve the framework and approach outlined in *Section 4.0* for a Burnaby Food Systems Strategy.
2. **THAT** a copy of this report be forwarded to the Environment Committee, the Parks, Recreation and Culture Commission, and the Planning and Development Committee for information.

**REPORT****1.0 INTRODUCTION**

At its meeting of 2019 May 06, the then-Environment and Social Planning Committee received a delegation from Burnaby Food First requesting the City to develop a Food Systems Strategy for Burnaby. Arising from the discussion, the matter was subsequently referred to staff for further investigation. This report responds to that request.

Burnaby Food First (BFF) is a local community group that was formed in the late 1990's to advocate for affordable access to food for all community residents. Membership is composed of Burnaby community members, representatives of local non-profits (e.g. Burnaby Neighbourhood House, Immigrant Services Society of BC), Fraser Health Authority, and the City (Social Planning). Over the years, BFF has raised funds to support direct food delivery programs (e.g. school breakfast programs), supported the establishment of gardening programs at Burnaby high schools, and organized food skills-development workshops for community members on a wide range of issues such as canning, drying and storing food, and container food gardening.

A food system is the complex web of activities involving the growing, production, processing, transport, distribution, and consumption of food. A Food System Strategy would examine the

levers held by the City, and other community partners, including local non-profits, other government entities and the business community, to support these activities, while ensuring that they are conducted in an environmentally sustainable and equitable manner.

## 2.0 POLICY SECTION

The City of Burnaby supports this information through the following Council-adopted policies:

- **Official Community Plan** (1998) includes a 'Section 9 – Agriculture'.
- **Burnaby Economic Sustainability Strategy** (2007) includes a Primary Strategy of 'Agriculture', which speaks to the importance of continued viable agricultural operations in Burnaby.
- **Burnaby Social Sustainability Strategy** (2011) includes the Strategic Priority 'Meeting Basic Needs', which includes Action #26 that outlines the importance of developing a 'community based' Food Strategy.
- **Burnaby Environmental Sustainability Strategy** (2016) includes the goal of 'Nourish', which references the importance of considering food systems, and identifies a 'quick start' to initiate a community-based Strategy.

In addition to the policies noted above, the *Strategy* supports a number of goals and sub-goals of the *Corporate Strategic Plan*:

- **A Healthy Community**
  - Healthy life – Encourage opportunities for healthy living and wellbeing
  - Healthy environment – Enhance our environmental health, resilience and sustainability
  - Community involvement – Encourage residents and businesses to give back to and invest in the community
- **A Dynamic Community**
  - Economic opportunity – Foster an environment that attracts new and supports existing jobs, businesses and industries
  - Community development – Manage change by balancing economic development with environmental protection and maintaining a sense of belonging

## 3.0 BACKGROUND

As referenced above, a food system includes all the local processes involved in keeping us fed: from growing and harvesting food to its processing, packaging, transportation, distribution, preparation, marketing, and its final consumption. As well as being central to the economies of most communities, food is a basic element of community self-reliance and cultural well-being. It provides jobs, enhances and transmits culture, enables community and supports public health.

Access to safe, nutritious, culturally appropriate and affordable food is necessary for the well-being of every community resident. Unfortunately, many British Columbians still go hungry as a result of both economic and physical barriers to access. For example, a low-income senior without

access to a vehicle or convenient transit service is unable to physically travel to a grocery store, as well as being limited by income to those goods they can afford to purchase. The BC Centre for Disease Control estimates that 12.7% of people across the Province do not have access to adequate food. This experience has become more acute as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. In Burnaby approximately 3,200 people a week are seeking support via the Greater Vancouver Food Bank and their community affiliates (e.g. Burnaby Neighbourhood House). This number has grown significantly from pre-pandemic numbers (approx. 2,000 people a week), and is expected to further increase as economic impacts of the pandemic persist.

Metro Vancouver is one of the most important food producing and processing areas in British Columbia. The region's farmers supply over 130 different farm commodities including a wide array of fruits, vegetables, dairy, poultry and other livestock products. Burnaby contains 234 hectares of land within the Agricultural Land Reserve, with approximately 40 active farms. Burnaby is also home to a number of food supporting and processing businesses.

