



Cultivating the Conversation: Workshop on Urban Agriculture Policy in Durham Region

Summary Report

November 2017



This workshop summary report was prepared by Sandra K. Znajda (Durham Food Policy Council), Mary Drummond (Chair, Durham Food Policy Council; Chair, Durham Integrated Growers) and Mary Anne Martin (Durham Food Policy Council, Durham Integrated Growers). The report captures key feedback obtained from participants at the Cultivating Conversations workshop, held on November 2nd, 2017. If you have any questions or comments regarding the summary, please contact:

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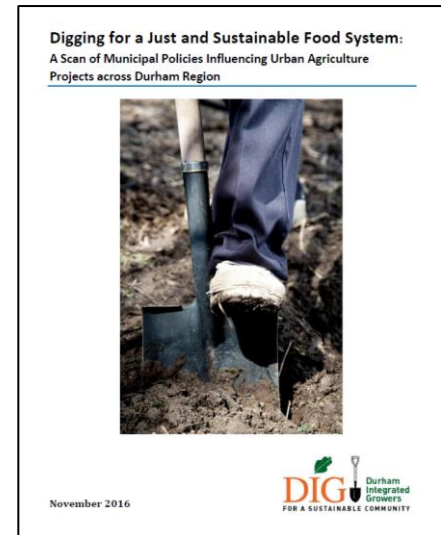
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1.0 BACKGROUND

1.1 Urban Agriculture Policy Scan

In November 2016, Durham Food Policy Council (DFPC) and Durham Integrated Growers (DIG), with support from the Nourishing Communities Research Group, released *Digging for a Just and Sustainable Food System: A Scan of Municipal Policies Influencing Urban Agriculture Projects Across Durham Region*. This report summarizes an in-depth review of local and regional policies that support or hinder urban agriculture. It identifies gaps, challenges and recommendations for where effectively enacted policy would provide a more supportive environment for urban agriculture.



Urban agriculture was selected as the focus for this policy scan for several reasons. First, the documented benefits of urban agriculture – such as improved health, access to fresh food, community engagement, skill-building, reduced greenhouse gas emissions, and local community development – make urban agriculture an important component of a sustainable food system and achieving the Durham Region Food Charter vision. Second, urban agriculture projects are on the rise in Durham, and an increased understanding of policy to support these initiatives was needed. Third, while urban agriculture is commonly associated with community gardens, there is a diversity of urban agriculture initiatives that have or could be implemented in Durham Region that warranted attention.

1.2 Cultivating the Conversation Workshop

As a follow-up to the policy scan, DFPC and DIG, with support from Durham Region Planning and Economic Development and Feed the Need, hosted a half-day workshop with municipal staff on November 2nd, 2017. The purpose of the workshop was to gather municipal staff to start a conversation about how policy in Durham Region can better support urban agriculture projects and the benefits they bring.

This Summary Report documents the outcome of the workshop. Section 2 provides an overview of the workshop format while Section 3 gives highlights from the plenary keynote and research summary presentations. Section 4 summarizes the feedback provided by participants during the discussion session. Section 5 briefly overviews key themes arising from the workshop, and the report closes with next steps in Section 6.

**“[a] food secure Durham [r]egion is financially sound, environmentally responsible and socially just, contributing to the future wellbeing of our region and its residents”
(Durham Region Food Charter, p.1)**

2.0 WORKSHOP FORMAT

The *Cultivating the Conversation* workshop consisted of the following activities:

- **Welcome Address** – Nancy Rutherford, manager of Durham Region Economic Development Agriculture and Rural Affairs, welcomed participants and commented that urban agriculture has become a large part of our food system and culture as we look towards healthy, secure, and local food;
- **Workshop Introduction** – Mary Drummond, Chair of DFPC and Chair of DIG, provided an overview of the agenda and purpose of the meeting;
- **Keynote Presentation** – Adam Watson, Project Manager, Neighbourhood Action Strategy, Community and Emergency Services, City of Hamilton, discussed urban agriculture policy in Hamilton including an example of the McQuesten Urban Farm;
- **Policy Scan Report Overview** – Mary Anne Martin, primary researcher for the scan, provided an overview of the findings from the urban agriculture policy scan;
- **Breakout Discussions** – Participants worked through three questions in roundtables. Each table reported back in plenary through a discussion facilitated by Carolyn Puterbough, OMAFRA. The discussion questions were:
 1. Are there any new or in-the-works policies that influence urban agriculture in your municipality?
 2. Thinking of the gaps and challenges identified in the presentations and report, what gaps or challenges related to urban agriculture policy are most prevalent in your municipality?
 3. What opportunities are there for municipalities and NGOs such as DIG and DFPC to work together to address these gaps and challenges and move forward to better support urban agriculture and its benefits in Durham Region? (what on our recommended list is doable? What other opportunities are there?)
- **Wrap-up and Next Steps** – Workshop participants shared their perspectives on how to keep the conversation going and what actions they could take in their role to support the benefits of urban agriculture. Mary Drummond closed the meeting by discussing upcoming DIG and DFPC projects.

