

DECOLONIZING LOCAL FOOD SYSTEM POLICY

Decolonized and Inclusive Food and Culture
Gardens in the City of Vancouver Park Board



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Disclaimer

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Land Acknowledgement

I would like to acknowledge this work was done on the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territories of the x^wməθk^wəyəm (Musqueam), Sk̓w̓x̓wú7mesh (Squamish), and səlilwətał (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations. These Nations have acted as stewards of the land since time immemorial and continue to do so to this day. I would also recognize that today Vancouver has the third-largest urban Indigenous population of any Canadian city. Despite the dispossession of their lands, Indigenous peoples in Vancouver continue to practice their traditional ways of growing, harvesting, and using native plants.

I would also acknowledge the disproportionate impact climate change has on Indigenous communities and that climate change is driven by the same systems of power which uphold colonialism. I am very grateful for the meticulous care Indigenous Peoples have provided to the land where I am continuously learning and unlearning.

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Acknowledgment of my Positionality

Positionality is the social and political context that creates your identity regarding race, class, gender, sexuality, and ability status. Positionality also describes how your identity influences and biases your understanding of and outlook on the world¹.

As a researcher it is important to identify my position and degrees of privilege. I am a white, able-bodied, settler of Western European descent on both my maternal and paternal sides. I am privileged to be a Master of Public Health student at the University of British Columbia. This privilege was easier for me to achieve given multiple generations of my family have attended university before me. I grew up on the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territory of the Anishinaabe Algonquin Nation as an uninvited guest in what is today known as Ottawa, ON. I now live, work, and learn on the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territory of the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh Nations in Vancouver, BC. I acknowledge the limitations of doing this work as a white settler working within two colonial institutions.

Executive Summary

In 2018, the Vancouver Park Board (VPB) embraced the Reconciliation Mission, Vision, and Values² as a foundational framework for the organization. The mission to decolonize the VPB has resulted in equity and decolonization initiatives being brought to the forefront of subsequent documents like the 2021 Local Food System Action Plan³ (LFSAP).

The LFSAP's vision is to move towards a sustainable, just, and decolonized local food system by making space for Indigenous food sovereignty, increasing equitable access to food assets and services, and working towards food system resiliency as part of climate action³.

In accordance with actions 2.3 and 2.4 in the LFSAP, the purpose of this report is to review the current expression of interest (EOI) process and inform future policy updates regarding increasing equitable access to food-growing assets, specifically food and culture gardens. Currently, food insecurity is nearly three times as prevalent for Indigenous Peoples living off-reserve⁴ and four times as prevalent for Indigenous Peoples living on reserve⁵ compared to the national prevalence of food insecurity in Canada. Despite two-thirds of people on reserve reporting that they practice traditional harvesting, most participants reported a desire to have

more traditional foods in their diet⁵. Indigenous food sovereignty (IFS) provides a framework for exploring, transforming, and rebuilding the industrial food system toward a more just and ecological model for all⁶. IFS is more than a solution to food insecurity, it is a way to increase access to traditional foods and culture, make space for knowledge sharing, and increase food system resiliency in the face of climate change. Given the 2017 VPB Truth Telling Report's recommendation to begin all reconciliation efforts with the truth⁷, this report begins by exploring the historical use of agriculture as a tool of colonization. This, and the Eurocentric philosophies around land use and management, have created the industrial and colonial food system in Canada today. Using calls found in foundational frameworks such as the VPB Reconciliation Mission, Vision, and Values² and the CoV's UNDRIP Strategy⁸, recommendations for methods to decolonize the process of updating a new Urban Agriculture Policy for the City of Vancouver (CoV) Park Board are suggested. These include co-developing the new policy with members of the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh Nations using a framework that centers on justice while incorporating their values. Finally, an audit of the current Urban Agriculture Policy and the process of applying for and starting a new food and culture garden on park-managed land was conducted using a decolonization lens. Recommendations for how this process can be improved are suggested.

Food and culture gardens are community supported gardens that provide space for individuals and groups to grow food, herbs, provide a space where people can come together to learn about growing cycles, share food and culture, and build community³.

BEGINNING WITH THE TRUTH

Food Insecurity in Canada

In Canada, food insecurity is a widespread problem which is associated with worse mental health outcomes, increased rates of infectious disease, increased health care utilization, and premature death⁹.

Food insecurity is inadequate or insecure access to nutritious food due to financial constraints⁹.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic in 2018, 12.7% of households or an estimated 4.37 million people nationwide reported being food insecure. This led to food insecurity being declared a priority in Food Policy for Canada in 2019⁹. One of the most documented risk factors associated with being food insecure is low income. While Canada holds a reputation for being among the top countries in the world in terms of standard of living, Indigenous Peoples experience huge disparities in the social determinants of health and socioeconomic status¹⁰. The group in Canada with the highest reported prevalence of food insecurity in 2021 was Indigenous peoples living off-reserve with around 31% prevalence of food insecure households⁴. White Canadians have the lowest reported prevalence of food insecurity compared to any other racial group, pointing to the country's long history of colonialism and racism⁴. In a study looking at 92 First Nations reserves across Canada, researchers found that 47.1% of households were food insecure, which was above average in British Columbia at 48.6% of households⁵. Most First Nations participants expressed a desire to have more traditional foods in their diet even with 67% saying they actively participated in traditional harvesting⁵. While the research on Indigenous people's desires in the urban context is sparse, a study from Winnipeg illustrated the desire to have increased access to traditional food as being equally as strong in the urban setting compared to the more-studied rural and remote settings¹¹. One participant stated that relocating to urban spaces is associated with limited traditional food practices because of the lack of access to land and the loss of traditional knowledge that accompanies living in the city¹¹.

Indigenous Food Sovereignty

While the concept of IFS may be novel in academic literature and Western society, it has been the living reality of Indigenous groups for thousands of years. However, the impacts of colonization and land seizures have disrupted traditional and local food systems, threatening these practices¹¹. Dawn Morrison, Curator for the Working Group on Indigenous Food Sovereignty (WGIFS), describes rather than defines IFS to avoid homogenizing the diversity that exists amongst different Indigenous communities. The underlying principle is to uphold their distinct cultures and relationships with land and food systems. Despite differences between languages, cultures, and communities the beliefs and values that underlie relationships with the land and food systems are similar⁶.

Indigenous food sovereignty “describes strategies that enable and support the ability of Indigenous communities to sustain traditional hunting, fishing, gathering, farming, and distribution practices the way we have done for thousands of years prior to contact with the first European settlers.” - Dawn Morrison, *Secwepemc Nation*⁶.

Dawn Morrison explains that IFS also provides a framework for exploring, transforming, and rebuilding the industrial food system towards a more just and ecological model for all. IFS is, therefore, more than a solution to food insecurity, it is a way to increase access to traditional foods and culture, make space for knowledge sharing, and increase food system resiliency.

