



Best Practice: Supporting a Just and Sustainable Urban Food System

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CITY: VANCOUVER

POLICY AREAS: ENVIRONMENT; SOCIAL SERVICES

BEST PRACTICE

The Vancouver Food Policy Council (VFPC) is an advisory body composed of food experts working on matters of food production, processing, distribution, retail, food waste diversion and other food system issues in order to bring a community perspective to policy making and land-use related activities in Vancouver. VFPC plays a key role in supporting the creation of a food system that is ecologically sustainable, economically viable and socially just.

ISSUE

The need for a coordinated approach to food system issues, and a means to establish a municipal role in food policy, had long been an issue in Vancouver. In 1990, nutritionists in the former Vancouver Health Department initiated internal discussions about the need for a food policy. Matters discussed included local food security, the production and supply of adequate, quality foods and people's ability to acquire them. Similar conversations were also taking place in the community at large, through non-profit organizations working on urban agriculture, emergency food services, and other food-related issues. In October of 1995, the Medical Health Officer of the City of Vancouver informed City Council of the existence of the then grassroots organization called the Vancouver Food Policy Coalition and their discussions about generating a food policy for the City of Vancouver.

A strong municipal role was seen to be a way to link together a variety of food-related matters taking place in the city, creating a connection between various initiatives that were taking place in different aspects of the city's food system. Although other levels of government (provincial and federal) have a role in food issues, it was agreed that local government, by virtue of being closest to city residents, had a pivotal role to play.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The primary goal of the VFPC is to examine the operation of the local food system and provide ideas and policy recommendations for how it can be improved. In so doing, Vancouver is able to respond to a variety of food system issues with policy, land-use planning, advocacy and funding. The VFPC also aims to foster sustainable equitable food production, distribution and consumption, nutrition, community development and environmental health.

Part of the Vancouver Food Policy Council's mandate is derived from the Vancouver Food Charter (approved in 2007) which affirms the principles of a "just and sustainable food system" and which sets out the City's commitment to coordinated municipal policy.

The Vancouver Food Charter identifies five principles of a just and sustainable food supply:

1. Community Economic Development
2. Ecological Health
3. Social Justice
4. Collaboration and Participation
5. Celebration

The Food Policy Council also works to support Vancouver City Council in their efforts to make Vancouver "a global leader in urban food systems" by 2020.

IMPLEMENTATION

On July 8, 2003, Vancouver City Council approved a motion supporting the development of a just and sustainable food system for the City of Vancouver. By this time, the City Council had recognized the importance of implementing a formal food policy action plan in Vancouver to address the growing public awareness about food system issues and sustainability. Additionally, food policies were considered a useful tool to examine issues that often go unexamined, such as the effectiveness of food assistance programs and the causes of hunger in the community.

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The motion resulted in the creation of a citizen-led Food Policy Taskforce whose purpose was to assess the best way for the City to be engaged in food system issues. As a result of the Taskforce's year long investigation, a Food Action Plan was formulated and the Vancouver Food Policy Council was created in 2004. This occurred concurrently with the creation of two Food Policy staff positions in the City's Social Planning Department. VFPC is integral in supporting the creation of a just and sustainable food system, defined as one in which food production, processing, distribution and consumption are integrated to enhance the environmental, economic, social and nutritional health of a particular place.

Composition of the Vancouver Food Policy Council (VFPC)

The VFPC is structured similarly to food policy councils across Canada. Members of the VFPC represent a broad number of issues and interests of stakeholders across the food system. Typical representatives might include farmers, consumers, anti-hunger advocates, food bank managers, labor representatives, members of the faith community, food processors, food wholesalers and distributors, food retailers and grocers, chefs and restaurant owners, officials from farm organizations, community gardeners, and academics involved in food policy and law. VFPC is considered a non-partisan forum and does not convene with a political agenda.

Initiatives and Activities

The VFPC met for the first time in September 2004 and developed a detailed work plan that integrates and builds upon the projects and goals identified in the Food Action Plan. It also launched a variety of policy and research initiatives, including, Food Security research studies in 2005 and 2006, the development of the Vancouver Food Charter (2007), the creation of Food System Indicators (2009-10) and many other projects. Through its advisory and review roles, the VFPC has helped shape the development of City bylaws, policies and guidelines related to food, including: Hobby Beekeeping Guidelines (2005), Edible Landscaping (2006), the 2,010 Garden Plots by 2010 Challenge (2007-2009), and Guidelines for the Keeping of Backyard Hens (2010).

The Food Policy Council supports the creation of a just and sustainable food system through a variety of community and residential activities including: food-growing (community gardens, urban farms, edible landscaping, bee-keeping, backyard chickens), food processing, distributions and retailing (farmer's markets, pocket markets, street food vending), emergency food services, food waste collection, municipal procurement, the use of City land for food initiatives, and support for neighborhood food networks.

