

THE WAY TO A CITY'S HEART IS THROUGH ITS STOMACH

PUTTING FOOD SECURITY ON THE URBAN PLANNING MENU

By Wayne Roberts, PhD



**TORONTO FOOD
POLICY COUNCIL**

Crackerbarrel Philosophy Series

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ABOUT . . .

THE AUTHOR

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THE TORONTO FOOD POLICY COUNCIL

With three staff and 21 citizen members, the Toronto Food Policy Council advises the Board of Health, the Medical Officer of Health and City Council on matters relating to food systems. The TFPC has a mandate to work with community groups to help solve the hunger problem, work with food companies to foster more nutritious products and services, and work with farmers to develop environmentally and socially sustainable growing systems. As an example of the Council's work, TFPC policy consultant Sean Cosgrove contributed two discussion papers, *Food Secure City* and *Feeding the City from the Back 40*, to staff preparing Toronto's draft Official Plan. These papers can be viewed and downloaded at www.city.toronto.on.ca/health/tfpc/index.htm. Cosgrove can be reached at scosgrove@city.toronto.on.ca.

THE CRACKERBARREL SERIES

Harkening back to the days when ordinary folk spouted philosophy while lounging around the wood stove and cracker barrel at the general store, this series promotes free-wheeling discussions. It gives food policy analysts a place to try out their ideas and receive constructive criticism prior to release in peer-reviewed or officially-authorized publications. Publications in this series are not for citation or attribution without explicit permission from the author. Publication in the Crackerbarrel Series implies no agreement on the part of the Toronto Food Policy Council or Toronto Public Health, which sponsor this series solely to nourish innovation and dialogue in a new and exciting field of healthy public policy.

ADOPT A PLANNER

"Who are the actors in the food system?"

asked Andy Fisher, Executive Director, Community Food Security Coalition and workshop co-chair at an Ontario Public Health Association workshop.¹

As people brainstormed, he used a flipchart to record their responses as they came up...

*consumers.....farmers.....processors....
.....packagersretailersgrocers.....
.....wholesalers.....waste managers.....
.....all levels of government
universities.....advertisersmedia...
.....schoolsdoctorsfood banks..
.....input suppliers: fertilizers, etcrestaurants
.....hotelsconvention centres
.....land developerschefs
.....purchasing agentsappliance makers.....
.....public transit authoritiesfarmers markets...
.....community agencies.....social housinglandlords*

"No-one has said planners yet," said Andy Fisher, "but, I think we've done a good job of illustrating how broad the food system is, and how broad the potential for partnerships is."

"I'd like to stress that what you need to do is adopt a planner,"

said Kami Pothukuchi, Wayne State University professor of urban planning and workshop co-chair.

LET'S GET PHYSICAL: Why food is a crucial ingredient in city planning

Air, water, food and shelter are among the essentials of life. Planners have been involved in efforts to improve the quality of air and water through pollution control programs and more comprehensively in shelter planning. But the fourth essential, food, has been virtually ignored by planners.

Kami Pothukuchi and J. Kaufman²

If planners are not conscious [of food issues], then their impact is negative, not just neutral.

Kami Pothukuchi³

LET'S GET PHYSICAL

There's an old saying that everyone says is painfully obvious: we are what we eat. "Virtually nothing else we do in our daily lives," writes anthropologist Amy Shulman, "speaks so loudly of our sense of art, aesthetics, creativity, symbolism, community, social propriety, and celebration as do our food habits and eating behaviour."⁴ Why is it, then, that so few people make the connection to the equally obvious: a city is what it eats?