Unlike the industrial food system, Indigenous food systems include Indigenous knowledge, wisdom, and values in addition to the land, water, soil, and living organisms⁶. The values described by Morrison include interdependency, reciprocity, respect, and responsibility. The approach to increasing IFS provides a restorative framework to identify ways in which settlers can work to support IFS from a bottom-up perspective to influence policy that incorporates Indigenous traditional knowledge and practices⁶. Furthermore, IFS provides a foundation for Indigenous-settler relations as settlers learn to value IFS as equal to the Western knowledge and food systems and join Indigenous Peoples in support of their efforts to reclaim voice and vision in decision-making matters which affect their traditional lands and food systems¹⁰.

Dawn Morrison describes four principles commonly shared by Elders, community members, and knowledge keepers across Canada and beyond during various discussions and conferences with

the WGIFS over the last 10 years¹⁰. The following principles have been translated from various Indigenous languages to English and so some of their original meaning may be lost. Nevertheless, these principles express and validate the wisdom, knowledge, values, and metaphors present within Indigenous eco-philosophy¹⁰. The first principle recognizes that food is a divine and sacred gift from the Creator and as such cannot be controlled by colonial laws, institutions, and policies. The second principle calls for participation in food systems because IFS is grounded in action and the daily practice of nurturing a healthy relationship with the land, plants, and animals that provide food. The third principle is self-determination around choices about what and how much to eat based on health needs and having independence from having to rely on commercial grocery stores and the industrial food system. The fourth principle is supportive legislation and policy as IFS seeks to provide a restorative framework to reconcile policies across many colonial industries such as agriculture, forestry, environmental conservation, and community planning⁶.

Indigenous Eco-Philosophy

The land has always been fundamental for the health and cultural identity of Indigenous Peoples and today it is recognized as an Indigenous determinant of health. The land is viewed as a living, conscious being that can heal and teach, making it a source of cultural identity and wellbeing and is therefore respected like one¹². Ioana Radu, professor of Indigenous studies at the University of Quebec, highlights that Western land uses such as urbanization and agricultural development are considered major threats to biodiversity and are poised to fulfill short-term human needs¹². A common belief amongst Indigenous cultures is the interconnectedness with all life and that all life coexists in balance, harmony, respect, and care¹². First Nations environmental stewardship practices are meant to sustain the whole by living in harmony with nature and taking only what is needed to ensure the same opportunity for future generations¹³.

Frank and Kathy Brown from the Heiltsuk Nation share that the Coastal First Nations believe there is an eternal and inseparable relationship between their people and the land and waters. Care and respect for nature is a deep-rooted value in their culture and so many traditional stories speak of the importance of caring for nature¹³.

“We are taught to take only what we need and to always acknowledge and show respect to everything we take, be it plant, animal, or fish; our ancestors taught us that everything is alive¹³.”

An example of these philosophies in action can be seen in ancient Indigenous forest gardens in British Columbia. Indigenous forest gardens are ecosystems created and managed by Indigenous Peoples and in the Pacific Northwest, they consist of a canopy layer of fruit and nut trees, a lower layer of berry species, and a forest floor of herbaceous plants for food and medicines¹⁴. Four ancient food forests in British Columbia were studied by researchers at SFU including two forests on Coast Salish territory¹⁴. These sites had been occupied for an estimated 2000 years prior to the late 1800s when communities were forced to leave following settler invasion. Despite not being stewarded for approximately 150 years, these food forests remain more biodiverse compared to the surrounding forest area¹⁴. Researchers found that these forest gardens have significantly higher species richness, plants have larger seeds, more animal-dispersed species, and insect-pollinated species. The large-seeded fruit reflects the importance of perennial species for Indigenous peoples in this area while the animal and insect activity indicate these sites continue to provide important habitat for many forest species¹⁴. This example demonstrates how Indigenous eco-philosophies and land stewardship are valuable tools for biodiversity conservation and food growing. Today, Indigenous peoples make up 5% of the global population yet inhabit 80% of the areas in the world with the highest biodiversity¹⁰.

Western Philosophy of Land Management

“The term colony comes from the Latin word *colonus*, meaning farmer¹⁵.”

The land is integral to the IFS movement and is also central to colonialism. Land was gained by settlers as a direct result of the forceful removal and displacement of Indigenous communities marginalizing them onto reserves on undesirable, infertile lands to make room for their own food systems. Today, the current industrial food system continues to uphold colonialism as

demonstrated through the ongoing dispossession of subsistence hunting, fishing, and gathering societies along with the how the realities of Indigenous food systems have been made invisible within the dominant Western resource-management system¹⁰.

Humans are to dominate and control nature, and therefore seek to “manage” the land that provides us with our food. - Rene Descartes⁶

The predominant Western belief is that land is a commodity or a resource for human benefit¹⁵. The land is something that can be individually owned. These beliefs are apparent in past and present colonial actions and policies. The urbanization and industrialization of our society along with the insatiable demand for consumer goods connected with a capitalist economy have resulted in a disconnect between humans and nature. This disconnect has created a belief that human activities are independent of the activities of animals, nature and the ecosystems that surround us. Moreover, a dominant belief in Western religions and philosophies is anthropocentrism, meaning that humans are not only viewed as independent from nature, but as above it¹⁶.

Anthropocentrism regards humans as separate from and superior to nature and holds that human life has intrinsic value while other entities (including animals, plants, mineral resources, and so on) are resources that may justifiably be exploited for the benefit of humankind¹⁶.

Historical Use of Agriculture as a Tool for Colonization

Along with Canadian assimilation policies, these Western philosophies foster unsustainable exploitation of natural resources that disrupt Indigenous food systems and ways of being. When Europeans first came to what is today known as British Columbia there were few who settled there and the relationships between First Nations and Settlers were governed by the fur trade. Colonization by trade, unlike settlement, did not immediately result in the dispossession of Indigenous lands¹⁷. However, European activities such as the overhunting of sea otters for their pelts to the point of near extinction, disrupted the careful balance of Indigenous food systems¹³. Colonization by settlement in British Columbia took off in 1858 when gold was discovered on

the banks of the Fraser River. The Fraser River Gold Rush brought an estimated 30,000 miners to the River from California. The influx of people from the United States and the discovery of gold led Britain to declare British Columbia a colony on August 2nd, 1858¹⁸. The arrival of mining companies created conflicts between the First Nations and the miners who had not consulted with any of the Nations prior to beginning their work. These extractive mining practices along the river occupied traditional fishing sites and disrupted spawning grounds, endangering the future of the salmon population¹⁹.

Agriculture, framed by Western philosophies of land tenure, was used by the Government of Canada to displace, and erase, Indigenous land governance, stewardship practices, and food systems. The reserve system forced Indigenous communities to stay in place and cultivate the land they were assigned by the federal government. In the late 1880s, many First Nations in the prairies had very successfully joined the farming economy and many of their techniques which involved sharing land, work, farming equipment, and cost of repairs led to unheard-of success in quality and quantity of food production²⁰. This success threatened settler farmers and Hayter Reed, Indian Agent at the time, implemented several policies to undermine and control the agricultural practices of Indigenous Peoples²⁰.

