

Arbutus Greenway Community Garden Proposal

ANNIE FANG

Greenest City 2020

The Greenest City action plan is a strategy for the City of Vancouver to become the greenest city in the world by 2020. In the face of climate uncertainty, growing population, and changing economies, the Greenest City plan aims to shape Vancouver to be a healthy, livable, and prosperous “green capital”. The plan outlines 10 main goals to achieve this. In particular, the installation of more community gardens would be in accordance to the goals “Access to Nature” and “Local Food (City of Vancouver, 2012)”. A stronger Local Food system would benefit the environment and urban biodiversity, reduce our ecological footprint, increase food accessibility and security, and reduce the distance from farm to plate. According to the plan, the implementation of access of nature could involve developing community gardens, parks, and greenways. Community gardens would also improve access to nature, providing health and social benefits for local communities (City of Vancouver, 2012).

What is urban agriculture?

Urban agriculture refers activities related to growing plants for food within an urban area. In Vancouver, urban agriculture activities include community gardens, farmers markets, hobby bee-keeping, as well as shared plots and edible landscaping (City of Vancouver, 2009)."

Community gardens provide a wide array of benefits to the local community, economy, health, and environment.

Vancouver's Food Strategy is a plan to meet "social, environmental, economic, and health goals" to create a sustainable food system for the city. It's mandate is to increase opportunities for people to grow their own food, increase walkability to local food markets, improve accessibility to affordable food, implement community composting programs, and create community food celebrations (City of Vancouver, 2017). Vancouver's Food Strategy outlines the benefits of community gardens as:

Community Economic Development

The production and consumption of local food enhances Vancouver's economy.

Gardens can provide employment opportunities or even provide a source of income. Urban gardeners can contribute to the local economy by selling their produce at local farmers markets. Urban agriculture can provide produce for local food chains to increase their competitiveness with retail supermarkets. For many communities in the City of Vancouver, community gardens improve accessibility to more affordable food. Gardens can also provide food security, where people could obtain a "safe personally acceptable, nutritionally adequate diet." In particular, gardens could provide food security for at risk communities, single parent families, and individuals on unemployment insurance or welfare (Schutzbank, 2012).

Ecological Health

The installation of urban agriculture projects can benefit the environment by improving biodiversity, ecological footprint, and nutrient cycles in urban soils. Furthermore, the introduction of green space in a city would improve the city's urban heat island effect, cooling the neighborhood it resides in. In addition, community gardens foster a community with an increased environmental awareness and connection with nature by providing residents with the opportunity to regularly work more closely with the earth.

Social Justice

According to Vancouver's Food Strategy, "food is a basic human right." Everyone has the right to "accessible, affordable, healthy and culturally appropriate food (City of Vancouver, 2017)." Community gardens provide citizens the ability to self-sustain at a more affordable cost.

Collaboration and Participation

Community gardens develop communities and transform neighborhoods. It can help build a small urban core where urban agriculture encourages community engagement and food and agriculture education. Urban agriculture produces social capital (Schutzbach, 2012).

Celebration

Food celebrations in communities can help connect individuals through celebrations to communities and societies (City of Vancouver, 2017).

Additional benefits:

Health

In addition to this list, there are health benefits for urban agriculture. The maintenance of a community garden could help an individual increase physical activity, vegetable and fruit intake, and improve mental health. Availability of affordable food plays an important factor in improving personal health. When an individual has access to affordable food, they are more likely to eat healthy foods than unhealthy foods (Schutzbank, 2012). Gardeners are more likely to eat fruits and vegetables than non-gardeners. Furthermore, access to nature is beneficial for our physical and emotional health, by “reducing blood pressure, cholesterol, and stress (City of Vancouver, 2012).”

Food Yields

Contributing to the local food system and supply chain, increasing urban agriculture activities would increase the amount of locally grown fruit and vegetable yields. Increased yields would feed more people within the city.

Disadvantages of Urban Agriculture:

Cost

Initial construction costs for raised beds, soil, and irrigation systems may be expensive. Some of these costs could be reduced through the recycling or repurposing of old materials. Labour costs should be subsidized through volunteer contributions from the community and local organizations to reduce costs. There also may be maintenance costs, as tools in a shared garden would require more frequent replacement from wear. Gardens may experience increased water use charges depending on their irrigation system.

Shared Space

In a public space, there is no privacy for gardeners that community members may want to enjoy. Gardeners spend a considerable amount of time in these spaces maintaining their plants, so it is important to design a layout to provide an increased sense of privacy for gardeners. Spacing between plots, planting of bushes to separate the gardens from the street, and including areas of rest from gardening could help increase a sense of privacy. Further problems involve stolen produce from plots, as well as differing gardening preferences between community members in regards to weeds.

Distance from home

Although local community gardens provide gardening space for

residents who may not have gardening space on their own properties, residents would have to carry their own tools to the garden. This may be inconvenient for some, but this could be mitigated if a storage space was built on site for people to store their tools.

Arbutus Greenway Community Garden Proposal

The Arbutus Greenway is a corridor in Vancouver designed to be a “high quality space for walking and cycling, with public plazas, art, and so much more.” The aim of this project is to strengthen relationships “neighbors and neighborhoods (City of Vancouver, 2017).” A community garden would be an ideal feature along the Arbutus Greenway, promoting sustainability, access to nature, and social interaction between neighbors in the community.

The proposed new community garden is located along the Arbutus Greenway, on East Boulevard between 60th and 61st avenue. This new garden would be an expansion of a small existing garden along the tracks at 60th avenue. Currently, the existing garden provides the neighborhood a beautiful short walk in nature when crossing the train tracks to access public transit. The purpose of this expansion is to recreate the same experience one block away on 61st avenue. The current community garden is not currently listed on the City of Vancouver website. The approval of this proposal would establish this entire area as an official community garden.

The current community garden is small but fully occupied. This indicates that there is a demand in this neighborhood for community garden plots. Furthermore, this land is ideal for urban agriculture development because it is too narrow for any building development.

Much of the ground is bare, as it was previously removed of existing plant species due to filming projects in the area. Therefore, the addition of a community garden would improve soil nutrient cycling as well as urban biodiversity. Furthermore, it will improve Arbutus Greenway as a corridor for the movement of species within the city.

In this neighborhood, there is a nearby park, church, grocery market, and school. This new garden would be a great site for community events or educational field trips for families and children in the area. Community gardens are a great educational tool, where people can learn agricultural practices, environmental issues, and healthy eating. Furthermore, as the Arbutus Greenway develops, the garden would be easily accessible by bike or by foot.

There are several disadvantages to this site. Along the proposed area, there are powerline poles that may interfere with plot placement. The plot and road layout would have to be carefully designed to ensure none of the plots interfere with these poles. Furthermore, extending the proposed area further south may not be ideal because there are tall trees that may be blocking the sunlight several hours during the day.

Approximate Yield and Cost Benefit

Total Area of Garden	803 m ²
Total Useable Green Space	800 m ²
Anticipated total yield of garden per year	720 kg/year
Anticipated people fed	6 persons
Anticipated overall value of all vegetables grown in garden	\$2250 per year

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