More than with any other of our biological needs, the choices we make around food affect the shape, style, pulse, smell, look, feel, health, economy, street life and infrastructure of the city. Our food habits determine whether the main drag is a nowheresville fastfood strip, or whether it's lined with spots that ooze local flavour and character; whether shoppers drive to pick up convenience foods from antiseptic box stores, or whether they walk to neighbourhood outdoor markets and make an outing of watching the street entertainers who serenade local farmers hawking their fresh and homemade products; whether there's a Little Italy, Little India or Chinatown anchored by restaurants and groceries that nourish entrepreneurs and cooking traditions of many cultures, or whether Italian means take-out pizza and Chinese means eggroll; whether the poor, elderly and physically disabled can get to nearby grocers that sell fresh produce at decent prices, or whether they're limited to over-priced packaged foods at corner smoke shops; whether backyards are splashed with the colours of vines, squash and corn or whether they sport fence-to-fence lawn; whether people label food scraps garbage, or compost; whether highways are clogged with refrigerated 18-wheelers bringing in food from across the continent, or whether local farmers bring in the day's yield on pick-up trucks; whether the money spent on food stays in and near the city to create more local jobs, or whether it leaves town overnight to create jobs far away; whether people on low incomes have a place at the table of a bountiful land, or whether they're turned into have-nots deprived of life's simplest pleasures and most basic necessities.

There are a thousand tales of food choices like these in every city. One way or another, these choices account for about 20 percent of all retail sales, 20 percent of all service jobs, ten percent of industrial jobs, 20 percent of all car trips and traffic, 20 percent of chronic diseases, 25 percent of fossil fuel energy and air pollution, 40 percent of all garbage, 80 percent of sewage ... the list goes on.

Given the over-arching importance of food in urban life, planners need to put food closer to the top of their planning menu. Since systems of food security are as amenable to design, planning and management as any other systems governing city life, planners also need to engage in a dialogue with food security experts about the best ways to foster healthful food choices – not just healthful in terms of the physical nutrients every body needs, but healthful in terms of the social nutrients every community needs.

To make the case for this dialogue on food issues, we'll assess the consequences of having neglected it. It's easy enough to make the case for including food perspectives by pinpointing inadequacies of a poor urban plan. Instead, we'll make the case by checking out one of the best: the Toronto Plan Directions Report, a draft official plan released for public discussion in 2000. The report is called *Toronto at the Crossroads*.

Toronto at the Crossroads maps out bold and visionary principles, not detailed land-use blueprints, which were until recently the heart and soul of most urban plans. *Crossroads* embraces the city's density and diversity, keystones to its vitality. It's in love with city life. That's a historic shift too, given a mainstream culture filled with prejudices about the crowds, noise, grit, hustle, bustle, raunchy energy, weirdness and degradation of the big city. Best of all, there's no obsession to colour inside every line or make sure no square peg variance ever gets close to a prescribed round hole. This is organic planning, not mechanical controlling. There's not a whiff of Le Corbusier's planning credo, "By order, bring about freedom," or other over-engineered credos which inspired urbanists only a generation ago. Content to let core values and public campaigns take over the driving from detailed specifications, the *Crossroads* planners are at peace with the way order self-organizes out of the apparent chaos of a dynamic and evolving city. For the city planning profession, these changes are a milestone. In person and in spirit, Jane Jacobs, the world-famous critic of the technological bravura of yesteryear's Modernist architects and planners, is alive and well and living in Toronto. If not yet world-class, the city's at least post-modern.

Despite its many merits as a planning document, *Crossroads* likes its food bland and overcooked. Of course, it's easy to overcook such tiny portions: 11 fleeting references occupying 0.25 percent of the space of a 140-page report. The eat-and-run pace of the 11 comments leaves little to relish or savour. More disappointing, many of the comments are off the mark. We'll document these shortcomings in the rest of this chapter, with the hope of showing the need to link the re-envisioning of food issues with other revisions that *Crossroads* has already developed.

It takes two to sprawl

An omen of what's not to come, there's no mention of food in either the executive summary or introduction to *Crossroads*.

The first references to food come on pages 15 and 17, where urban sprawl is blamed for paving over so much of the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). *Crossroads* makes little fuss about the fact that GTA sprawl takes out of commission Canada's most fertile and productive soil. We are not talking about the malling and sprawling of any old once-rural area. We are witnessing the destruction of a rare resource, most of the country's Class 1 land blessed with a long growing season. It's about the only land in Canada with the

right combination of nutrient quality and heat content to support the variety needed for local food security. We live in an era of climactic and social instability, when anything from droughts in California or Florida to truckers' blockades of the Canadian border to local ice storms can keep low-cost food imports from reaching the city. If these possibilities are not planned for, the entire population of Toronto, not just its poorest residents, is put at risk of food insecurity. We are "shooting ourselves in the stomach," is how urban planning expert Richard Gilbert describes this destructive trend.⁵

A first reference to sprawl should therefore identify it as a first-order threat to local food self-reliance and food security. At a time when extreme weather responses to global warming are predicted by senior scientific bodies internationally,⁶ local efforts to protect agricultural land from sprawl should be classified as public safety measures, on par with any other obligatory measures designed to prepare for emergencies. There's no such sense of urgency and no such proposals in the *Crossroads* draft.