The first of these policies was Severalty which divided reserve land into individual plots. Everyone was allowed to own and cultivate a maximum of four plots. The goal was to force Indigenous people into Western ways of individualism and provide the government with a means to seize any plots not being used for farming. This also prohibited groups from collectively purchasing machinery, which many alone could not afford²⁰. The second policy was known as the Peasant Farming Policy. This was based on Hayter Reed's belief that Indigenous Peoples were less evolved compared to European Settlers and needed to evolve into modern farmers. This policy included rules about what tools were available for use, stating that Indigenous Peoples could not use machinery and instead had to use simple tools on small plots of land. This again reduced the land that could be cultivated and reduced output, making it difficult to produce enough to move beyond individual sustenance²⁰. Additionally, it created lateral harms between those who had already purchased machinery prior to this law and were able to continue using it, and those who had not and were forced to use only simple tools. Finally, the Permit System - prohibiting the sale of any produce without a permit from an Indian Agent - and the Pass System - prohibiting Indigenous peoples from leaving the reserve without a pass from an Indian Agent -

stopped any remaining chance of profiting from agricultural practices on reserves²⁰. The pass system also further disrupted traditional practices as now members of each reserve required permission to leave to hunt, fish, and gather traditional foods.

In British Columbia, as industrial fishing began to become popular in traditional fishing areas, Indigenous fishing methods such as weirs and inland netting were banned by the government which claimed they were the cause of poor salmon runs¹³. Today, we know that Indigenous fishing techniques such as weirs are great environmental stewardship techniques as the larger, stronger fish were left in the waters to strengthen future generations of salmon¹³. These policies show how Western ideas of land and agriculture were part of Canada's unjust history of colonization and assimilation. Today Canadian food systems continue to highlight the Western philosophies of land as a resource, individualism in food growing, and humans being independent from and above nature. Furthermore, public policies value Western academic literature and ideas over oral traditions and Indigenous ways of knowing. Thus, policymakers at all levels of government must begin by recognizing where colonial ideologies exist currently in food systems. Once this has been recognized, IFS can act as a restorative framework for improved health and community development that values working together across cultures to heal relationships between one another, and the land, water, and living things that provide for us.

CURRENT CONTEXT OF LOCAL FOOD SYSTEM POLICY AT VANCOUVER PARK BOARD

Foundational Frameworks

In recent years, there has been a shift towards centring equity and decolonization within the CoV’s strategies and frameworks. Following the CoV’s adoption of a reconciliation framework in 2014, the VPB adopted two foundational reconciliation frameworks in 2017 and 2018 respectively. The 2017 Truth Telling Report⁷ highlighted the importance of beginning with learning the truth of colonization before any reconciliation work. The 2018 Reconciliation Mission, Vision, and Values² document (Figure 1) states that reconciliation is a decolonization process and announces the VPB’s mission to decolonize the institution.

PARK BOARD RECONCILIATION

Mission Vision Values Statement

VALUES

These values are your compass to help guide the way you work, interact with colleagues, external partners and the public.

- 

PATIENCE
Colonialism didn’t happen overnight. Untangling it takes time. We will pace ourselves for the marathon, not the sprint. We will adjust deadlines to ensure things are done well and respectfully.
- 

CLARITY
We will focus on how colonialism functions to exclude, not on how to include.
- 

PRAGMATISM
All staff are inheriting a system not of our making. The Park Board Reconciliation Team (PBRT) are here to assist colleagues with examining the ways colonialism continues to damage others. Blame is unproductive.
- 

LEADERSHIP
We will nurture and sustain each other, demonstrating Indigenous principles in the way we function as a team.
- 

LEARNING
We consent to learn in public. We will make mistakes. We will sit with those mistakes, be transparent about them, and use them both to learn and to teach. Our mistakes will be diagnostic tools.

Figure 1 VPB Reconciliation Mission, Vision, and Values²

Since then, frameworks and strategic plans created by the VPB have brought equity and reconciliation to the forefront of their objectives. Frameworks lay a foundation for strategic action plans which influence the updates and creation of new policies. Policies then create the structure for internal and public processes. This relationship between frameworks, strategic plans, policies, and processes in the context of food and culture gardens is shown in Figure 2.

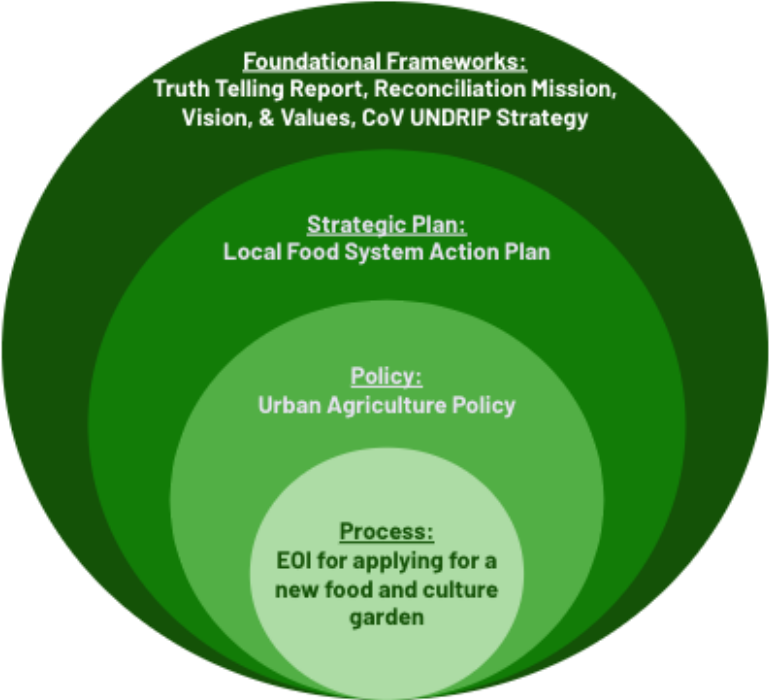


Figure 2 Nested model of VPB’s frameworks, strategies, policies, and processes.

Since this initial shift towards reconciliation and decolonization, additional foundational frameworks that centre equity and decolonization have been developed (Figure 3) such as VanPlay, the Interim Colonial Audit Report and the CoV’s UNDRIP Strategy which are described in Table 1. The CoV’s UNDRIP Strategy was created as a pathway to support the CoV’s commitment to improving their relationships with the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh Nations, by recognizing them as the rights-holders of the land known today as Vancouver. The Task Force, made up of members of each nation and city employees, calls upon the CoV to implement the Calls to Action outlined in this report⁸. Several of these Calls to Action (Appendix A) relate directly to local food systems and should be considered during the policy update process.