Please see **Appendix A** for the workshop agenda.

3.0 PRESENTATION OVERVIEWS

3.1 Keynote Presentation

Adam Watson, Project Manager of the Neighbourhood Action Strategy in the City of Hamilton, provided an overview of Hamilton's recent urban agriculture review, zoning and Official Plan changes, and policy gaps related to urban agriculture. He shared the example of the McQuesten Urban Farm in relation to urban agriculture policy in Hamilton. Specific policy changes that were required to allow for urban farming at the scale of the proposed project included permits for selling produce on-site, permission of greenhouses with setbacks, and zoning where urban farms of a minimum of 1 acre would be supported.



The remainder of the presentation described the journey of the McQuesten Urban Farm. This initiative, with ground broken in 2015, was developed in a community designated as a food desert and with a high level of residents on financial aid. The project site was a highway right-of-way owned by the City that was no longer needed. The City took the lead on site assessments, formation of a Stakeholder Committee, and public consultation to develop a community vision for the site. The result is an urban farm with over two acres of field production of vegetables, berries, and culturally-appropriate foods, with an estimated harvest of 75,000 lbs of produce a year, a community education space, rainwater capture area, and native plantings. Greenhouses are planned for late 2017. Next steps include transitioning the urban farm to an incorporated not-for-profit run by the community, restoring an adjacent building into an Indigenous Health Centre with a commercial kitchen, diversifying markets, and adding value through processing.

Adam provided a variety of links related to his presentation for additional information (links embedded):

- [McQuesten Urban Farm Video](#)
- [Urban Farms and Community Gardens Official Plan Amendment Report & Zoning By-law Amendment](#)
- [Hamilton Food Strategy](#)
- [Community Garden Policy](#)
- [Hamilton Community Garden Network Website](#)

3.2 Policy Scan Report Overview

Mary Anne Martin, research assistant for the study and member of both DFPC and DIG, provided an overview of the urban agriculture policy scan. The report looks at policies



influencing multiple categories of urban agriculture including: community gardens, urban farms, rooftop gardens, greenhouses, apiculture (urban beekeeping), backyard hens, edible landscapes, food entrepreneurship, local food procurement, and planning for neighbourhood food access.

Overall, the policy scan found that Durham's urban agriculture policy environment is complex, encompassing policies at the local, regional, provincial and federal level.

Generally, more attention was shown to urban agriculture by cities and larger towns than rural centres, even though urban agriculture in rural centres is growing. Community gardens have received by far the most policy attention of any form of urban agriculture in Durham region. Certain urban agricultural practices are prohibited across the region, such as raising hens or bees, while others, such as selling produce on-site of community gardens, varies by municipality. Awareness about urban agriculture policies in municipal departments is also variable, and urban agriculture policies are not always publicly accessible.

Broader issues identified in the report include that the rate of developing and enacting policy related to urban agriculture in Durham is slow compared to the rapid rate at which primarily citizen-driven urban agriculture initiatives are evolving on the ground. There is a disconnect between support of urban agriculture promoted by local and regional governments, and policies that hinder rather than support these initiatives. Also, more attention is needed on the contribution of urban agriculture to building community resilience to adapt to climate change. Encouragingly, recognition of the interdisciplinary nature of food is increasing.

Further information can be found by downloading the full report, [Digging for a Just and Sustainable Food System: A Scan of Municipal Policies Influencing Urban Agriculture Projects Across Durham Region](#).

4 PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK

Staff from various local municipalities and the Region attended, representing planning, health, economic development, social services and environmental departments (see **Appendix B** for participant list). Unfortunately, there were no representatives from the northern regions of Durham including Brock Township, Scugog, or Uxbridge, while Clarington sent regrets.

For the breakout group sessions, participants were separated into groups with a mix of representatives from the local and Regional level, and from a variety of departments (including planning, health, economic development, social services and environment). The following sections summarize the key feedback obtained from the breakout discussions.