Nor is there much discussion in *Crossroads* of the economic crisis faced by local farmers, many of whom hold out until they're at the brink of bankruptcy before they sell their family inheritance to edge-city developers. Even with inherited land that doesn't have to cover costs of a mortgage, farmers can't cover their costs of production. The price offered by monster home developers looks good to farmers partly because the farmgate price dictated by food brokers looks so bad. If city planning tools aren't used to help reverse the economic pressures threatening local farmers with extinction, chances of protecting agricultural land from monster homes will be cut in half. That's because it takes two to sprawl. Sprawl happens because there's both a push and a pull. High housing costs in the city push people out. At the same time, cheap and undervalued land on the outskirts pulls people in. If city planners don't deal with the pocketbook economics behind pull as well as push, chances of success are cut in half. Though the *Crossroads* draft makes good suggestions for more affordable housing in the city, this won't have much impact on sprawl until the agricultural use of farm land is protected by both public policy and economics, which support local farm sustainability.

The second reference to a food-related theme comes on page 40, where a community garden is part of a photo collage suggesting the city's enviable quality of life. There is no reference to urban food production, either in the text of the photo caption or elsewhere in the section.

Food works

The third reference to food comes on page 44, where food and beverage processing are identified as one of ten clusters that drive Toronto's economy. Not much is made of the fact that Toronto is a front runner in North American food and beverage processing, coming second only to Chicago. Food and beverage processing rank seventh on the *Crossroads* industrial hit parade, behind aerospace, textiles, biotechnology, and business

services. The draft plan doesn't acknowledge that food is one of the few clusters on the list that doesn't owe its very existence to government subsidies and tariffs that are unlikely to withstand challenges brought to the World Trade Organization or North American Free Trade Agreement. Nor are the recession-proof qualities unique to the food cluster emphasized. Since food is a daily necessity, there's less of the boom and bust or fashion cycle that makes other clusters less reliable as anchors of a local economy.

At a time when many conventional manufacturers are vacating the big cities of North America and Europe, the role of food processing as the city's number one industrial employer deserves the special attention of planners. About 12 percent of Toronto's industrial employment is in this sector⁷. Toronto food and beverage processors pay some 18,500 workers about \$606 million in wages every year, and export \$5.3 billion worth of goods from the region a year. The processors are anything but hewers of corn and drawers of milk. Value-added during manufacturing is double the average for Canadian industries.

Though food accounts for one in four manufacturing jobs in Ontario, the industry can't get no value-added respect from city planners or new economy forecasters. Maybe it's a bias against the demon rum. To be honest, most of the value-added in the food and beverage sector does not add nutrient value to food or beverages. Booze is where the value-added is concentrated. Beer is Ontario's third biggest export earner: I add value to barley, I AM CANADIAN!⁸ Or maybe it's because food processing is grimy factory work, with none of the immaculate glamour of high-tech. Food processing employs blue collar and manual labourers, not white collar knowledge workers. Food processing has too much blood and guts, too few bells and whistles, to qualify for new economy hype. But when all is said and done, more has been said than done in the alpha-geek cluster that so mesmerizes business journalists and economic and urban planners. Internet retail sales account for 0.2 percent of Canada's yearly Gross Domestic Product,⁹ which doesn't even rate being talked about in the same breath as food processing.