During this shift, the 2021 LFSAP was created, using the available frameworks as a guide, to outline specific objectives and actions that the VBP should take to decolonize local food systems. Based on actions 2.3 and 2.4 in the LFSAP (Appendix B), the next steps are to update the 2015 Urban agriculture policy and the criteria and EOI process of establishing new food and culture gardens.



Figure 3 Timeline of frameworks, strategic plans, and policies relating to community gardening and decolonization work at the VPB.

Table 1 Frameworks, Strategies, and Policies relating to community gardening and decolonization work at the VPB.

Document	Type	Description
1996 Community Garden Policy ²¹	Policy	In 1996, the VPB approved a Community Garden Policy that defined community gardens, stated how the VPB would support their development, and outlined conditions for the operation of community gardens. Community gardening was recognized as a valuable recreation activity that could contribute to community development, environmental awareness, positive social interaction, and community education. The VPB committed to collaborating with interested parties in assisting the development of community gardens on VPB property.
2005 Community	Policy	The definition of community gardens was amended to recognize community gardens as recreational programming as

Garden Policy Update ²²		well as community development programming. The range of gardens that existed was also recognized along with the benefits of increased biodiversity and increased understanding of food production. The amendment also included commitments to increased support from the VPB for community gardening initiatives including a guide to starting a new garden, provision of tools at low to no cost, and translations of information when possible.
2013 Local Food Action Plan ²³	Strategic Plan	This report outlined five principles to guide the CoV’s food system work: community economic development, ecological health, social justice, collaboration and participation, and celebration. Additionally, five goals were identified which included: supporting food-friendly neighbourhoods, empowering residents to take action, improving access to healthy, affordable, culturally diverse food for all residents, making food a centrepiece of Vancouver’s green economy, and advocating for a just and sustainable food system with partners and at all levels of government.
2015 Urban Agriculture Policy ²⁴	Policy	This is the current policy guiding the creation and maintenance of community gardens and other food growing assets on VPB land. This policy defines community gardening and outlines the process for choosing a site, consulting the community, and operating the garden. In 2018, the Urban Agriculture Guide ²⁵ was created as a tool to describe the process, governed by the 2015 policy, of starting a new community garden on city-owned land. The current process for starting a new garden on city managed land is audited on beginning on page 23.
2017 Truth Telling Report ⁷	Foundational Framework	The report was a result of a series of consultations led by VPB staff and Indigenous consultant Kamala Todd with Indigenous cultural leaders, artists, and knowledge holders from across Canada, as well as from within the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh Nations. In this report, one of the main points was that we are not yet at the reconciliation phase in Canada’s journey towards “Truth and Reconciliation”, the act of truth-telling must come first.
2018 Reconciliation Mission, Vision & Values ²	Foundational Framework	The VPB adopted the Reconciliation Mission, Vision, and Values on April 16, 2018, as a foundation for reconciliation within the organization. The mission—to decolonize the VPB—is an ambitious one and has reframed much of the ongoing regular business of the VPB, as well as internal staff cross-departmental relations. The 5 values, illustrated on page

		11, are used by staff to transition away from the institution's colonial roots.
2018 Colonial Audit Motion ²⁶	Future Foundational Framework	The VPB approved a motion in April 2018 titled Truth and Reconciliation with the Park Board's Colonial Roots. This motion directed staff to undertake an analysis of the VPB's colonial roots, as well as current practices, and report back with their findings and recommendations to acknowledge all injustices uncovered as part of the "truth-telling" phase. In July 2018, staff presented the initial findings of this analysis in a report titled Exploring Park Board's Colonial Roots and Current Practices, and the Board approved recommendations for staff to undertake a comprehensive Colonial Audit to identify opportunities (short & long-term) and specific ways to improve VPB policies and practices concerning reconciliation.
2020 VanPlay ²⁷	Strategic Plan	The VPB approved the VanPlay Framework on October 19, 2020. VanPlay is a reference guide to Vancouver's Parks and Recreation Services Master Plan which consists of 4 comprehensive reports. VanPlay Goal 9 directs the Board to "seek truth as a foundation for Reconciliation". Furthermore, the VanPlay Playbook directs VPB to "focus reconciliation efforts on decolonizing the VPB and relationship building with the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh Nations".
2021 Local Food Systems Action Plan ³	Strategic Plan	In 2021, VPB approved the updated Local Food System Action Plan. The vision of this 5-year plan is to move toward a sustainable, just, and decolonized local food system by making space for IFS, increasing equitable access to food assets and services, and working towards food system resiliency as part of climate action. The plan was co-managed and co-authored by the Environment & Sustainability team and the Decolonization, Arts, & Culture team. This was the first plan co-produced by the Decolonization, Arts, & Culture department.
2022 CoV UNDRIP Strategy ⁸	Foundational Framework	Council adopted CoV's UNDRIP Strategy on October 25, 2023. This strategy contains 79 Calls to Action and was developed in partnership with the Musqueam Indian Band, Squamish Nation, and Tsleil-Waututh Nation. The City's Indigenous Relations team is co-developing an action plan to implement the calls and is identifying champions across each department to work on this.

Strategic Plan: 2021 Local Food System Action Plan

The 2021 LFSAP was the VPB's first strategic plan to center decolonization and equity. Together, the plan's four goals (Figure 4) and 38 actions form the steps to move towards decolonized food systems within VPB managed land. Several of the LFSAP's actions (Appendix B) relate directly to the recommendations in this report including the two actions, 2.3 and 2.4, which directly call for this work.



Figure 4 The four goals outlined in the VPB's 2021 Local Food System Action Plan³.

VPB Food Growing Assets

The LFSAP defines **food growing assets** as formal and informal growing areas that provide food, medicine, and space for cultural practices; contribute to emergency food response; enhance biodiversity and habitat protection; support soil health; and use an integrated environmental approach³.

The LFSAP³ acknowledges the colonial implications of using the term assets to describe growing spaces. This is associated with the Western philosophy of land as a resource for capital and economic gain. In moving towards a decolonized food system, it would be good to move towards a new term without these colonial implications and without the specification of growing food given that medicine and cultural uses are also a part of this definition. Table 2 from the LFSAP³, shows that the most common type of garden found on VPB land is what is known as

Community Gardens. Community Gardens have less than 50% of the garden dedicated to collective gardening and are primarily made up of individual plots. While fewer gardens are 50%+ Collective Community Gardens, this type makes up the majority of the area on VPB land currently used for gardens at 62% of garden space. These gardens self-report having more than 50% of the total garden area dedicated to collective gardening. This type of gardening allows spaces to benefit more than one household or group. The fewest number of gardens and least amount of space is currently occupied by Cultural Learning Gardens and Indigenous-Led gardens. Indigenous Led Gardens comprise 1% of all garden spaces and 0.002% of all space on VPB managed land. The 2021 LFSAP³ included a community engagement survey and found that respondents reported community gardens and cultural learning gardens were difficult to access due to long waitlists. Moreover, the respondents reported that there is a need for increased equity in food assets access and so resources should be directed to those in need of support. These numbers and results from community engagement show that new urban agricultural policy and planning processes need to be developed that address this disparity in who has access to VPB’s food growing systems and to reach VanPlay’s²⁷ goal of increasing collective growth. To support these accessibility goals, LFSAP action 1.6 (Appendix B) calls for increased resource allocation towards cultural learning gardens and Indigenous-led gardens.

