



Resilient Communities, Regenerative Landscapes A Continuing-the-Urban-Agriculture-Conversation

Workshop and Pre-symposium Event for Regional and Municipal Staff

Summary Report

October, 2019



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Introduction

On March 29 2019, DIG (Durham Integrated Growers for a Sustainable Community) with the support of Durham Region Agriculture and Rural Affairs Economic Development and Friends of the Greenbelt Foundation hosted a half-day workshop for municipal staff to continue a conversation on nurturing urban agriculture in Durham. This event represented a logical next step in DIG's municipal engagement after the development of an urban agriculture policy scan and a 2017 workshop to explore urban agriculture policy. This most recent session drew representatives from Durham Region, Pickering, Ajax, Oshawa, Whitby, Clarington, and Uxbridge as well as the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority. Participants were treated to a morning of presentations about - and time to discuss - ways that urban agriculture can revitalize communities and regenerate landscapes. This session also acted as an opening event for a public symposium showcasing urban agriculture projects the next day.

Background

November, 2016- Urban Agriculture Policy Scan release- DIG and the Durham Food Policy Council (DFPC) collaborated with the support of Nourishing Communities to develop a scan of policies in Durham Region that pertain to urban agriculture. The scan examined strengths and gaps in the system and made recommendations. The final report, *Digging for a Just and Sustainable Food System: A Scan of Municipal Policies Influencing Urban Agriculture Projects Across Durham Region*, is available at <http://www.durhamdigs.ca/resources>

November, 2017- Cultivating the Conversation Workshop- As a follow-up to the policy scan, DIG and DFPC, with the support of Durham Region Planning and Economic Development and Feed the Need Durham, brought together Regional and local municipal staff at a half day workshop to begin discussing the use of policy to support urban agriculture and its benefits across Durham. The summary report is available at <http://www.durhamdigs.ca/resources>

March, 2019- Resilient Communities, Regenerative Landscapes- DIG offered a half-day workshop for Regional and local municipal staff at the Regional Municipality of Durham Headquarters. This session drew on many existing examples to broaden ideas about the ways that urban agriculture can be incorporated into urban and near-urban spaces. This workshop, a pre-cursor to the next day's urban agriculture symposium held at the Durham College Centre for Food, is described in the following pages.

Workshop Format

The Resilient Communities, Regenerative Landscapes workshop involved these components:

- **Welcome** – Nancy Rutherford, Region of Durham and Anna Shortley, Friends of the Greenbelt Foundation
- **Interview** - Joe Nasr, PhD, Ryerson University: *Planning productive urban space into our landscapes*
- **Presentation** -Mary Drummond, President, DIG: *Supporting Urban Ag & Urban Ag Entrepreneur- Introduction to Urban Agriculture in Durham s*
- **Presentation** - Ryan Cullen, Field Manager, W. Galen Weston Centre for Food; Entrepreneur: *Supporting Urban Ag & Urban Ag Entrepreneurs*
- **Breakout Questions**- Each table of participants was asked to consider a different form of urban agriculture when discussing the questions:
 - 1) In light of this morning's discussion, how do you envision the item(s) on your card could revitalize Durham communities?
 - 2) Given your experience, what needs to be in place for this vision to occur?
- **Keynote** - Ron Berezan, Permaculture Teacher and Community Consultant in Food Security: *Revitalization through Urban Agriculture*

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

Presentation Summaries

Welcome- Nancy Rutherford, Manager, Economic Development, Agriculture and Rural Affairs, Durham Region

In welcoming the audience, Nancy highlighted the importance of urban agriculture projects in communities and their connection with current Durham Region policy activities including: the development of an updated agricultural strategy; the public survey on this process; and public consultation on both the strategy and new official plan through opportunities to comment on the Agriculture & Rural System Discussion Paper.

Anna Shortley, Research and Policy Analyst, Friends of the Greenbelt Foundation

Anna provided an overview of the work of Friends of the Greenbelt Foundation. She pointed out both the many threats to the Greenbelt and the importance of the abundance of peri-urban and urban agriculture in the Greenbelt.

Joe Nasr, PhD, Ryerson University- Planning productive urban space into our landscapes

Through a video recording of an interview with Ryan Cullen, Joe Nasr shared his insights on the role of urban agriculture and those who affect it, especially in cities. He explained that urban agriculture is becoming a more important part of cities, contributing to such benefits as greener spaces in and around cities, a place for unofficial environmental actors, a certain democratization of green infrastructure, and the resilience that comes from reduced dependence on the fluctuations of government. Therefore, the role of people who plan cities is becoming increasingly clear as they enable urban agriculture and disrupt obstacles to it. In general, however, he sees developers and planners and their institutions and regulatory structures (e.g. official plans) as raising more obstacles to urban agriculture, especially regarding new projects. He also sees grassroots groups continuing to have an essential role in making urban agriculture projects happen. Going forward, Joe foresees growth in urban agriculture, more recognition of it, the scaling up of some projects, and ongoing innovation.