Neither is the social importance of the food processing industry easily matched by other business clusters. The lion's share of foodbank donations, for instance, come from local food processors. Food processors also provide stable jobs that make manual workers at home in the city, a claim that can't be made by many other business sectors. It's crucial to remember this at a time when government social policy is under intense pressure to focus on disaster relief, retrieving the people who have fallen through the social safety net, rather than supporting vulnerable but not yet marginalized workers who are one layoff or one stroke of bad luck away from falling through the safety net themselves. The centrepiece of an economic strategy linked to social well-being has to include a safety net of stable blue collar options to the so-called jobs of the future, not just the default position of welfare.

Not that food processing's social importance is limited to manual or blue collar workers.

Another social function of food processing is its role as incubator for entrepreneurial talents among ethno-cultural minorities, who can develop a food business catering to a community they already know first-hand. Such small business opportunities are not viable in the aerospace or biotechnology clusters, where the New Canadian's lack of start-up capital, social connections, recognized education, Canadian experience and English language skills are formidable barriers to entry. Only food processing allows recent immigrants to profit from, rather than be held back by, their unique cultural heritage. And with every new food business, the city capitalizes on its diversity and inclusiveness. Such are the economic nuts and bolts that help hold a diverse city together, and which merit support from planners.

Glossing over the unique social importance of food processing might well jeopardize *Crossroads'* commitment to a compact city that features social diversity and inclusiveness. "Similar people," as Aristotle warned long ago, "cannot bring a city into existence." Without the bedrock of industrial employment provided by food processing, urban renewal could easily slide into urban removal, as gentrification of both labour force and neighbourhoods pushes all but the well-to-do out of the city. This international trend toward inner-city yuppification, brought to international scholarly attention by David Harvey's *The Condition of Postmodernity* and Saskia Sassen's *The Global City*, drives working people into the arms of both edge-city developers and leaders of backlash politics based on resentment of the inner city.

Staving off such threats to the city requires appreciation of the importance of food processors to the city's well-being, and more active consideration of planning tools, such as industrial zoning, that can protect the processing industry from the same distortions of land value that encourage sprawl outside the city. Like farmers, processors work on squeaky tight margins. Processors can't begin to pay as much for land as real estate developers can. The cash flow in real estate is magnitudes of order quicker – the land is bought, the house is built and then sold, not amortized over the lifespan of a company – and the amount that people will pay for a home in a crowded urban housing market is magnitudes of order higher than people will pay for highly-competitive industrial commodities. Because of these distortions in the valuation of urban and rural land, real estate developers have the city in a squeeze play. They push companies and people out of the city by driving the price of urban land to levels that can be afforded only by the elite, then they push farming out of the countryside by driving the price of land to levels that can be afforded by those just exiled from the city. One reason why we have city governments, and one reason why city governments enact zoning regulations, is to protect business, public and environmental interests from just this kind of market failure.

Finally, the food processing cluster should be flagged for its environmental role. Buying the food your neighbour grows is the key to the sustainable food system on which the planet's healthy future depends. Our food system is speeding in the opposite direction. The average molecule of food any of us eats on any given day has travelled 1500 miles.

That's a lot of fossil fuels and global warming, especially after packaging and refrigeration for long shelf life are factored in. Local processors can help reverse this dangerous trend because they're already close to customers and are within easy reach of suppliers. With a little help from local governments, this closeness could let food companies slash their energy and material use. It's possible, for instance, to design custom packaging for close customers. If the food doesn't need to be protected over the course of a 1500-mile truck ride, the packaging can be made of simpler materials that are easier to re-use or compost.

When an industry has economic, social and environmental importance, it deserves recognition as a strategic industry, with all that implies in terms of public encouragement and planning supports. By simply placing food processing on a list of economic clusters, the *Crossroads* report skips over the uniqueness of this industry and the opportunities that require special attention from planners.

Help yourself

The fourth reference to food comes on page 63, in the course of a discussion about the worrisome increase of poverty in the city: up from 18 percent of the population in 1991 to 28 percent in 1996. Low incomes and high rents force many of the poor to rely on food banks and hot meals from soup kitchens, the draft plan says. We must respond, the draft says, noting that "responsibility is about the ability to respond."