Table 2 Distribution of different types of food and culture gardens situated on VPB land³.

Garden Type	Number of Gardens	Number of Plots	Total square metres	Percentage of square metres out of all food and culture gardens	Percentage of square metres out of all park land
Community Gardens	18	651	11,084	27%	0.1%
50%+ Collective Community Gardens	13	676	25,627	62%	0.2%
Cultural Learning Gardens	8	39	4304	10%	0.04%
Indigenous Led Gardens	2	5	260	1%	0.002%
Food and Culture Gardens	41	1371	41,275	100%	0.4%

TABLE 2: PARK BOARD LAND DEDICATED TO FOOD & CULTURE GARDENS

The purpose of the following sections is to provide staff with recommendations for Urban Agriculture Policy and process updates grounded in the preceding decolonial and equity-centred frameworks and the 2021 LFSAP.

Policy: 2015 Urban Agriculture Policy

The 2015 Urban Agriculture Policy (Table 1) was created prior to the VPB's shift towards centring equity and decolonization. This policy was created by the VPB without consulting any Indigenous stakeholders or rightsholders. Therefore, this policy centres Western philosophies of land management and as a result, most gardens are Community Gardens with individual plots (Table 2). Several of the CoV UNDRIP Strategy's⁸ calls to action emphasize the importance of co-developing new policy with the local Nations that honours their governance of land (See Appendix A: Actions 1.10, 2.13, and 4.9).

Recommendations for a Decolonized Policy

Leading With Values

There is a colonial belief that when Indigenous Peoples choose to relocate to urban spaces they are rejecting or leaving behind their traditional culture. However, it is underlying cultural values that provide the mechanism for cultural survival¹¹ especially in urban environments and thus it is critical to lead a decolonizing initiative with Indigenous values. An example of this is seen in a study on IFS in the inner City of Winnipeg where themes related to values around IFS emerged¹¹. The first main theme was food as ceremony. A spiritual connection with cultural food was described at all steps in the food system from growing to eating and sharing. The knowledge gained from growing your own food is connected to a larger understanding of the relationship between nature, spirituality, and people. One participant shared “It’s about **respect**—especially the respect—and respect of the growth. It’s another life that you’re bringing and growing, and you’re harvesting that life form in a respectful way and putting it in your body¹¹.” The ceremonies and rituals described are also related to the value of building **relationships** that accompanies sharing of traditional foods. There is an appreciation for the broader connections between generations, food, and land that comes with this connection to food. This theme and its values directly relate to the first pillar of IFS, the recognition that food is divine and sacred, as described by Dawn Morrison⁶.

The next theme that emerged through the IFS study in urban Winnipeg was a connection to land through **reciprocity**. Participants explained that although it can be more difficult to access

traditional foods in the city, their connections to family and friends on-reserve resulted in many gifts of traditional foods. Many discussed how trading or bartering becomes easier when you are a part of the food community. Bartering is related to facilitating cultural values of **sharing and reciprocity** one participant shared “I also barter now instead of taking cash for my teachings. People will bring me meats or yarn, and then there’s less of the “I bought you” attitude. The person asking for the teachings has to go out and actually participate in getting that product for me. That tells me that they actually respect the knowledge enough to do so¹¹.” Participants also highlighted the importance of the process of food giving up its life to support people.

Understanding the importance of reciprocity between the provider and receiver of the food is about cultural exchanges. A participant describes this reciprocity by sharing “Are we respectfully honouring and giving thanks to that food and where it comes from? Those are the most important parts¹¹.”

Dawn Morrison describes similar values of interdependency, respect, reciprocity, and responsibility which are necessary during the cultivation of Indigenous food. She also explains that to support IFS one must have a deep cross-cultural understanding of the ways in which Indigenous knowledge, practices, values, and wisdom can inform food-related policy reform⁶. Thus, it is important for the VPB to co-create a new food policy with local Indigenous Peoples working in the IFS space so values, knowledge, and practices that are most important to their culture can be captured. This is also expressed in the CoV UNDRIP Strategy⁸ calls to action 1.10 and 2.13 (Appendix A), which call for the incorporation of Indigenous stewardship knowledge in food policy and policy co-creation respectively. From the values of sharing and reciprocity shared by a participant in the City of Winnipeg, expressing gratitude for the work done in this process can go beyond monetary honorariums. Sharing a gift, especially one from the land, like cedar for example, can be a way to honour the relationships between the CoV staff and the Indigenous partners working together on this process.

Applying a Design Thinking Framework Centring Justice

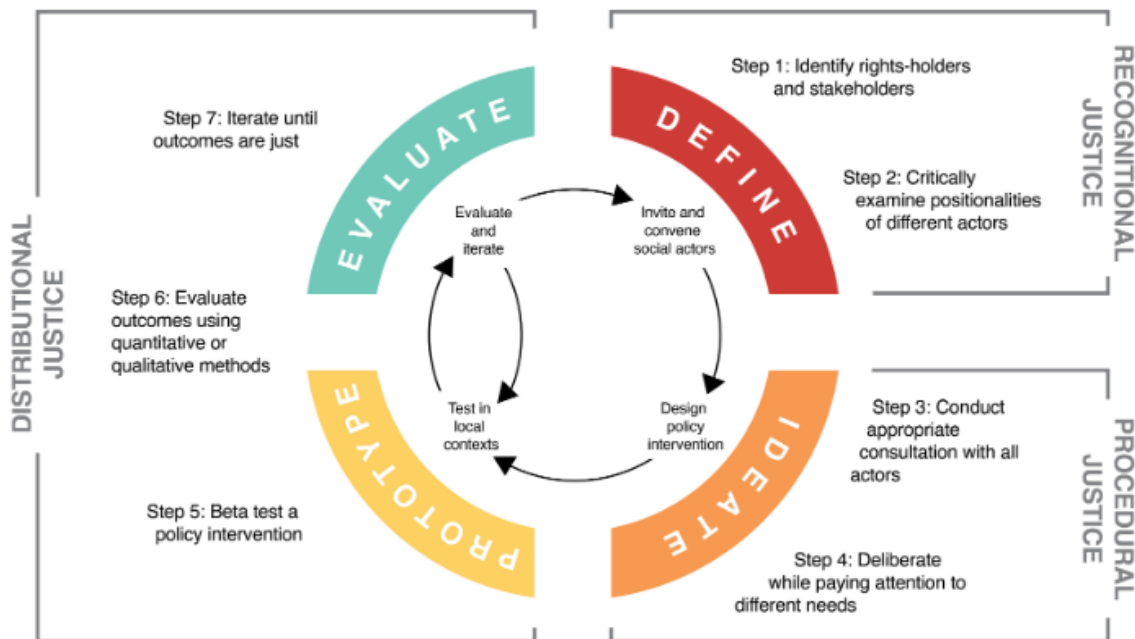


Figure 5 Circular design thinking framework which incorporates different types of justice at each step²⁸.

