

Burlington Food Council  
6/6/2011

**In Attendance:** Alison Nihart (UVM Graduate Student), Will Robb, Meg Klepack (City Market), David White (Planning and Zoning), Harris Roen (Burlington Planning Commission), Mike Bettie (Tamarack Hollow Farm), Amanda Andrews (Tamarack Hollow), Kit Perkins (Farm to Plate Initiative), Will Bennington, CJ Cerido (head of Rock Point School), Joan Knight (Burlington CoHousing), Travis Marcotte (Intervale Center), Sona Desai (Intervale Center), Dan Erickson (UVM), Julie Cole (Fletcher Allen), Jimmy DeBiasi (UVM Undergrad), Dan Cahill (Burlington Parks and Rec), Jess Hyman (Friends of Burlington Gardens), Ed Antczak (CEDO)

#### Urban Agriculture Task Force Research Plan

- Urban Ag Task Force Charter and Members
  - o Effort inspired by lack of regulatory clarity around keeping animals in the city and keeping animals. Resolution drafted by Burlington Food Council and sponsored by Bram Kranichfeld. Passed in late March. Resolution contains instructions for what we're charged with.
  - o Members of Urban Ag Task Force
    - Will Robb, Chair
    - Alison Nihart, Graduate student researcher
    - Ed Antczak, Community and Economic Development Office
    - Ian Galbraith, Board of Health
    - Harris Roen, Planning Commission
    - Will Bennington, Farmer
  - o The Urban Ag Task Force has mailing list, let Will ([otherwill@yahoo.com](mailto:otherwill@yahoo.com)) or Alison ([Alison.nihart@uvm.edu](mailto:Alison.nihart@uvm.edu)) know if you'd like to be on that mailing list.
- Project Goals
  - o Written report to City Council (w/in 1 year)
    - Policy recommendations
    - Implementation recommendations
    - Metrics to track progress
    - Potential Funding Sources
      - Grants to support initial infrastructure development
    - Integration w/ State and Regional Efforts
      - Farm to Plate, etc
      - Institutional Purchasing, Farm to School,
    - Resource List
      - Active Organizations
      - Potential "How-To" Guide for residents.
- What do we want from Burlington Food Council? A vision for urban agriculture in Burlington.
  - o Help with:
    - Identifying unmet needs
    - Identifying barriers
    - Identifying resources

- **Conceptual Framework**

Working definition: Urban agriculture is the production of food in a city and can involve a range of activities including the cultivation of plants, keeping animals, and aquaculture. Urban agriculture can address issues as broad as food security, community and economic development, environmental sustainability, and conservation of open space.

- **Underlying Factors**

- Land availability, access and ownership
- Access to funding
- Knowledge
- Access to technical resources
- Development priorities
- Social technology
  - Skills,
- Organizational models
  - Single owner, co-ops,
  - What does “unbundled” ownership look like? (collective backyard micro farm ideas)

- **Governance Considerations**

- Food safety
- Public health
- Pollution
- Nuisance
- Animal welfare
- Get away from reactive stance but develop uniform policy that allows people to move forward.

- **On our radar**

- Livestock
- Home gardens
- Community gardens
- Rooftop gardens
- School gardens
- Aquaculture
- Pollination
- Hoop houses
- Greenhouses

- **Research Plan**

- Foundational research
  - Methods: Literature review
    - Goal, provide theoretical justification for work. Identify models, best practices, relevant research, innovative governance.
    - If you know anything relevant, please send it on to Alison and Will.

- Method: Review Current Zoning and Ordinances
  - ID Current gaps and barriers
- Method: Gather input from local stakeholders and experts
  - Meet with local experts. If you can think of anyone else they should talk to, let Alison and Will know.
- Method: Consult with external experts
  - Lots of work being done in other cities on urban ag policy. Other cities?
- Method: Gather input from community
  - Talk to residents who may or may not be involved in food production. Talk about needs and concerns of city residents. Feedback as well as opportunity to raise awareness and create buy-in from community.
  - Neighborhood Planning Assemblies.
  - Connect w/ other planning processes already underway (Waterfront Development Plan, Legacy Plan, Open Space Plan)
- Method: Consulting w/ Burlington City Officials
- Synthesize Research Results and Develop Recommendations
  - Early Fall
  - Bring initial recommendations to get revisions, review, etc.

- Questions for the Group

David White: Applaud you – looks like you nailed the approach. Regulating chickens really doesn't fit under Zoning. Look forward to your recommendations. A lot of your work is focused on production. How far down processing road may you go? Probably not large-scale but there may be opportunities to share skills (canning produce) with those who would like to learn. Religious practices (such as slaughter or meat smoking) may also arise as issues. How far down that road do you want to venture?

Will: It would be nice to venture as far down it as we can. If we could exempt small-scale food processing, or have a downtown food enterprise zone.

David: Are there existing community centers where this work could be done?

Jimmy DeBiasi (UVM student): how do we do this in a way that doesn't create competition with local farmers?

Amanda (Tamarack): yup, that's part of why we came here today. In casual conversations w/ farmers the concern is less about home production but more about helping farmers in a year when we're really struggling - identify land outside the floodplain. Even an acre where we could get in short crops. Economic growth and job health b/c farmers are laying off workers. There are willing landowners that would love to help. School yards? Church yards? Planning and Zoning – what are our limits in terms of moving livestock there, putting vegetables there? What is the city's stance on that?