Mary Drummond, President, DIG - Introduction to Urban Agriculture in Durham -

By profiling what urban agriculture looks like in Durham Region, Mary prompted the audience to think of urban agriculture as extending beyond community gardens. She noted that projects may be located in urban, rural, and near-urban areas but are usually established on private lands. They are typically citizen-initiated/driven urban agriculture projects and generally operate independently, with non-profit projects operating on relatively small amounts of money. Because many projects are small (and it is important for them to start small) and because forms of for-profit and not-for-profit urban agriculture often exist in under-observed spaces like backyards, it is difficult to account for all the projects in Durham Region. However, Durham also has many large, multifaceted community gardens and projects. Mary spoke of the ability of urban agriculture projects to connect communities, build networks, educate, build skills, and increase community leadership. However, land for urban market gardens and for-profit urban agriculture ventures is disappearing. She emphasized that both non-profit and for-profit projects need a strong foundational structure, mentorship, and policy support that encourages their initiative.

Ryan Cullen, Field Manager, W. Galen Weston Centre for Food; Entrepreneur- Supporting Urban Ag & Urban Ag Entrepreneurs-

Ryan also stressed how urban agriculture is bigger than just community gardens. He summarized several different approaches to urban agriculture and asked how they might be built into urban spaces: 1) *Continuous productive urban landscapes* connect different parts of cities; 2) *Agroecology* applies

ecological processes to agricultural production systems; 3) *Resilience* holistically involves the capacity to deal with change and develop learning, diversity, and connection between humans and nature; and 4) *Regenerative agriculture* involve farming principles that increase biodiversity, enrich soil, improve watersheds, and enhance ecosystem services. He then looked at ways in which such models have been incorporated into urban spaces with attention to the triple bottom line.

The first example, the Durham College urban farm, uses a small-scale, high-yield, high-tech farming model. Students from programs in horticulture, food and farming, event planning, culinary skills/management, hospitality, and special events programs all participate in this hands-on, farm-to-table system. The farm provides produce for the on-site restaurant, Pantry (campus food shop), and local craft breweries. Such programs help support budding entrepreneurs by, for example, developing viable farming methods that allow producers to support themselves.

The second example is a grassroots social enterprise that partners with the Durham Region Catholic School Board in outdoor education environments. It uses an urban agriculture-focus and has worked with high school students in carpentry to build greenhouses in exchange for a Durham College horticultural credit.

Ryan also described City of Greens, a microgreens business using a passive solar greenhouse. This unique business is also in the process of building a harvest station in a freight container and uses a mobile refrigerated trailer to transport produce.

Keynote - Ron Berezan, Permaculture Teacher and Community Consultant in Food Security - Revitalization through Urban Agriculture

Ron began by showing how urban agriculture is very much a product of its context. It is affected by local climate, social conditions, and regulations. He stressed that urban agriculture is not new: although it waned in North America in the post-WWII years, it is in fact the norm in many places globally. He highlighted that food is intimately tied to many issues such as social justice, environment, reconciliation, and has great power to build community.

Ron went on to consider five Urban Agriculture Zones. The first, *home production* involves growing food in yards, on balconies, and on rooftops. He noted the gap for millennials who grew up without home food-growing teachings and lack the skill and time, but are still interested in food-growing.

Ron cited various benefits of home growing: people who grow at home are more likely to buy from local farmers too; 1000 square feet can provide all of the calories, minerals, protein needed for one person for one year; urban agriculture can act as a back-up if the dominant food system is interrupted; perennial food forests like Ron's require less work and provide food, biodiversity, and beauty. (see rooftops.ca regarding urban agriculture)

The second zone, *the neighbourhood*, includes gleaning projects (Canada has over 35 fruit tree-gleaning programs); gardening on vacant lots and boulevards (permissible in Vancouver); and community gardens. Such projects need not only a physical design but also a social design (organization, governance) which can contribute to the success or failure of the project. He cited examples of projects

that ‘focus on the edges’ by engaging with the community around the project (e.g. Edmonton with its 80 community gardens, Sycamore Commons in Powell River).