One framework the VPB could use to center Indigenous voices in the co-creation of policy updates is a circular design thinking model as shown in Figure 5. Langhans et al., suggest this as a useful framework for the design of urban interventions, which improve access to nature while centring justice²⁸. This cyclical process is made up of seven steps which are outlined below as they could apply to the update of the Urban Agriculture Policy at VPB.

Step 1: The first step is to identify all the stakeholders and rightsholders involved in community gardening. It is suggested to enlist a diverse demographic to capture all values and needs. Once the initial group is convened, actors can refer and identify more groups until all stakeholders have been identified. This step, which involves naming and listing all stakeholders and recognizing their needs and values, is an act of recognitional justice. In the case of VPB and local food system policy the local Nations should be included as rights holders and urban Indigenous Peoples should be included as stakeholders.

Recognitional Justice is recognition of all groups, their values, and their needs²⁸.

Step 2: The second step involves all actors, including the government, critically examining their positionality. Your positionality shapes the way an intervention is designed and without this critical examination, it is likely the new policy will uphold harmful patterns and practices which perpetuate current injustices.

Step 3: The third step is to conduct appropriate engagement with all rightsholders and stakeholders. As recommended in CoV UNDRIP Strategy⁸ Actions 1.10 and 2.13 (Appendix A) Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh Peoples in this context, should be involved in the co-creation process. This is an act of procedural justice.

Procedural justice is inclusion of all parties who will be affected by a decision in the decision-making process²⁸.

Step 4: The fourth step is deliberation. This should be a discussion which facilitates making decisions together. Furthermore, it is suggested that all stakeholders involved in earlier steps understand how and why a decision was made.

Step 5: Test a prototype of the new policy as a beta test. This involves trying out the new policy on a small scale. In the case of VPB food and culture gardens, it could be applying the updated policy and process to one new cultural or Indigenous-led community garden.

Step 6: This step involves evaluating the distributional justice of the outcomes associated with the prototype. This could involve collecting data from the group leading the new garden and evaluating how the process worked for them and who has gained access to gardening space.

Distributional Justice is fair allocation of natural resources and opportunities to experience nature across spatial or temporal scales²⁸.

Step 7: Based on the findings from step 6, step 7 is an iterative step which involves adjusting the policy to remedy unjust outcomes as shown in Figure 5.

By choosing an iterative, participatory approach which centers on justice, the VPB can make deliberate decisions for the new Urban Agriculture Policy, keeping in line with the CoV UNDRIP calls to action such as 2.13, which specifically calls for the co-development of new policies to ensure they are accessible and culturally safe. Langhans et al., provide reflection questions (Figure 6) to help self-assess during each stage of the design process to ensure justice is being considered.



Figure 6 Examples of self-reflection questions for each step of the design thinking framework to ensure each type of justice is being achieved in the process.

Process Audit: EOI and Public Consultation

The Urban Agriculture Garden Guide²⁵ was published in 2018 as a tool to help the public through the EOI process for starting a new urban agricultural project on CoV and VPB managed

land. The manual outlines the process (Figure 7) to apply for, design, and construct a new gardening initiative and is governed by the 2015 Urban Agriculture Policy. To address the inequity in land access for Indigenous food growing noted in Table 2, I conducted an accessibility audit, inspired by the VPB’s ongoing Colonial Audit work, on this process to help identify areas which can be decolonized in future policy and process updates.

The following section is a summary of my audit findings for the current expression of interest process as represented in the Urban Agriculture Garden Guide.

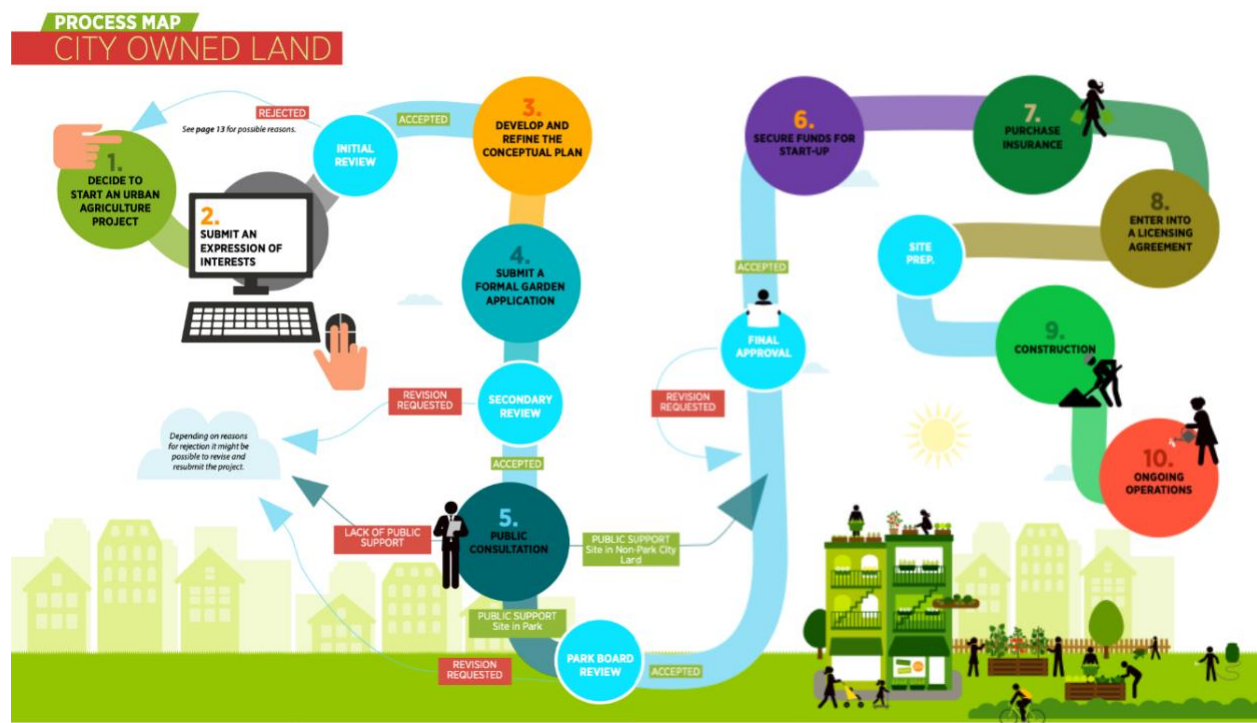


Figure 5: Process map outlining the steps required to start a new food and culture garden on city managed land²⁵.