There's little doubt that the double whammy of low incomes and high rents is behind the alarming rise of hunger and food banks, both part of the national landscape since the 1980s. Likewise, it's logical to suppose that a combined effort to raise incomes and lower rents could reduce hunger and dependence on food banks. Unfortunately, the city does not have the necessary funds or authority to do much about either rents or incomes. The city therefore needs to identify local avenues of approach. That angle of approach starts to become visible as soon as we link the rise of hunger to two other factors: not just low incomes and high rents, but also lack of capacity within the local community for self-reliance and mutual support, and lack of capacity within local governments to marshal all the resources available to them. Fortunately, city governments have what it takes, in spades, to change these last two factors.

When city and social planners say that the rise of hunger is due to falling incomes and rising housing costs, they're taking two things for granted. First, they're assuming that food exists only as a commodity that can be bought. Funny how that assumption took hold with food. We don't make that assumption with medical care, or schools, or parks or roads. We don't worry that there'll be a rise of road banks or school banks or park banks or doctor banks in response to lower incomes and higher rents. Roads, schools, parks and doctors are considered basic needs, basic rights, and aren't delivered through market mechanisms, because too much harm could be done if they weren't affordable.

It's probably fair to say that food is more essential to survival than schools, parks, roads and doctors. But, for some reason, we assume food is only available on payment of cash; so when people can't afford it, they have to fall back on the charity of food banks, not universal programs. This assumption is both arbitrary and obsolete. The direct causal link between poverty and hunger, in other words, should not be assumed; the link is strictly a result of public policy, or rather, the lack thereof.

The second assumption linking poverty directly to hunger is equally arbitrary. The logical error in this assumption is known, thanks to the philosopher Alfred North Whitehead, as "the fallacy of misplaced concreteness."¹⁰ Parents sometimes make fun of kids who commit this philosophical error when the kids say that food comes from a store. Not so, the parents laugh, food comes from a farm. Not so, the grandparents may well laugh, food comes from the mix of seeds, sun, soil, water and human labour that are available everywhere. When food is sold in the marketplace, it has to be paid for. But nowhere is it written that food can only come from a farm or a store. Earlier generations of people who paid high rents out of low incomes managed to get by without foodbanks because they did not depend entirely on farmers or on the market for their food. They could grow their own veggies in their own backyards, as was once common in Cabbagetown, and they could even have livestock, as was once common in Hogtown, Toronto's nickname. (Toronto is not unique in this regard; Wall Street in New York is so named because of the walls used to keep out wandering pigs.) During the early 1900s, many working class families settled on the outskirts of the city so they could have cheaper land that gave them space to grow their own food. After World War II, many suburbs were settled by veterans who were granted half-acre lots so they could grow their own food when the inevitable post-war Depression came along. The big post-war Depression didn't come, the vets converted their yards into lawns just like the wealthy people had, and it fell to immigrants, who hadn't yet been programmed to assume that food only comes from stores, to carry on the traditions of home-grown food. By the time the big depressions came in the early 1980s, and again in the early 1990s, the traditions and capacities for self-reliance had almost disappeared. The loss of these traditions has accentuated the relationship between poverty and hunger.

The city has the means to help recover the skills and culture of self-reliance and mutual support that are central to "the informal economy" that can help reduce hunger. Toronto has many parks that can provide plots for community gardens, where people can grow a season's worth of vegetables for the cost of seeds. The official plan could designate community gardens as an essential component of every neighbourhood, and encourage city support for basic training, equipment and support. Once we tune in to the reality that "there's no such thing as vacant land, just vacant minds," the prospects for urban farming look very good. Toronto is said to have ten High Parks worth of idle land that could be put to work. Ontario Hydro, the biggest landowner in the province, has right-of-ways, some unused, over some two thousand acres in the city. That such resources remain untapped when hunger and under-nourishment are commonplace speaks to the fact that governments as well as citizens have lost their bearings and capacities when it

comes to self-reliance and mutual support. The next draft of the official plan could identify ways to put such resources to use.

So they can identify their responsibilities in perspective, it's crucial for urban planners to understand that the increase in chronic hunger among the poor in modern cities is not just about low incomes imposed on marginalized individuals and groups. Hunger comes from a systems problem, not just an individual or group problem. On the most visible level, a level that's been the subject of considerable public debate, hunger is a symptom of a tattered social safety net, the result of cutbacks to government social programs. To the extent that's true – and it is true to a large extent – poverty and hunger are the responsibility of social planners, not urban planners; it's the job of social planners to do something about the low incomes of the poor so they can buy more of the necessities of life.