Ron provided several examples of the third zone, *commercial in city*, that use SPIN (small plot intensive) farming to grow high yield, fast crops in small spaces which can be lucrative. Examples included:

- Village Homes, Davis, California- an entire community designed around food
- Sole Food Street Farms, Vancouver- which uses movable containers and flexible models to grow food on vacant land (often land awaiting development) and sell the food through restaurants, CSAs, and farmers’ markets.
- Organoponics, Cuba- 200 000 people make a living growing food in cities; people who grow food make about three times the average wage; this emerged from a massive transformation in Cuba

The fourth zone, *town/city*, has much potential because cities have the tools to protect land from being developed. In addition, food hubs and local food infrastructure provide space in urban areas for producers to aggregate their produce, share knowledge, support farmers, and have commercial kitchens. He provided the example of Beacon Food Forest, Seattle.

The last zone, *wild food*, connects people to where we live and with people who know/understand the food that naturally grows where we live.

Breakout Notes

Participants were divided into three groups and asked to answer two questions in relation to the focus card they found on the table which had one of the following topics: Community Gardens, Urban Farms (not-for-profit); Urban Market Gardens (for profit); and Small-scale Food Processing. The questions for all groups were:

- 1) In light of this morning's discussion, how do you envision the item(s) on your card could revitalize Durham communities?
- 2) Given your experience, what needs to be in place for this vision to occur?

The following are the notes from the groups answering the questions.

Group 1 Community Gardens, Urban Farms (not-for-profit)

1. In light of this morning's discussion, how do you envision the item(s) on your card could revitalize Durham communities?
 - Social inclusivity
 - Community building
 - Stronger engagement across boundaries
 - Knowledge transfer between different age groups, communities, culture
 - Opportunities for people who don't have private space
 - Utilizing underutilized spaces
 - Eyes on space, more engagement in the space, safety
 - Vehicle for job training, education
 - Support local initiatives
 - Durham updating their Regional Official Plan – urban ag. is part of their update
 - Ajax updating their zoning by-law – looking into updating definitions for urban ag.
 - Identify potential sites
2. Given your experience, what needs to be in place for this vision to occur?
 - Official Plan Policies
 - Zoning- specifically around zoning, e.g. include urban ag explicitly as a use to be permitted
 - Operational-level policies, insurance (can be a burden for municipalities) - Oshawa has a template to address some of these issues
 - Identify potential sites

- Community/public interest
- People to run/ be involved in the gardens, farms
- Groups like DIG or Durham Master Gardeners that can provide workshops, education, commercial kitchens (e.g., have an inventory)
- Partners (e.g. libraries, conservation authorities)
- See swap events, seed saving libraries
- Oshawa boulevard policy: outlines what people can grow on their front lawns
- For urban farms: big enough, well-placed sites
- TRCA has an urban agriculture policy – only CA to have its supported by the City of Toronto and Region of Peel

Group 2 Urban Market Gardens (for-profit)

1. In light of this morning's discussion, how do you envision the item(s) on your card could revitalize Durham communities?
 - Growing and selling products from the site
 - Municipality supporting farmers markets are a logical partnership
 - Supportive policy to allow urban agriculture sales from products grown in urban projects
 - Can create jobs within a community, teach job skills (show up on time, physical labour, working with others, technical gardening skills)
 - Whitby has a community garden policy – but it's a not for profit, hurdle is finding
 - Could you partner for profit piece of the land (as the kick-starter) with the non-profit group to start the
 - Usually if grown on public land, can't sell for "a profit"

2. Given your experience, what needs to be in place for this vision to occur?
 - How do we make the environmental landscape conducive so more people will take this on – when they meet barriers (such as you can't sell for profit) they just stop
 - Municipal staff need people to come forward asking for urban agriculture, municipal staff can't build it and they will come – municipalities could post online what public spaces within their community that is productive space that could be used for urban agriculture
 - Seniors building
 - Whitby 2017 – community garden procedure (2017)
 - Clarington has an informal policy but no "urban agriculture" policy

- There is an opportunity for a commercial component within appropriate space (hydro corridor), could potential ask that a part of the lease requirements is that they foster a community garden component

Group 3 Small-scale Food Processing

- Land intended for development
Looking at vulnerable communities and re-developing in the context of small-scale processing
- Home based businesses springing out the local urban garden projects
Change the regulations around home-based businesses
- Commercial kitchens available for small scale growers and individuals

Knowledge around food preservation and processing

- Food Safety regulations
- Information on rules and regulations on food facilities
- One pager fact sheets
- Short four-minute video
- Inventory of commercial kitchens around the region (google maps?)

Storage and Distribution - How could food products be stored and distributed?

What kind of infrastructure do small scale projects need?

A one stop shop local food aggregator that sources food from rural farms and urban agricultural projects and local growers re-distributes in the city - This aggregator should be in the city - Can have commercial kitchen space attached to it as well for local artisans?

Participant Feedback

1. Would you be interested in attending another meeting or workshop regarding urban agriculture policy in Durham Region?

On 13 of 15 evaluations, participants stated YES they would be interested in attending another such meeting. The other 2 did not respond.