Alison: we see the purview of the taskforce as cutting through all scales of production, from home scale to commercial.

Kit: The list does not include commercial agriculture.

Mike: Community gardens might benefit from having an education component around crop rotations. We now can't grow potatoes in Burlington because the Colorado Potato Beetles are so strong. Big strawberry issues. There are consequences for commercial farmers to have so many community garden plots that seed pests into commercial farms.

Sona (Intervale Center): I agree

Travis (Intervale Center): talk to the farmers and the Intervale Center. Critical to separate those. The Center has a lot of expertise we can share but farmers want their own bullet point. Is there any mapping work that will assess land availability? Intervale Center is wrestling with not having enough land. If this work could identify more land that would be really helpful, especially in emergency situations like this.

Dan Erickson (UVM): Yes, mapping is incorporated. In fact, the question should also be "where are the opportunities?" There are a lot of interstitial spaces. Using remote sensing/GIS I'm starting to assess based on soils, size. What is ownership of land? Need ground-truthing for identified plots.

Rock Point School: In our relationship, we're trying to be accommodating but are running into issues with non-profit status inviting a for-profit farm onto the land.

Burlington College is another prime space for open land. Working with Mark Larson to try to get the land up and going.

Dan Cahill (Parks and Recreation): Land and Water Conservation Fund governs the land purchased with land and water conservation funding. Put restrictions on land use, including restrictions on agricultural use. (Under National Parks Service.)

Dan Erickson: do you have spreadsheet or database of those lands?

Dan Cahill: Not certain if Planning and Zoning might have one.

Ed: This is an opportune time. The congressional delegation is looking for way to push federal agencies to give concessions to people to make things work in lieu of money. This kind of scheme would be of interest.

Kit: Farm to Plate Plan – one of the strategies is to develop comprehensive soil monitoring. Difficult in VT to say, "do we have good soils in the state?" A soils-based approach to looking at urban agriculture would support this state-wide goal.

Joan: One goal should be that soil will be improved over time. Another missing link is availability of inputs. Was unable to locate a soil amendment, but hardware stores offer so many poisons being sold to homeowners. Something has to be done.

Amanda: Beekeeping. How do we plan for pollen sources around the season for a food source for urban beekeepers.

Jess: Insurance issues in trying to get hive up and running at neighborhood garden.

Liability insurance currently goes through Parks and Rec. Something like this isn't covered by the policy

Will Bennington: the bees would exceed the animal keeping ordinances (more than 4 animals)...

Amanda: People ask Tamarack Hollow all the time why their animals are shipped across the state for processing and smoking. What about something like the Maine Food Sovereignty Act? Smokehouse in the city would be really cool. Compost is a huge issue. VT Compost Co is inside of Montpelier. People ask Tamarack Hollow if they could come down and pick up cow manure and they are hesitant to do it, not knowing how the person will use it.

Travis: Regional sustainability planning process – Regional Planning Commission Ecos Plan. They have a \$1 million grant and a 57 organization steering committee.

Agriculture, the natural environment and community will show up as central to the plan. Charlie Baker is the contact. Landworks (Dave Raphael) is the consultant. Anytime we can get more input into this process, we should. This planning process could inform that process. Check out ecos.org

Rock Point School: education on composting and processing (BHS technical school), Burlington Permaculture, knowledgeable about urban farming, partners at UVM, teach the HS kids. Burlington School District.

Jess: lots happening at elementary school, education lacking at HS level.

Kit: Technical skills development and food system education is in the Farm to Plate Plan (plus more school gardens in general). Need more skilled meat cutters.

Amanda: food processing and compost are huge opportunities for HS training.

Dan Erickson: schools not just for education but they could be processing centers. Nights, weekends, summer is open space in those existing facilities

Amanda: Talk to Rural Vermont re. broader regulatory content.

Will Robb: What are ways to build political will? How can we really get the City Council behind some of these ideas? Food sovereignty: how far do you think we could go in Burlington on this issue?

Amanda: McKenzies had processing plant here.

Mike: Food sovereignty is a big goal.

Kit: go straight to the metrics. One thing that's not on the list is crime prevention or community safety.

Amanda: I think Detroit is taking this approach

Kit: metrics also around community health (obesity or diabetes or any other health issues), metrics around education issues (Health City Youth Farm for example), social services, job training, objective metrics not traditionally associated with farming. For Farm to Plate Chapter 2 every goal of the plan is associated with metrics. Tons of literature on those. Objectifying it helps make the case.

Will Bennington: Food sovereignty is lofty and hard to define. Love what's going on in Maine but don't think there's the political will. Some people on City Council were not quite fully behind transformation of urban agriculture. Plenty of progressive people are held back from really progressive things because they don't want to get a fine, or get kicked off their land. Food freedom instead of food sovereignty.

Harris: don't want to come out with product that offends 1/3 of the population.

CJ: the more that people know their farmers the better

Mike: By the time that this comes back before the City Council, food prices will go way up. This will be enough to rattle their cages to entice them to build a stronger local food system.

Rock Point: There needs to be a full house with urban ag supporters at City Council meetings. Host an event like the Art Hop for urban gardens to get people interested.

Ed: the best way to build political will is not to ask for money. Be as bold as you can be. Push it to the limit. Have a plan B but experiment with asking big. We can always pull back if we have to.

Upcoming meetings

August: chickens and bees

October: Compost

Agenda would be to inform the Urban Ag work but also provide a general forum.