4.1 Urban Agriculture Policy Updates

Participants shared a number of new or in-the-works policies, including upcoming policy reviews that support, or provide an opportunity to support, urban agriculture (Table 1).

Table 1: New or In-the-Works Municipal Policies Affecting Urban Agriculture

<p>Regional Municipality of Durham:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Municipal Comprehensive Review (2018) – opportunity to get urban agriculture recognized, climate change will play a large role • Regional Official Plan Update (2018) • Agricultural/Rural Strategy update (2018, for next 5-year plan) • Climate Change Adaptation Plan – food security task force in process to develop objectives and programs • Regional Strategic Plan Review (2018/19) • Local Climate Action Plan update (2019) – opportunity for public consultation • Durham Community Energy Plan (current – estimated completion 2018/19) – will inform the Local Action Plan 	
<p>City of Oshawa</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community Orchard Policy • Boulevard by-law, doesn't restrict plantings, allows gardening, has restrictions regarding sight lines 	<p>Town of Whitby</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduced some enabling policies in Official Plan review (amendment re: support of community gardens, rooftop gardens, farmers' markets; also adds sustainability principles that address climate change and adaptation)
<p>City of Pickering</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New language in zoning by-laws regarding farmers market (Jan 2017) 	<p>Town of Ajax</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allows sale of fruits/vegetables on-site at community gardens
<p>All Local Municipalities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Municipal park plans will be updated to reflect new recommendations about park by-laws in the Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe – urban agriculture should be considered 	

4.2 Challenges in Advancing Urban Agriculture Policy

Participants were asked to share which gaps and challenges related to urban agriculture policy were most prevalent in their municipality. Challenges noted include:

- **Land scarcity** – specifically, scarcity of municipally-owned land, which has led to competition over land use (e.g. sports fields or dog parks versus urban agriculture).
- **Changing land use requirements with Hydro** – for urban agriculture projects situated in hydro corridors, there are more requirements and increasing difficulty in negotiating activities on the site with hydro companies.
- **Lack of political will** – in that direction from Council is needed or an action is required by legislation, otherwise the activity is seen as optional/guidance only; also there is a need for a community champion.
- **Lack of existing policy framework** – an example provided was that a request for an urban farm to Oshawa’s City Council was not approved because of lack of supportive policy and zoning.
- **Insufficient resources** – including lack of staff and funding, especially in rural municipalities.
- **Complexity of a two-tiered government** – the divide in responsibility (e.g. health, parks, social services) makes the policy environment challenging; also, there is no clear mandate at the Regional government level for urban agriculture.
- **Lack of coordination** – policy affecting urban agriculture crosses many different departments, and coordination within municipalities is needed.
- **Liability issues** – potential risks and the costs of insurance associated with urban agriculture initiatives on public versus private lands; another example was given about lack of support for pollinator gardens in one municipality due to potential bee stings.
- **Tasks required of community** – the requirement in some municipalities for resident groups to go before Council with their urban agriculture initiative (e.g. community gardens) may be a barrier for residents.
- **Lack of information for municipal staff** – urban agriculture needs to be defined and clear terminology needed; also need best practices and research on urban agriculture.
- **Public education** – ensuring the public have the tools/information they need to be able to advocate effectively for urban ag. at their municipalities.
- **Ease of providing information** – posting information electronically is difficult with website accessibility requirements; information often gets buried or it is difficult to know where to look.

4.3 Opportunities to Address Barriers

Participants were asked to brainstorm opportunities to address the gaps and challenges related to urban agriculture policy, in order to better support urban agriculture and its benefits. Suggestions were provided on how urban agriculture policy could be advanced at the regional and local municipal level.

Opportunities for advancing urban agriculture POLICY	
The Regional Level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Piggy back” on other overarching programs/initiatives or driving forces within the Region; e.g. Durham Community Climate Adaptation Plan • Link with Durham Health Neighbourhoods – 12 neighbourhoods based on determinants of health, designed to help advocate for services in particular areas; need to link with dieticians in public health • Develop a Durham Region Food Strategy – can draw on examples of Winnipeg, Edmonton, Hamilton • Potentially a new multi-faceted Regional Advisory Committee on public health/urban agriculture/multi-issues, within purview of Regional Council; or expand mandate of existing advisory committees • Transportation Master Plan – focused on the sharing economy, there will be policy ties to sharing economy in many policies
The Local Municipality Level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider urban agriculture as a face of developing City Centres (e.g. Oshawa, Pickering) with a view to new business attraction and labour force attraction. • Ensure a cross-department presence in conversations • Allot a certain % for green space in neighbourhood design
Information Sharing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify urban agriculture policy and initiatives needed in a municipality and how municipalities could get “most bang for their buck” • Provide evidence-based best practices of policy that can be adopted in Durham Region • Provide policy examples with templates

Providing information on best practices to municipalities was seen as a key role of DIG and DFPC. OMAFRA was also noted as a potential source for examples of urban agriculture policy and practice.