2. What motivated you to attend the workshop today?

Several participants said that they attended the workshop in order to learn more about existing urban agricultural activities within and beyond Durham Region. Some also spoke of their current or past municipal work related to urban agriculture and their hope to learn more about the role that municipalities and their policies can play in urban agriculture projects. Specifically, some participants were interested in finding out more about the ways that municipal operations, comprehensive zoning by-law review, landscape planning, and public lands design, and development planning and permits (TRCA) can integrate and support urban agriculture. Some also attended for opportunities to network, understand sustainable community, understand agricultural partnerships, or to gain information to help with starting community gardens.

3. What did you like best about the workshop?

Many of the participants reported that they enjoyed the speakers, using words such as ‘inspirational,’ ‘intriguing,’ ‘very informative’ and ‘motivational.’ In particular, participants found the many examples of existing initiatives useful. Many also appreciated the opportunity for discussion provided by the break-out session. Networking with and learning from each other was another benefit reported by several participants.

4. What could have been done better to improve your experience today?

The most common suggestion was to have more time for networking, brainstorming, and discussion around the break-out questions. A couple participants mentioned the technological issues of the day. Others suggested: having a full day event with more speakers; providing a booklist from the speakers of authors that influenced them; providing a current list of urban agriculture sites in Durham Region; and providing a direct presentation on what municipalities can do better/ where change can happen to better support urban agriculture. One person suggested changing nothing because they were ‘very satisfied with the workshop.’

5. Is there anyone else who you think would be interested in or should be included in future conversations about urban agriculture policy in Durham Region? Please provide their name, title and organization below.

Participants suggested: decision makers on these policies; Rouge National Urban Park (agriculture is a key priority of the park); conservation authorities and area municipal economic developers; University of Guelph, Rural Planning & Development students (lots of food security projects going on there); the STOP (community and urban agriculture NGO based in Toronto that have an emphasis on access to food for those low-income neighbourhoods); local entrepreneurship; policy planner from Whitby; and sustainability co-ordinator from Town of Whitby.

Next Steps

- Distribute summary report to attendees
- Set up another opportunity to continue this conversation by looking at specific urban agriculture-related policies, policy gaps, and policy successes
- Educate municipal councils around what urban agriculture looks like in Durham Region

Appendix A: Workshop Agenda

8:45 – 9:00	Registration
9:00 – 9:10	Welcome – Region of Durham and Friends of the Greenbelt Foundation
9:10 – 9:15	Interview – Planning productive urban space into our landscapes <i>Joe Nasr, PhD, Ryerson University</i>
9:15 – 9:45	Introduction to Urban Agriculture in Durham <i>Mary Drummond, President, DIG</i>
9:45 – 10:15	Supporting Urban Ag & Urban Ag Entrepreneurs <i>Ryan Cullen, Field Manager, W. Galen Weston Centre for Food; Entrepreneur</i>
10:15 – 10:30	Break
10:30 - 11:00	Breakout Questions
11:00 – 12:00	Keynote - Revitalization through Urban Agriculture <i>Ron Berezan, Permaculture Teacher and Community Consultant in Food Security</i>

Appendix B: Workshop Participants

Joyce Chen	Planner, Planning and Development Services Ajax
Sean Malby	Supervisor of Parks Development Parks Planning and Development Division; Community & Marketing Services Department Whitby
Anna Shortly	Research and Policy Analyst Friends of the Greenbelt Foundation
Catherine Rose	Chief Planner, City Development Department Pickering
Kristy Kilbourne	Senior Planner, Policy Planning & Special Studies, Planning and Economic Development Department Region of Durham
Amy Burke	Senior Planner – Special Projects, Planning Services Department, Clarington
Anne Taylor Scott	Sr. Planner, Development Review Branch, Planning Services Department Clarington
Victoria White	Planner A Oshawa
Carolyn Puterbough	Agriculture and Rural Economic Development Advisor, Regional Economic Development Branch OMAFRA

Aimee Pugao	Planner, Parks Planning and Development Division Whitby
Mike Kuchera	Whitby
Vanessa Aubrey	Planner II, Development Planning and Permits, Development and Engineering Services Toronto and Region Conservation Authority
Stephanie Worrone	Toronto and Region Conservation Authority
Amber Dignard	Parks Project Co-ordinator Oshawa
Michelle J. Martin	Senior Public Health Inspector Durham Region Health Department Region of Durham
Bronwen Fitzsimons	Coordinator, Urban Agriculture Program Government and Community Relations Community Engagement and Outreach, Toronto and Region Conservation Authority
Emilia Gruyters	Planning Technician Secretary Treasurer Committee of Adjustment Uxbridge