

# Proposal for a Sustainable Food Systems Park

## Garden City Lands, Richmond, B.C., Canada

Developed by the [Richmond Poverty Response Committee](#) and [Richmond Food Security Society](#).  
 First presented in 2007. Updated in 2007, 2008 & 2011. Cover illustration is the historical March 2007 graphic (not 2011).



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\*This 2011 update usually refers to the former Richmond Food Security *Task Force* as *Richmond Food Security Society*, its current name.

## The Need

In September 2006, the Richmond Food System Assessment commissioned for the Richmond Poverty Response Society uncovered these issues:

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

According to the City of Richmond's Official Community Plan (OCP), the population of Richmond was expected to grow to 212,000 by the year 2021. Much of this growth will be in 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 Richmond farming community is aging, and the rate of replacement is low. Richmond needs more locally grown food.

*To counteract these issues, the Richmond Poverty Response Committee and Richmond Food Security Society addressed Richmond Council on February 6, 2007, to present this Sustainable Food Systems Park proposal. They advocated that 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 the agricultural park on the Garden City Lands would be:

- **Environmental:** It would shorten the distance between food production and consumption, improve the local micro-climate, act as a carbon sink by absorbing CO<sub>2</sub>, 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, 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. The agricultural park would attract tourists from abroad and provide access to income-generating opportunities.

As the Richmond Council [minutes](#) state, a motion was carried "That the Richmond Poverty Response Committee and the Richmond Food Security [Society] be included in any stakeholders list for the Garden City Lands Study."

The Richmond community soon began describing the area as "Richmond's Stanley Park," featuring urban agriculture instead of urban forest.

## 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 teaching kitchen, community supported agriculture (CSAs), a farmers' market, and perhaps a small food outlet (mobile concession stand?) with the theme of locally grown food.
- House a new [Richmond Food Bank](#) location in connection with garden plots and a community farm and accessible to clients. They may take away food that they grow, but it is primarily an active, cooperative, contributing area, rather than a passive receiving one. It is not a large building (not a replacement for the main food bank building).
- 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.

Note: All buildings would need to befit the agricultural setting, and only uses with Agricultural Land Commission approval would be included.

## 2. Goals

- To develop an accessible, barrier-free food park that is an example of urban agriculture.
- To increase local production of affordable, culturally appropriate food.
- To support new and established farmers.
- To increase the number of local food enterprises, with focuses that include 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 integrate conservation, urban agriculture, education, eco/agri-recreation, and community wellness in a single ALR farming unit.
- To engage all in permaculture if the community wishes.
- To develop a unique public space that would be accessible by trails, link to the city's park system, and attract visitors from the City Centre, all of Richmond, Metro Vancouver, and afar.

### 3. Concept Elements

Although many elements will be part of the sustainable food systems park, the land in its entirety will be managed as one farming unit, thereby ensuring that all development on the land adheres to the goals of the park. Water issues, including drainage, water retention and irrigation, will need to be addressed over the entirety of the property, rather than section-by-section.

#### Agricultural

- Heritage agriculture throughout the sphagnum bog area: up to half the land, e.g., approx. 70% north from Westminster and 70% west from No. 4.
- Leased acreage for new farmers (approx. 5 acres each)
- Community farms (1 to 3 acre lots for CSAs)
- Community garden plots for individuals and non-profit agencies
- Apiary and honey house
- Heritage orchard
- Demonstration cultivated blueberry and 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
- Reservoir lake(s) to enhance drainage and be a resource for irrigation needs

#### Economic

- Organic local food eating place (for ALR uses)
- Local-food farmgate market
- Economic social enterprises—supporting small businesses—market sauces, salsas, dried herbs, honey, and fruit products grown on the Garden City Lands
- Commercial kitchen or community kitchen
- Green power systems, including solar and especially geothermal

#### Educational

- Teaching/demonstration farm fields (Kwantlen Polytechnic University urban agriculture education, UBC, Trinity Western?)
- Continued education programs
- Community teaching kitchens
- Perinatal nutrition and support program for low-income pregnant women [?]

#### Social Support

- Richmond Food Bank location (for ALR uses)
- Public trails
- Outdoor gathering spaces and serene spaces (e.g., for tai chi)
- Cob houses for trainees/apprentices to live in + a caretaker

## Concept Details

The Richmond Food Bank gained a suitable new home in 2007. There continue to be values of a location in a sustainable food systems park on the Garden City Lands in terms of combining the requirements of accessibility, affordability, and community partnership. Food Bank clients will have excellent access to the community gardens and farms. 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.

Individuals and families wanting to grow as much of their own food as possible will have access to community gardens. Community groups and recreational growers who want to make the step into commercial production will be able to access larger-size plots. Lastly, some new growers may 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 could exist on the site, Agricultural Land Commission and community preference permitting. A teaching kitchen would be able to train young people in food preparation and provide skills development. A small prepared-food outlet could use produce grown on the adjacent land. The produce could also be channeled through a farmer's market on site. Tilling and harvesting equipment housed on-site could be made available to rent and provide an income opportunity for a local entrepreneur. 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.

Beehives could be developed on-site and then rented to local berry growers. They are much needed to remedy a shortage, and the bees would be safe from insecticides in the Garden City Lands location.

Keeping the Garden City Lands in the Agricultural Land Reserve and developing a sustainable food systems 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 many agencies are keen to participate.

#### 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 Polytechnic University School of Horticulture and Institute for Sustainable Horticulture, Langara College, Trinity Western University, 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 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's Richmond campus is steps away from the Garden City Lands, and a number of partnerships with the university's horticulture, business, and ecology departments are possible. A [concept paper developed by Kwantlen's Dr. Kent Mullinix](#) has been excellently received by City Council and the community.
- Access to continuing education services could be provided for farmers in such areas as seed saving, organic pest control, and produce marketing, and the continuing education opportunities are enormous.

#### 5. Successful Urban Farming Projects

Successful urban farms and community gardens have been cited worldwide. Some of the *many* possible examples:

- The 27- acre [Center for Agroecology & 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's community garden program](#) is the largest 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 at 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 in each plot, 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. The programs include [Seattle Youth Garden Works](#).
- 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 a recent year. The Stop's 8,000 sq. ft. community garden and greenhouse produced over 2,400 pounds of fresh food. In 2008, the Stop expanded 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 located in the new space.

## 6. Further 2011 Brainstorming

Possible further ways to update the sustainable food systems park proposal:

- Restore up to half the area as a sphagnum bog featuring native agricultural species—a year-round wetland in the southeast with a dyke trail between it and the urban agriculture half of the 136-acre farming unit.
- Eliminate any previously proposed use that is unlikely to be acceptable to the Agricultural Land Commission.
- Give particular attention to the needs of the rapidly growing City Centre population, ensuring opportunities for food growing, agri-recreation, and eco-recreation and enabling community wellness.
- Keep non-farm vehicle use of the Garden City Lands to a minimum.
- Give particular attention to culturally appropriate food plants when planning how the Garden City Lands will contribute to food security.
- Include at least one reservoir lake in the urban agriculture area for storm water retention and irrigation.
- Include heritage and permaculture as major themes.
- Make the lands a hub for Richmond agri-tourism.

## 7. Research Sources

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