Suggestions were also provided on ways that urban agriculture projects could be supported.

Opportunities for advancing urban agriculture PROJECTS	
Collaboration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Link with universities and colleges through capstone projects, innovation projects, e.g. Teaching City, UOIT and City of Oshawa partnered in the “Living Lab” • Link with school boards – they can apply for funding to facilitate gardens • Explore links with Lakeridge Health and Whitby Shores – they have a lot of provincial land • Pilot projects in partnership with post-secondary institutions, municipal government and health institutions • Entrepreneurship involving greenhouses, rooftops, school gardens
Funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DFPC and DIG can help leverage funding opportunities, tapping into funding sources that are not available for municipalities (e.g. as was done in the Hamilton McQuestern Farm)
Information sharing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Municipalities could have something on their websites to direct people to urban agriculture information and contacts • Some municipalities (Durham, Whitby) have a rotating planner that takes inquiries from the public – would be beneficial to track these inquiries

Other suggestions provided for overcoming barriers and advancing urban agriculture policy and practice included:

- Keep talking – e.g. more meetings, feed information to sustainability coordinators and pull them together for meetings, communication between departments within individual municipalities
- Engage more people – need to involve multiple people, politicians, departments; there needs to be a roundtable at each municipality to have this workshop conversation
- More public awareness – through town hall meetings, talk about the topic and have constituents put pressure on municipalities
- Find an urban agriculture advocate – someone to step up and take ownership
- Share information – municipalities are always checking to see what other Durham municipalities are doing; the Province may be helpful in providing information about soil quality, chickens and health, etc.
- Push politicians
- DFPC/DIG need to develop greater ties to government; link with economic development and climate change [*note, the DFPC already has strong links with the Region’s department of Economic Development Rural, and the Durham Region Roundtable on Climate Change*]

Feedback on Recommended Actions

The urban agriculture policy scan included a list of recommended actions provided by DIG and DFPC to overcome barriers identified in the research (see box). Participants were asked to provide feedback on these actions, in terms of which were doable and/or preferred.

Participants provided the following information:

- Information sharing was supported. Information on insurance was especially noted.
- In terms of reviewing zoning or policy, urban agriculture needs to be better defined and best practices understood; need to know which activities are being considered.
- Endorsing the Durham Region Food Charter was noted as an easy win.
- It would be difficult to find one person to facilitate internal/external information about urban agriculture or to be dedicated full-time to urban agriculture; another suggestion was to designate the environmental/sustainability coordinator in the role of the urban agriculture go-to person.
- Policy on insurance associated with urban agriculture could be consistent across municipalities; insurance that is affordable.

DIG/DFPC Recommendations from Digging a Just and Sustainable Future Report

Municipalities:

- Work with Durham Integrated Growers and Durham Food Policy Council in a reciprocal sharing of knowledge and expertise.
- Review current zoning designations to consider allowing urban agriculture projects in a broader range of zones.
- Endorse the Durham Region Food Charter, ensuring staff working in areas related to food security/systems are familiar with the Charter, and use the Food Charter as a guide for policy and decisions affecting urban agriculture and food systems.
- Each designate a central person to maintain a comprehensive understanding of policies affecting urban agriculture and community food security.
- For ease of public access, 1) prepare an easy-to-read public-friendly framework for how to work through municipal and regional policies for setting up new urban agriculture initiatives and 2) have designated municipal staff available to walk through relevant agreements/policies with community members.

Region:

- Create a centralized online information source (e.g. an on-line clearinghouse) of local and regional policies from multiple departments regarding urban agriculture and food security.
- Bring the eight local municipalities together regularly to continue the conversation about policy that can support urban agriculture across the region.

