

FOOD

Community Input by Formal Submission Ideas and Recommendations for Moving Forward

The following information is a collection of formally submitted recommendations to the District Department of the Environment and the Office of Planning by local organizations. The information was reviewed and pertinent comments, suggestions and ideas for the food working group are included in this document. Much effort by concerned citizens went into the creation of those documents and a lot of relevant material has been compiled. Please review these ideas and concerns to enhance participation in the working group process.

1. Becoming Greenest

Recommendations for a More Sustainable Washington, D.C.

Submitted by the American Society of Landscape Architects

According to the EPA, urban agriculture is the “production, distribution, marketing, and disposal of food and other products in the centers and edges of metropolitan areas.” This budding field deals with neighborhood mobilization, land and water use, pollution, health, and other issues. Programs can be private or public, volunteer-led, linked with food banks, or constructed by a landscape architect or horticultural expert. Urban farms can take shape in empty lots, remediated brownfields, or even on roofs. Some park departments are also starting urban farming programs.

At a [session of EPA’s Brownfields conference](#), Kenneth Kastman, URS, said a number of cities are moving forward with new urban gardening ordinances. San Francisco, Cleveland, Detroit, Denver, New York City, Philadelphia, Portland (Ore.), Seattle have or are in the process of releasing new codes.

In Detroit, the city is approaching landlords of vacant properties and asking them to sell their properties back to the city at reduced rates. The city is then turning these over to urban farmers if they commit to “making tangible benefits” to the property. If they fail to live up to their end of the bargain, the property goes back to the city. Detroit has also significantly reduced permitting fees for community gardens.

San Francisco allows residential sales of homegrown produce, which most cities don’t. However, urban gardeners can’t create storefronts or any permanent retail structure, only a temporary table. Also, foods can’t be baked or “value-added.” Plain fences (no chain link ones) are a must. No mechanized equipment can be used. In contrast, Madison, Wisconsin, is “totally laid back and allows for basically everything.”

In Chicago, Zachary Clayton, Chicago’s city government, said restaurants have been the driving force. “They want sustainable, local produce.” Currently, there’s nothing official on the books in Chicago. “The zoning code doesn’t even allow urban farming.” However, the city is in the process of revising and creating some very progressive codes. Community gardens can be a maximum of 18,750 square feet. Incidental sales will be allowed. Commercial gardens will need parking, screening, and retail areas. The city has also made commercial and residential composting acceptable.

Washington, D.C., should develop a comprehensive urban agriculture action plan, systematically evaluate all available empty lots (including brownfield sites) as potential opportunities for commercial and community urban agriculture, and develop new codes enabling local food production. The District should target “food desert” communities with high numbers of brownfields first, expanding access to fresh produce via local food stands and street markets.

As Fritz Haeg, author of *Edible Estate: Attack on the Front Lawn* notes, in many communities it’s still illegal to take out lawn in favor of food productive landscapes. Either local codes prevent these activities or restrictive homeowner associations ban these programs.

If allowed, these local yard farms can also be used to composted household and yard waste, which will help the city reach its waste reduction goals.

Note: For residential urban gardens, it’s important to look at whether the backyard used to be part of an industrial brownfield site. There are safety issues: Backyards could have been a brownfield in the past, or near a defunct facility. Residential gardens may also have been sites of historic “burn pits,” used to burn garbage. Lastly, lead paint flakes can get into soils.

Given yard gardens help reduce the costs of fresh produce, increase food security, and help improve environmental conditions, the District should allow local residential food production. Working with the EPA, the District should also develop new soil testing and clean-up requirements for growing food in former brownfield sites. Food production must be safe for the growers, and the produce must be safe to eat.

Green roofs can also be used to produce food. As Washington, D.C., moves up the rankings in terms of total acreage of green roofs, many of these could also be transformed into food-productive landscapes.

As noted, some [restaurants](#) (and even big box stores) are buying food from rooftop gardens. One [prime example in Chicago](#), designed by a landscape architect, brings in school groups and teaches kids about producing their own food. Washington, D.C., now has a progressive green-roof tax rebate. This could be further increased for property owners that produce food on their roofs.

The District should allow and also increase tax incentives for rooftop food production.

2. Sustainable DC Recommendations and Resources Submitted by the Congress for the New Urbanism DC Chapter

PART ONE: OPERATING PRINCIPLES FOR SUSTAINABLE DC

(Select comments applicable to the food working group)

19. Food production of all kinds shall be encouraged in individual buildings and on their lots consistent with their setting in order to promote decentralization, self sufficiency, and reduced transportation impacts on the environment.

35. A steady source of water and the production of a wide range of locally raised foods within an easily accessed distance establish the self-sufficiency and overall size of neighborhoods and/or small towns. Nearby rural agricultural settlements shall be promoted to preserve local traditional foods and food culture.

39. Regions shall strive to be self-sustaining for food, goods and services, employment, renewable energy, and water supplies.