Colonial Barrier #1: Limited information available about community gardening

Currently, information on community gardening is very limited, hard to access, or out of date. When looking into this process for myself, I have observed the CoV website does not provide general information about community gardens on the main page of the website including what a community garden is, the types of gardens people can choose to start, and how to identify a site

for a garden. While some of this information exists within the Urban Agriculture Garden Guide linked under resources for planning a new garden, some people may be deterred by the Guide's length when looking for basic knowledge prior to deciding to begin this application process. Furthermore, all information on the website and within the Guide is in English which limits accessibility to only those who can read English.

Recommendation #1: Increasing transparency and availability of information

General information on community gardening should be more easily accessible to the public directly on the web page. Increasing knowledge of local food initiatives could also go beyond the website. Advertising for new community garden projects could go in public and community areas such as VPB managed land suitable for new gardens and in community hubs like food banks, community centres, Indigenous friendship centres, local Indigenous reservation offices, and libraries to name a few examples. A Master of Urban Planning scholar from the University of Toronto, Katelyn Ling, interviewed community gardeners and city planners in Vancouver and found that all those who participated in the interviews expressed that inclusionary practices which prioritize populations with decreased access to garden space, should be utilized by the VPB. Interviewees suggested organizational partnerships with stakeholder groups who would support communal growing practices such as schools, multi-family housing units, and equity-serving organizations²⁹. These partnerships could contribute to the garden through additional funding for the garden, administrative support, and support in garden maintenance in addition to learning opportunities, and community development for all those involved in the partnership. According to the 2005 Community Garden Policy Update²², translations would be provided whenever possible. Despite the movement towards increasing equity and accessibility in the VPB, this clause no longer exists. To increase access to information, this clause should be reinstated into new Urban Agriculture Policy, and it should be clear how translations can be accessed through the VPB.

Colonial Barrier #2: Lack of information on how to obtain a non-profit status or team up with a non-profit.

According to the Urban Agriculture Garden Guide²⁵, “The CoV and the VPB require that urban agriculture initiatives be administered by a non-profit society according to a licensing agreement which will specify the terms of use, management responsibilities, and physical considerations, among other provisions.” Based on my exploration of the CoV’s site and the Urban Agriculture Guide, there is no information on how to team up with or create a non-profit group. This is a known organizational challenge for new organizations, small groups, and groups lacking administrative support, many of which would create barriers in low-income and/or BIPOC communities³⁰. For example, in New York City, garden activists admitted the application process for community gardening is so lengthy and complex that applying is beyond their time and administrative capacities. Furthermore, those who viewed their chances of success as slim reported that they could not justify spending the time and effort required to prepare applications. As a result, in New York City better-resourced groups fill this void further exacerbating the disparities between privileged and underprivileged gardening initiatives³⁰.

Recommendation #2: Increase resources, support, and facilitation available for gaining non-profit status.

Since having a non-profit association administer community gardens is critical for insurance reasons, creating a new non-profit or partnering with an existing non-profit should be facilitated by the VPB, especially in the case of equity-deserving groups. Firstly, a guide should be created to provide information on the process of creating a new non-profit group for the purpose of administering a new community garden. Secondly, VPB should seek out existing non-profit associations who are interested in collaborating with new Indigenous-led gardening initiatives so that these groups will not be dissuaded by the non-profit status requirement. This is supported by the LFSAP’s³ call to action 3.2 (Appendix B) which calls for additional staff time dedicated to facilitating the creation of new food and culture gardens.

Colonial Barrier #3: The public consultation process

The limitations of the current public consultation process are a known barrier to starting a new community garden for equity-deserving groups. Currently, the process for public consultation is guided by the VPB Urban Agriculture Policy²⁴. The process is two weeks long and involves one informational sign at the potential garden site, flyers delivered to all residences and businesses within a 2-block radius, and an online forum which is only mentioned on the information sign. The current engagement process only captures a small group of English-speaking residents and park users and does not take into consideration the voices of many community members who may require print materials in diverse languages or in more relational opportunities for sharing feedback. In recent years, this process has also led to harm to Indigenous partners, when local residents have shared anti-Indigenous and racist views as justifications against Indigenous garden projects. The lack of cultural safety in this process could dissuade those interested in starting an Indigenous-led garden from pursuing a new food and culture garden on VPB land.

Recommendation #3: Inclusive community engagement

Most community members have a common commitment to making the community a better place. While this commonality exists, it is important to consider that diverse stakeholders in communities will have different goals and values which will not always be complementary. This is why leading with the truth and values IFS for food and culture gardens is important so that conversations can be had about the different needs of the community. Civic engagement does not occur in a historical vacuum, and it can be counterproductive to ignore history in community conversations. When community members gain awareness of how historical inequities have shaped the opportunities afforded to people today an understanding can be formed. This is easier when those in power, such as those at the VPB, can admit the imperfections of their own organization. This is supported by the values described in the 2018 Reconciliation Mission, Vision & Values² (Figure 1). The value of clarity reminds us that the focus should be on how colonialism functions to exclude Indigenous partners from participating in the creation of Indigenous-led gardens on VPB land. The value of learning encourages those at the VPB to be

transparent about mistakes and how learnings from previous mistakes can be used to teach and move forwards.

A common complaint about community engagement is only the “usual suspects” are attending meetings or having their voices heard. Some deterrents for marginalized community members include meetings, hearings, or other engagements that are unknown or inaccessible to these members. When included it has been reported that many feel their voices muted and the use of jargon and unfamiliar procedures to be discouraging³¹. However, equity-denied members of the community are those who are most affected by community policy decisions. This relates to the value of pragmatism within the 2018 Reconciliation Mission, Vision & Values². This value acknowledges that this colonial system is inherited and there are supports in place to help those at the VPB examine the ways in which colonialism continues to damage people.

This calls for better methods of community engagement at each step of the process. Community engagement should be specific to the community’s population, considering things like languages spoken in the community, population density, and current food assets in the area. Historically, community engagement activities centred on decision-making prioritize making timely decisions rather than deliberate decisions. Framing meetings with values of belonging and deep listening can help members feel their input and time are valued and can provide information for deliberate decisions.

Colonial Barrier #4: Addressing Uneven Power and Privilege

More often policymakers focus on the basic challenges in urban agriculture such as access to soil, compost, land, horticultural advice, and operating funds³⁰. While important, focusing on only these challenges risks ignoring the social, economic, and political systems that can privilege some gardeners over others. First, a lack of privilege means urban agriculture programs in under resourced communities may be poorly connected to sources of financial support compared to those in more privileged communities¹¹. In New York City’s urban agriculture landscape an initiative in the South Bronx, a low-income neighbourhood with a majority of black and Latino inhabitants, struggled to raise \$250 for their garden and members of the community paid out of pocket to help reach their goal of \$500. Meanwhile, in Greenwich Village, a very affluent community in New York City, an initiative to install a rooftop greenhouse raised over 1 million

dollars in government grants and private donations³⁰. It is noted that of the projects in New York City that have received this level of funding, the majority are white led. This demonstrates how having better connections and so easier access to capital results in uneven funding opportunities. Furthermore, identifying opportunities to apply for grants requires some basic knowledge of these systems. These privileges are more often experienced by those with high socioeconomic status, and often those who are white.