4.4 Keeping the Conversation Going

Participants were asked in plenary how this group and partners can keep the conversation about urban agriculture policy alive in Durham Region. The following ideas were provided:

- Hold public forums
- Compile and publish statistics from successful projects worldwide
- Connect urban agriculture to larger projects and initiatives such as health and climate change
- Discuss urban agriculture through processes such as the Municipal Comprehensive Review process, Official Plan Reviews, Economic Development reviews, Office of Sustainability etc. to confirm focus or priority of urban agriculture
- Hold smaller municipal-level conversations in each of the eight municipalities, led by DFPC and DIG – not all individuals involved in decisions around policy were at the workshop
- Share notes from the workshop widely
- Send Summary Report to Clerk’s office to put on Council’s Agenda – it was noted that this this approach would not work for every municipality
- Identify potential roles within a municipality (e.g. go-to person for urban agriculture)

Participants were also asked what one action they could take in their role to support the benefits of urban agriculture. Responses included:

- Meeting with managers to share what was presented and discussed at the workshop
- Relay the message to management on the need for broader policy language to support urban agriculture
- Develop public communications plan for new community garden policy (Whitby)
- Talk more about the need for urban agriculture in our community
- Become the advocate
- Provide information to our advisory committee

5.0 RECURRING THEMES

Throughout the afternoon, several common themes emerged about moving forward on urban agriculture policy and practice:

1. **Encourage more discussion** – bringing the various departments and individuals that touch upon urban agriculture within one municipality together, and then broadening the conversation across municipalities.
2. **Link urban agriculture to high profile policy processes** – such as the Municipal Comprehensive Review, and Community Climate Adaptation Plan. Also link with existing initiatives such as Durham Region’s Health Neighbourhoods.

3. **Acquire and Share information** – on best practices in urban agriculture policy and which policies are feasible in Durham Region; on which urban agriculture initiatives would be the most needed and relevant in municipalities; and templates and examples of existing policies in other regions.

6.0 NEXT STEPS

DIG, DFPC and partners will continue to carry out research and communication activities to support urban agriculture policy. For DFPC, this is part of a broader mandate to support a just and sustainable food system in Durham Region.

The *Cultivating the Conversation* workshop represents the start of a conversation about urban agriculture policy in Durham Region. Three municipal representatives signed on as champions for moving the conversation forward. DIG, DFPC and partners will explore additional opportunities to bring municipal staff together, share this Summary Report widely, and continue to conduct and share research on best practices in urban agriculture policy.



APPENDIX A: WORKSHOP AGENDA

Cultivating the Conversation: A Workshop on Urban Agriculture Policy in Durham Region

Thursday November 2nd, 2017
1:30 to 4:30 p.m.
Region of Durham Headquarters,
605 Rossland Rd E, Whitby
Room 1A

AGENDA

PURPOSE: To facilitate a conversation around urban agriculture policy in Durham Region, and to identify supportive approaches to move the conversation forward and address policy gaps.

1:30 – 1:45 Introductions

1:45 – 2:15 Keynote Presentation

Adam Watson, Project Manager Neighbourhood Action Strategy, Community and Emergency Services, City of Hamilton.

2:15 – 2:30 Presentation: Overview of the Durham Urban Agriculture Policy Scan

2:30 – 2:45 REFRESHMENT BREAK

2:45 – 3:45 Breakout Group Discussions

3:45 – 4:00 Report Back in Plenary

4:00 – 4:30 Wrap Up and Next Steps

APPENDIX B: WORKSHOP PARTICIPANTS

Kiersten Allore-Engel	Durham Region, Planning and Economic Development
Sandra Austin	Durham Region, Corporate Policy & Strategic Initiatives
Adrienne Baltadjian	Durham Region, Health
Amanda Bathe	Durham Region, Planner and DEAC Liaison
Valentina Body	DFPC
Meaghan Craven	Town of Whitby, Planning and Development
Mary Drummond	DFPC and DIG
Ben Earle	DFPC and Feed the Need Durham
Kristy Gagen	City of Pickering, Environmental Engagement, City Development
Meaghan Harrington	City of Oshawa, Senior Planner
Catherine Hodge	City of Pickering, Business Development and Marketing
June Kinniburgh	DFPC
Sean Malby	Town of Whitby, Parks and Recreation
Mary Anne Martin	DIG and DFPC
Carolyn Puterbough	OMAFRA
Caitlin Rochon	Durham Region, Program Coordinator – Climate Change
Dean Sirizzotti	Durham Region, Employment Counsellor
Michelle Whitbread	City of Oshawa, Parks and Environmental Services
Sandra Znajda	DFPC