

What We Heard Report Urban Farms - Phase 1 Public Engagement

ADVISE

City of Edmonton
Parks and Roads Services

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Edmonton

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Project Overview

The urban farms project focuses on exploring options for commercial and not-for-profit organizations to develop agricultural spaces, such as urban indoor or outdoor farms, on city-owned areas.

Urban farming means the sale of agricultural products raised or grown on-site. It could be a development that involves growing fruits, vegetables, plants, or raising chickens or bees in urban areas for use beyond personal consumption. Council has set goals for the City to explore urban agriculture, address climate change through increasing sustainability, and find ways to reduce the maintenance costs for parklands. Moreover, demand for local food options is increasing and development of a program, or processes, to support business, not-for-profits / social enterprises to produce local food options will help satisfy the demand.

In response to the increased demand for local food options, the urban farms project will identify City-owned and maintained urban spaces that have the potential to be transitioned to new urban farms, and evaluate the feasibility of building a new urban farming program or processes. An urban farm program would galvanize community and local business support to promote a resilient and inclusive urban farming supply chain that is responsive to the demand for local diverse foods.

Public Engagement Approach

The City's public engagement spectrum defines the public's level of influence in engagement processes. **The role of the public during this engagement was at the ADVISE level on the City of Edmonton's Public Engagement Spectrum** and the public was invited to share their feedback and perspectives.

Visit edmonton.ca/publicengagement for more information on the City's public engagement process.



Online engagement opportunities were provided to broaden outreach and ensure a diversity of voices in the engagement process. Residents were encouraged to complete an online survey to provide feedback and concerns about urban farms in their communities.

How We Engaged

An online survey was available from February 20 - March 10, 2024. The survey received 4,847 responses.

Who Was Engaged

The survey was made available through an open webpage survey link and promoted through the City's weekly PSA, across social media and on edmonton.ca. There were 1,162 responses from these communications. Emails invitations were also sent to the [Edmonton Insight Community](#) and 3,685 responses were received.

What We Asked

Respondents were invited to share their feedback and perspectives on these primary topics:

- *Types* of agricultural activity that could potentially be included within an urban farming program;
- *Areas* throughout the city that could potentially be used for urban farming activities.

What We Heard

Community Insights Summary

There is strong support for the concept of urban farming in Edmonton, with many residents expressing a desire to see more local food production. However, there are concerns about land use and zoning, with some residents worried that urban farming could lead to increased traffic and noise as well as a decrease in property values. Many residents also expressed a desire for more community involvement in the urban farming program, such as the ability to volunteer or grow their own food. There is a need for more education and outreach about urban farming as many residents are not familiar with the concept or its benefits. Many residents are interested in the sustainability and environmental benefits of urban farming such as reduced food miles and increased biodiversity.

Key findings

In general, the majority of respondents (84%) strongly support to somewhat support the transition of City-owned and maintained spaces to commercial agricultural use, with fewer than one in ten (9%) being opposed to this integration

When asked about the most important benefits of urban farming, survey respondents most often mention local food production and sustainability (82%), wildlife habitat and ecological connectivity (67%) as well as environmental sustainability (67%).

About 10% of survey respondents state that they have no experience in agricultural activities such as gardening, farming or beekeeping, with three in five claiming intermediate to advanced experience in agriculture (59%).

A sizable percentage of survey respondents (88% strongly to somewhat support) express support for increased urban farming in the City, as well as an increase in urban farming in their neighbourhood (86%).

When asked about their level of support for different types of urban farming, survey respondents show greater support for rooftop farming (91%), in-ground farming (88%), hydroponic vertical farming (86%) as well as apiculture and beekeeping (86%). Support for medium to large livestock farming is relatively low (51% and 33%, respectively).

Survey respondents find unpleasant odours (58%), increased use of regulated herbicides (38%), loss of casual recreation space (33%), additional noise (28%) and messy aesthetics (27%) as the most prominent potential areas of concern regarding urban farming in Edmonton. However, 12% of respondents don't have any concerns.

When asked about level of support for increases in urban farming in specific locations, survey respondents were most likely to support rooftops of City buildings (90%), utility corridors (87%), City-owned lands (86%), indoor City-owned spaces (79%) and green spaces along roadways and boulevards (76%). Interestingly, 44% of respondents support increased urban farming in river valley parks.

When asked about types of organizations that should be able to use City-owned land for urban farming, survey respondents were most likely to choose not-for-profit organizations (91%) and City-run programs (81%). About 48% favour private (for-profit) businesses using City-owned land for urban farming.

About 5% of survey respondents say that they are interested in using City-own land for urban farming, among whom, 52% are part of not-for-profit organizations, 19% are part of private (for-profit) businesses and 6% are part of City-run programs.

GBA+ Spotlight

The City of Edmonton takes care to consider equity in delivering services and amenities to the public and uses Gender Based Analysis + (GBA+) to identify opportunities to create a more equitable and just community.

The survey asked respondents *optional* standardized demographic questions. The diversity of respondents is described below.

- City Residency (N=4847)
 - 98% of respondents live in the City of Edmonton
 - 2% of respondents live outside of the City
- Gender (N=4847)
 - 55% of respondents identify as Women
 - 38% of respondents identify as Men
 - 2% of respondents identify as Non-Binary
 - 1% of respondents identify as Transgender
- Business Ownership (N=4847)
 - 88% of respondents indicated that they do not own a business
 - 10% of respondents indicated that they own a business
 - 2% of respondents preferred not to answer this question
- City Location (N=4700)
 - 35% of respondents indicated that they live in the Southwest Quadrant of Edmonton
 - 31% of respondents indicated that they live in the Northwest Quadrant of Edmonton
 - 19% of respondents indicated that they live in the Northeast Quadrant of Edmonton
 - 14% of respondents indicated that they live in the Southeast Quadrant of Edmonton
 - 1% of respondents indicated that they either don't know or live somewhere "Other".

What Happens Next

The City will incorporate the feedback from Phase One of public engagement into an urban farm site identification study. An inventory of potential City owned areas that could support urban farming will be included in a report to council. Phase Two of public engagement will gather stakeholders with knowledge and interest in urban farming.

The program feasibility study will conclude with presenting findings to council, including developing options for different urban farming programs.