Components of a food system (e.g. shipping of goods) also have significant impacts upon local and global environmental sustainability and is a major producer of emissions. Food distributors and retailers in North America rarely have more than 3-4 days of fresh food stockpiled locally. Food items regularly travel hundreds or thousands of kilometers, and then can be circularly transported – that is, produced in B.C., but processed out of province, and shipped back again for sale (e.g. B.C. milk). This practice is dictated by economies of scale that do not account for environmental impact and is vulnerable to interruptions of various kinds.

Local governments support local and regional food systems primarily through land-use decisions, bylaws and policies that, for example, seek to protect agricultural land and encourage it to be brought into production, designate appropriate industrial and processing areas for food, and zone for farmer's markets and other food retailers<sup>1</sup>. As well, local governments often provide a range of both informal and formal community supports that enable access to food for local residents. Examples of local government programs that support access to food are subsidized lunch programs for seniors, cooking programs for teens, and 'how to garden' workshops and programs for the general public.

#### **4.0 PROPOSED BURNABY FOOD SYSTEMS STRATEGY - FRAMEWORK**

The following framework is proposed for development of a Burnaby Food Systems Strategy. A completed Food Systems Strategy would outline the current context of access to food in Burnaby, as well as articulating short, medium and long term actions for enhancement. Possible actions include avenues for protecting agricultural land and bringing more land into active production, expanding urban opportunities for food growing, protecting manufacturing and industrial land (for food processing), zoning review for the protection of cultural food assets<sup>2</sup>, and further support for food-related community capacity building (e.g. community kitchens).

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<sup>1</sup> For example, establishments such as grocery and produce stores that sell produce, milk products and dry goods.

<sup>2</sup> Cultural food assets are defined as the resources, facilities, services or spaces which provide access to fresh, often local, culturally appropriate food for particular cultural groups, while also providing spaces that support the maintenance and transmission of culture (e.g. halal/kosher butchers).

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This work would directly inform the anticipated development of an updated Official Community Plan, given the expected linkages described above with a variety of land uses including manufacturing, industrial, agricultural, commercial, and public lands.

## ***Phase 1***

### **Scoping the Strategy**

Staff would undertake initial research to precisely determine which categories and components of the food system would be examined through the development of the Strategy. This work would be informed by the Metro Vancouver Regional Food System Strategy (2011) and Implementation Plan (2016), similar strategies produced by other cities (e.g. City of Toronto, City of Edmonton, City of Victoria, City of Vancouver, City of Revelstoke), and current academic research.

### **Establish a Community-Based Food-Systems Advisory Network**

To align with the development of similar City strategies, and in keeping with the City's goal of engaging with the community, it is proposed that the process to develop a Food Systems Strategy be informed by a network of engaged community members (e.g. members of Burnaby Food First), subject-matter experts (e.g. farmers, food suppliers and distributors/retailers), and relevant cross-departmental staff representatives (e.g. Parks Recreation and Culture Staff). Such engagement will ensure that the Strategy is grounded in local knowledge of food systems in Burnaby.

It is proposed that this Network would meet occasionally as a collective, but that the majority of input would be solicited by lead project staff on an individual basis. It is anticipated that any such meetings or conversations would take place virtually. The network would be time-limited to that of the project duration. It is proposed that the network be administered by Social Planning, through pre-established working relationships.

### **Retain a Food Systems Consultant**

In order to ensure that any developed Strategy fully considers and analyzes the available levers available to local government to influence the local Food System, it is proposed that a specialist consultant be retained to complete background research, write the Strategy document and inform a community engagement process. City staff would work closely with the consultant in order to develop a robust Strategy and confirm that it aligns with the existing Metro Vancouver Regional Food System Strategy<sup>3</sup>, the recently released Federal 'Food System Policy'<sup>4</sup>, and City of Burnaby policies and strategies (e.g. Environmental Sustainability Strategy, Social Sustainability Strategy, and Economic Development Strategy). Staff would act as liaisons between the Food-Systems Strategy Advisory Network, members of the public, and the consultant.