Hunger is a challenge for urban planning, and not just social planning, because there's a lot more to hunger than cuts to social programs. More profoundly, but less visibly – isn't that always the case – hunger arises from the drastic shrinkage in that non-governmental social safety net known as "the commons". The commons – be it in the form of land, capital, tools, or the culture and know-how that go by the name of common knowledge – preceded and supported the social safety net established by the misnamed "welfare state" during the 1900s, just as the House of Commons preceded formal democracy in Britain and Canada. The seeming success of the government-sponsored social safety net, which received all the credit during the 1960s and 1970s for what was really the achievement of both an informal and formal safety net, led the public to be passive in the face of the shrinking commons. The shrinkage did not become visible – and it is still only visible to a small minority of social critics – until welfare state programs were cut, leaving the shrinkage of the commons exposed. All of a sudden, John Kenneth Galbraith's reference to the "private affluence and public squalor" of *The Affluent Society* of the 1960s took on profound significance.

Inasmuch as poverty and hunger arise from the shrinkage of the commons, these issues become responsibilities of public health and urban planning, both of which feature the commons in their very being. Public health needs to take on the job of re-establishing once-common skills, culture and habits around food production and preparation, common knowledge that was lost when convenience and fast food industries became dominant, especially after the 1970s. Planning needs to take on the job of re-establishing certain forms of public space, the foundation and precondition for the self-help skills that flourish outside a strictly cash economy; inasmuch as this source of empowerment takes place outside the cash economy, it provides opportunities otherwise denied to people on low incomes. The exchange for food, as the renowned development economist Amartya Sen puts it, is with nature, not the market.

Community gardens have become symbols of the rediscovered commons. Like all commons-based anti-poverty programs, they allow people on low incomes to grow top-

quality food at a minimal cost. And, like all commons-based programs, they deliver a host of benefits that improve the quality of life and environment for everyone. They provide exercise as well as food. They grow community as well as food. They beautify public space. They provide an outlet for compost. They help assure public safety by increasing the numbers of people in parks in the early morning and late evening. The list of benefits goes on. Because of these many benefits, advocates for both the poor and community gardens are justifiably loathe to describe community gardens as anti-poverty or anti-hunger programs. But as our awareness of the commons grows, this will become a non-issue. The commons, by its very nature, is highly productive when it comes to multiple benefits; that's what makes it the commons. By definition, community gardens, as one expression of the commons, can't be described as an anti-poverty program any more than they can be described as an anti-crime program. That's one of the differences between the commons-based social safety net and the welfare state-sponsored safety net; the commons sustains the most universal set of social programs yet.

Because the commons will play such a central role in reinventing the social safety net for the 21st century, urban planners, alongside public health workers, will inevitably be called on to design cities with the commoners more in mind.

The fifth reference to food comes on page 67. It's a photograph of a woman gardening on the grounds of Frankland Community School's community garden. The picture is used to illustrate the various roles that schools can play in the community, not the role that school gardens could play in school meal programs.

Keep on truckin'

The sixth reference to food is on page 83. That means food got passed over in the chapter on the environment. It's almost impossible to imagine a rationale for leaving food out of an environmental discussion, though, to be fair to the *Crossroads* authors, this sin of omission is widespread, even among environmentalists. Despite the commonplace mental lapse – probably the result of thinking of food in a compartmentalized way, as a policy issue that's limited to nutrition – it's critical to make the links between the way Toronto eats and the environmental problems that plague us. The linear flow of materials, the opposite of the circular and closed-loop flows required for ecological sustainability, characterizes Toronto's food systems. It starts with imports. When it comes to food, Toronto is one of the most import-dependent cities on the continent, consistently topping the list of North American purchasers of Florida and California produce. Most of the imports are bulky but are carried in refrigerated freight trucks, some of the most polluting vehicles around. At the other end of the linear flow, the city's garbage habits create endless havoc of the Desperately Seeking Landfill variety, despite the fact that over 30 percent of what the city tosses into landfill could be composted; better yet, it could be composted in ways that generate clean, green fuel for

heat or electricity as well as compost that can be used as soil conditioner. A perfect example of pollution being a good resource in a bad place: rotting organics that are buried under mounds of garbage, and thereby denied access to oxygen, are converted to leachate that poisons water tables and methane that escapes into the air. Methane is about twenty times more harmful than carbon dioxide when it comes to global warming impacts. This makes the dumping of food scraps in landfill one of the most environmentally harmful activities in the city.