Vancouver Food Policy Council meetings typically take place on the second Wednesday of every month and members of the public are invited to attend as observers. In these meetings, both members of the FPC and the public can ask questions such as, "How much food consumed is raised locally?", "Does the municipality make efforts to purchase local food?", and "What is the city's hunger problem?"

A typical meeting agenda includes presentations on city-wide initiatives, such as Vancouver's "Greenest City 2020" initiative, a discussion of the City's food strategy and related budget, and an opportunity to connect and hear from local organizations working on food issues, farmers, retailers, restaurateurs, non-profit organizations and other constituent groups.

COST

Current costs for food-related activities include:

- Annual allocation for the Vancouver Food Policy Council: \$15,000 Canadian dollars (\$14,223 USD)
- Staff support costs for 1 full-time and 1 part-time Social Policy Planners: approximately \$150,000 Canadian dollars (\$142,234 USD)
- Additional in-kind staff time from city entities such as the Parks and Gardens Recreation Board, Engineering, Real Estate, Planning, Development Services, Licensing, Urban Food Systems Steering Committee (inter-departmental staff team)

RESULTS AND EVALUATION

Over the past seven years, the notion of food policy and food system planning has moved from the fringe of planning activity into the mainstream. By nurturing a variety of food system activities, the City and its Food Policy Council have worked

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collaboratively to enhance the overall role of food in municipal policy and planning. The result is an increase in community gardens, farmer's markets, and residents participating in a variety of food-related activities.

TIMELINE

July 8, 2003	Vancouver City Council approved a motion supporting the development of a just and sustainable food system.
2003-2004	Vancouver Food Policy Taskforce created. Various recommendations proposed.
2004	Vancouver Food Policy Council created. City staff hired.
2005 – present	Various food related research reports (additional research on food indicators currently underway).
2005	Creation of Hobby Beekeeping Guidelines.
2006-2007	Creation of Edible Landscaping communications.
2006-2009	Development of Seasonal Update Food Policy Newsletter (discontinued due to resourcing).
2007	Creation of the Vancouver Food Charter.
2007-2009	2,010 by 2010 Garden Plots Challenge.
2008	Development of Urban Agriculture Steering Committee (now called Urban Food Systems Steering Committee) – ongoing to present.
2009	Creation of Urban agriculture design guidelines for the private realm
2009 – 2012	Greenest City Grants in support of food systems and urban agriculture.
2010	Creation of Guidelines for Keeping Backyard Hens.
	Release of <i>Toward a Bright Green Future</i> – Council endorsed commitment to make Vancouver a “global leader in urban food systems” by 2020.
	Launch of curbside food waste pick-up (Green Bin program).
	Update to Farmers Market Policy.

LEGISLATION

The creation of the VFPC is supported by the *Vancouver Charter*, the Provincial legislation that sets out the powers of the municipality. The terms and activities of the VFPC and other Advisory Bodies are spelled out in the *City's Procedure Bylaw* and *Code of Conduct*. Under the terms of reference for the VFPC, membership in the advisory body is to consist of the following:

- Fourteen (14) members: two members from each of the following food system areas: a) food production; b) processing; c) access; d) distribution; e) consumption; f) waste management; and g) system-wide.
- Seven (7) seats for members-at-large.

The approved mandate of the VFPC is to support the development of a food system where food is:

- (1) safe, nutritious and culturally appropriate;
- (2) affordable, available and accessible to all; and



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(3) produced, processed, marketed, consumed and waste products reused or managed in a manner that is financially viable, protects the health and dignity of people, and has minimum impact on the environment.

Vancouver Food Policy Council Terms of Reference link: <http://vancouver.ca/ctyclerk/civicagencies/foodcouncil/index.htm>

LESSONS LEARNED

The movement to a broader understanding and acceptance of food issues as part of the municipal agenda was an incremental process. The establishment of a Food Policy Council played a key role in helping the City to determine the various roles that it could play in food system issues. Moreover, the presence of the VFPC enabled the City to access and benefit from first-hand expertise on a wide array of food issues. By empowering the VFPC, the City has also been able to benefit from a range of new community-led food projects and research initiatives.

TRANSFERABILITY

There are a variety of conditions that support best practice food policy work. With these components met, any city can benefit from a Food Policy Council. These include:

- Empowering local leaders and playing a convening role in bringing them together to work on city-wide food issues;
- Willingness to allow space to bridge political leaders and community leaders in support of a just and sustainable food system;
- Willingness to position the city as a proactive player in local food issues – with appropriate recognition that local governments can play a key role;
- An interest in supporting broader public awareness about environmental sustainability and the role of food;
- A collective desire to build community capacity around local food;
- The availability of land and other resources for key initiatives, as well as a willingness to utilize it for food projects;
- Funding support within the city government and community at large;
- Willingness of key stakeholders to collaborate on innovative ideas – even when the ideas haven't yet been tested elsewhere.

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Facts and figures in this report were provided by the highlighted city agency to New York City Global Partners.