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<sup>3</sup> For more information, please visit: <http://www.metrovancouver.org/services/regional-planning/agriculture/rfs-strategy/Pages/about-the-strategy.aspx>

<sup>4</sup> For more information, please visit: <https://www.canada.ca/en/campaign/food-policy.html>

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Funds for the initial retention of such a consultant have been requested within the 2021 One-Time Funding Stabilization Reserve Requests as a component the Sustainability Projects of \$500,000 for Planning and Building. These requests are included in the Planning and Building Department's Provisional Operating Budget to be approved by Council.

## ***Phase 2***

### **Background Research**

Staff would work with the consultant to complete more detailed research and statistical analysis regarding the economic, transportation, agriculture, and cultural (etc.) aspects of the food system as it occurs in Burnaby. This work would be further informed by the Food Systems Advisory Network proposed above, and by data and input provided by Metro Vancouver.

### **Conduct a Community Engagement Process**

Given the complexity and multi-layered aspects of food systems, and the diffuse impacts felt throughout the community it is necessary that development of any Strategy include a robust community engagement process. It is proposed that the consultant referenced above provide input into development of the process, but that staff undertake the engagement activities directly. These activities could include a public survey, focus groups, a community forum, a mobile tour showcasing different examples of the local food system, and specific consultation processes to connect with subject matter experts and food processors/producers as well as farmers. In addition, particular efforts will be made to gain the input of those directly experiencing food insecurity. It is anticipated that all activities undertaken will be virtual until/if public health orders are updated.

The input from the engagement process, supported by the additional guidance and insight of a Food Systems Advisory Network, would inform the content and structure of the Food Systems Strategy.

### **Draft Strategy**

Based upon the work described above, the consultant would prepare the draft Strategy, which would be reviewed and informed by staff. Drafts of the Strategy would also be reviewed by the Food Systems Advisory Network, and by subject matter experts (internal and external) as appropriate. Once finalized the draft would be referred to Council for discussion and approval.

## ***Phase 3***

### **Food Systems Strategy Implementation Plan**

Once Council approval of the Strategy has been obtained, an Implementation Plan will be developed. The Implementation Plan would identify and prioritize actions, establish timelines and benchmarks, and identify opportunities for incorporating said actions into existing work programs.

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The finalized Strategy and the proposed Implementation Plan would then be referred to Council for approval.

Should the Committee and Council approve the framework described above to develop a Food Systems Strategy, staff would proceed with Phase 1, pending approval by Council for the 2021 One-Time Funding Stabilization Reserve Requests within the Planning and Building Department's Provisional Operating Budget.

## 5.0 COMMUNITY GARDENS

At its meeting of 2020 June 16 the City's Social Planning Committee, as a result of discussion resulting from correspondence relating to the keeping of backyard chickens, requested staff to report on how residents could be supported to produce more of their own food. This was followed by a motion at the 2020 November 24 Planning and Development Committee requesting staff to develop a revised Community Gardens policy and approach, including investigating potential locations across the City and developing a streamlined application process. Staff from the relevant departments (Planning / Parks, Recreation and Cultural Services) are beginning scoping work, and will report back to the Committees when a revised policy and approach is developed. Work undertaken for the Food Systems Strategy and the community garden policy review and approach development are mutually reinforcing.

## 6.0 CONCLUSION

The Official Community Plan, the trio of Sustainability Strategies (Environmental, Economic and Social), and the Corporate Strategic Plan support the City to move forward in developing a Food Systems Strategy for Burnaby. As such, it is recommended that the Committee request Council to approve the framework and approach outlined in *Section 4.0* for a Burnaby Food Systems Strategy. It is also recommended that a copy of this report be forwarded to the Environment Committee and to the Parks, Recreation and Culture Commission, and the Planning and Development Committee for information.

  
E.W. Kozak, Director  
PLANNING AND BUILDING

RM:sa

cc: City Manager  
Director Engineering  
Director Parks, Recreation and Cultural Services  
Director Finance  
Director Corporate Services  
City Clerk