PART TWO: SPECIFIC IDEAS, POLICY SUGGESTIONS, AND DESIGN CONCEPTS

11. DC should organize urban agriculture, community garden, and residential and commercial vegetable and fruit garden workshops, and develop a support system to promote the development, maintenance, and distribution of local food production. The support system should include provision of composted materials, regular debris pickup, water provision, and materials for basic infrastructure such as fencing and raised beds as needed.

All over the country, cities, and neighborhoods are rediscovering and reinventing their public space in extraordinary ways. This has not occurred on any scale in DC, where the overwhelming majority of parkland is owned by the federal government and is not well designed or programmed to meet the needs of residents, businesses, and visitors. A series of workshops, an appropriate allocation of federal and local dollars, and an implementation schedule to retrofit these spaces into beautiful, dynamic, and functional space for the enjoyment of all are needed.

Everyone needs and has a right to access and experience wilderness and agricultural areas. Provide accessible and affordable transportation choices that allow those with the least resources to get to and enjoy the bay, the rivers, the mountains, the woods, and farms. This will foster an understanding of the ecosystem and the food sources that support and nourish our lives.

Develop the capacity of DC residents and public officials to effectively participate in community processes for sustainability initiatives. This would involve holding community workshops organized and taught by subject experts at regular intervals across the city. These workshops would include subjects such as basic drawing and map-reading techniques, fundamentals of planning, urban design and form-based codes, and the history of the city plan; and would have inclusive meeting processes and decision-making techniques. (Bothwell)

3. Sustainability Recommendations Submitted by **DC Sierra Club**

ACTION ITEM	PURPOSE	RESPONSIBILITY
(1) Incentives for more urban community gardens.	Increase fresh produce in city; foster community-building.	Public or private property owners; citizen farmers.
(2) Encourage more year-round farmers' markets.	Increase fresh food supplies in city, promote bio-regionality ("localvore" eating to maintain regional farms and green spaces).	Public-private partnerships.
(3) Promote food co-ops in underserved neighborhoods.	Enable low-income residents to spend less on groceries by purchasing food in bulk.	Public-private partnerships (e.g., tax incentives, subsidized rental of city property).
(4) Promote vertical gardens.		

4. UDC Ward 3 Input Submitted by the **University of the District of Columbia**

(Only items relevant for review by the food working group are listed)

On 28 September, UDC held a meeting as part of 'Start in September' under Mayor Gray's [Sustainable DC](#) initiative. Office of Planning staff, UDC staff, and concerned citizens gathered to discuss ideas about the attributes of a sustainable city in an effort to break down high-level concepts and bring them into our local context.

This open discussion at UDC allowed participants to share their own visions and aspirations for the city and gave them an opportunity to listen to other residents with different perspectives. In small tables of 4-5 people, we discussed three guiding questions:

- 1) What are the attributes of a sustainable city?
- 2) How does DC measure up to that vision of a sustainable city?
- 3) How can we engage and energize the whole city around this sustainability plan?

Question 1: What are the attributes of a sustainable city?

- The city is in sync with natural systems and all resources are valued.
- Design is informed by nature/works with nature
- Holistic thinking is present in all planning efforts
- Nothing toxic/poisonous
- Climate, energy, and water are protected
- People are connected to nature
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Question 2: How does DC measure up to that vision of a sustainable city?

Strengths

- Local farm produce/farmers markets
- Grassroots action - more and more NGOs and businesses are involved in sustainability

Weaknesses

- Scale of social disparities – state scale problems/city funding
- Segregation is still a problem
- City systems are not in sync with natural systems

From the conversation came the following suggestions for building on our strengths and addressing our weaknesses:

Local Goals –

- Access to food
- Respect for natural cycles
- We are able to feed our own city

Potential Action –

- Use a holistic infrastructure design process
- Strengthen sustainability education as preparation for jobs
- Leverage participation to benefit local economy
- Enable In-house elder care in each neighborhood
- Implement and improve safety net for vulnerable groups
- Act and plan regionally for water, waste, and food

Question 3: How can we engage and energize the whole city around this sustainability plan?

Social Media Strategy

- Twitter meetings – Q&A between city officials and Tweepers
- Tweet ups
- Sustainable DC Foursquare Badge

Collect ideas outside of meetings

- Collect ideas on napkins, used envelopes, things with blank surface areas like toilet paper
- Suggestion boxes for sustainable DC at local businesses – maybe through Think Local First
- Collect ideas via text

Mobile meetings

- Bike rides
- Experimental circulator bus routes

Paid/incentivized participation

- Give rebate for bottle recycling (5-10 cents)
- Make it FUN
- iPod giveaway at planning meetings
- Take the money we would have used to hire a consultant and instead pay businesses directly to participate.

Go to existing meetings and groups

- Churches/Religious networks/GWIPL/Creation Care
- ANC meetings – Mobilize the ANCs
- Boy Scouts/Girl Scouts
- Unions
- Rotary Club
- Lions Club
- Business orgs like AOBA
- Parents at playgrounds on Saturday mornings