Recommendation #4: Increased support and funding for Indigenous-led gardens

More support should be given to equity-deserving groups in terms of securing funding and insurance to start a new food and culture garden. This is supported by the LFSAP's³ call to action 1.6 (Appendix B) which calls for increased resources including land and funding to be dedicated towards the development and maintenance of Indigenous-led gardens. Moreover, the CoV's UNDRIP Strategy's⁸ call to action 4.9 (Appendix A) calls for the development of policies that support affordable access to spaces for cultural and community programming. By increasing support and funding for new Indigenous-led food and culture gardens on VPB land, distributional justice is increased by creating equitable opportunities to access gardening space.

CONCLUSION

Today, Indigenous Peoples in Canada experience rates of food insecurity 3 to 4 times greater than the national rate. This is due to disparities in the social determinants of health, one of which for Indigenous Peoples is access and connection to land. IFS offers a solution to not only food insecurity, but it also provides a basis for increasing connection to land, and to traditional food systems through principles such as participation and self-determination. Supporting Indigenous Peoples in their efforts to reclaim voice and vision in decision-making matters which affect their traditional lands and food systems is called for in the CoV's foundational frameworks and strategic plans. These frameworks and plans have pivoted in recent years to centre

decolonization and equity within the CoV and the VPB. The LFSAP calls for a review and revision of the Urban Agriculture Policy and EOI process. Using these documents to ground recommendations for updates and revisions, it is recommended to co-create a new Urban Agriculture Policy with members of the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh Nations, as well as Urban Indigenous People, currently involved in IFS. To co-create this policy update, a circular design thinking framework which incorporates justice at each step is recommended. Moreover, leading the updated policy and process with Indigenous values is recommended as these values are integral to IFS. The current process creates barriers for equity-deserving groups caused by limited and hard to access information, an exclusionary public consultation process, and a lack of funding for equity-deserving groups. By addressing these barriers with an iterative, participatory approach, the VPB can begin to decolonize local food system policy to support IFS, increase community development and biodiversity within the City of Vancouver.

APPENDIX A: COV UNDRIP STRATEGY CALLS TO ACTION THAT SUPPORT DECOLONIZING LOCAL FOOD SYSTEM POLICY

Theme 1: Cultural Wellbeing

1.10 Within food policy and other areas, support Indigenous food sovereignty in ways that follow Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh people’s stewardship knowledge and practices, and support community-led initiatives to heal the lands and restore access to healthy food systems.

1.11 Identify priority areas for environmental restoration and protection to support restoration and practice of cultural use and cultural values.

1.12 Restore access for Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh people to traditional harvesting sites for ongoing cultivation and stewardship.

Theme 2: Ending Indigenous-Specific Racism and Discrimination

2.13 Co-develop policies, programs, and processes to ensure that Indigenous people in Vancouver feel safe in accessing municipal services (health clinics, recreation, library services, engineering services, etc.) and are treated with respect, receiving the culturally safe and appropriate services that they deserve.

Theme 3: Self-determination and Inherent Right of Self-Government

3.5 Ensure the City funds Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh with capacity funding and personnel support for any process the City wishes the Nations to participate in. Ensure the diverse Indigenous populations living in the city are also funded for engagement.

Theme 4: Rights and Title of Indigenous Peoples

4.9 Develop policies and practices which look at a range of spaces such as community centres, parks, recreation centres, art institutions, etc. and prioritize providing governance, affordable access, and space for Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh and Urban Indigenous spaces for cultural practice and culturally safe community programming.

4.12 Identify ways to support Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh to create cultural learning and healing centres/programs for education, training, and sharing of traditional knowledge, laws, languages, and cultures of these lands.

a. Programs and spaces would provide a means for Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh youth and other community members to relearn their traditional knowledge, languages, and cultural practices.

b. Programs and spaces would be a means to develop educational programming for schools and other places of learning to learn local Indigenous traditions, languages, and histories.

4.13 In consultation with Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh, create processes for the diverse Indigenous populations living in the city to be represented in decisions which impact their lives, including access to services, quality of life, and reflection in the community.

APPENDIX B: LFSAP CALLS TO ACTION THAT SUPPORT DECOLONIZING LOCAL FOOD SYSTEM POLICY

Goal 1 Centre Indigenous Voices in Food System Work to Honour the Teaching that “Food is Medicine.”

1.3 Audit relevant policy, guidelines and by-laws that may prohibit or impact Indigenous food sovereignty and equitable access to food assets and services.

1.6 Increase annual resources (land, funding, staff time, program space, and materials) allocated to cultural learning garden development and maintenance and seek partnerships with Indigenous-led organizations to create these gardens based on park locations identified by x^wməθk^wəyəm, S_kwx' wú7mesh, and _səlilwətał First Nations and Urban Indigenous peoples as key sites.

Goal 2 Improve Equity in Park Board Food Assets, Services, and Programs

2.3 Revise the Urban Agriculture Expression of Interest (EOI) process to prioritize cultural learning gardens, equity-denied groups, priority areas (as per Map 9) and VanPlay targets of 50%+ garden area being collectively grown. Streamline the application and intake process, decision-making criteria, and community engagement process. Prioritized groups and projects can move forward with General Manager approval rather than Board approval. Provide collective gardening educational resources focused on creating space where equity-denied groups feel safe, confident, and supported.

2.4 Review and revise the Park Board Urban Agriculture Policy and the Urban Agriculture Garden Guidelines to align with the 2021 LFSAP and the revised EOI process.

2.8 As garden licence agreements are up for renewal, work with garden groups to transition towards 50% collective food growing area and increase access and benefit to more people, and to integrate updated policies. Provide collective gardening educational resources focused on creating space where equity-denied groups feel safe, confident, and supported. This action would require garden management staff to oversee the transition process and ensure broader participation.

Goal 3 Strengthen Food Partnerships and Collaboration to Support a Sustainable and Just Food Economy

3.2 Dedicate additional staff time to the implementation of the 2021 LFSAP. These roles can include 1FTE position to oversee the implementation of the LFAP, 1FTE position to address food security and accessibility in parks and recreation, and 1FTE position to coordinate food and culture gardens. Staff will require specialized skills in community development (e.g., community capacity-building, intercultural relationship-building, fundraising, improving equitable access, and working within a decolonized approach).

Goal 4 Build Long-Term Food System Resiliency, Sustainability, and Increase Biodiversity

4.11 Ensure the 2021 LFSAP is considered as parks undergo renewal, acquisition, and infrastructure is built or renovated (e.g., fieldhouses or washrooms). Develop internal garden site selection guidelines to inform the implementation of future food and culture gardens (garden requirements and design details to be determined through engagement). Flag fieldhouses as having high potential to support food assets and services.

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