Food is not only an object with great environmental consequences. It's also a subject with great environmental opportunities, perfectly suited to the campaign style promoted by *Crossroads*. Both individual citizens and municipal institutions can participate in activities which reduce the toll of pollution. Indeed, taking direct corrective action is probably both easier and more profitable with food than with any other environmental issue. It's hard for many individuals to "just do it" when it comes to riding a bike or taking the bus instead of taking the car, or when it comes to upgrading the energy efficiency of a home or workplace. Supporting physical infrastructure (i.e., bike paths) and supportive social structures (i.e., interested landlords) need to be in place before individual wills and efforts become mainstream habits. That's not as true with food. Individuals make personal decisions about food choices many times during the course of a day, and many of these decisions don't have to be mediated by physical infrastructure or social structures. As a result, continuous improvement, rather than either/or, can become the norm. By leaving food out of the discussion on environment, *Crossroads* misses important opportunities for low-cost but highly effective campaigns featuring an active citizenry.

Life is a cabaret

The passage on page 83 supports the theme of "great city, great living," one of five action campaigns proposed in the draft plan. The text depicts a city where people can "eat at a host of restaurants offering cuisine from around the globe, [or] weed their tomato patch in a community garden."

The seventh reference to food, on page 87, is similar. While presenting the "campaign for beautiful places," the text depicts streetscapes where people can "sip a coffee, and watch people go by."

The eighth reference to food, on page 91, is similar again. Toronto boasts beautiful main streets with tasteful restaurants and outdoor cafes, it's said.

There's something missing from these three portrayals of the Toronto food scene, and it's not just donuts. Except for the reference to community gardeners, people are depicted as passive audiences and detached spectators looking on as the world goes by. You can observe a lot just by watching, Yogi Berra says, but food offers something more

engaging than this. You can participate a lot just by joining in at neighbourhood cafes and watering holes where everyone knows your name. They become public spaces and hang-outs where neighbours and friends break bread, laugh at life, and enjoy companionship – itself a word that came into the English language from the Latin for “with” and “bread.” It’s by adding to the social capital and emotional intelligence of a neighbourhood that clubs and restaurants foster the vitality that makes for great living. If restaurants and clubs were just peepholes on the world outside, there would be no public interest in preserving their independent or mom and pop character. Precisely because they are part of the identity and place-ness that encourages citizen ownership of and contribution to a city, they deserve some protection from global chains, which thrive on rapid turnover of customers who drop in for a quick pit stop. Shifting the status of local cafes from observers to producers of local charm thereby requires a city plan to engage in an action campaign that safeguards food outlets as people places.

Shout from rooftops

The ninth reference to food comes on page 130, where green roofs are promoted. Rooftop gardens have many economic and environmental uses, the draft plan notes. They help insulate the building, they capture rainwater and keep it out of the sewers, they beautify any view from the top. Green roofs can also be made into “bountiful food gardens for the occupants,” the draft plan says.

Picky, picky, maybe, but green roof experts like to distinguish between green roofs and rooftop gardens. Green roofs are meant to be attractive and to perform basic environmental functions, such as storing carbon and water or pumping out cool moisture and oxygen. Rooftop gardens are designed differently from green roofs, and have different environmental benefits. Food production requires walking and storage spaces that leave part of the roof bare. All-season greenhouses on rooftops make for serious food production but compromise some of the environmental benefits of an open green roof. However, this is more than made up for by drastic reductions in the distance food has to travel: instead of California to Toronto, it’s rooftop to main floor. Both kinds of rooftops are worth shouting from, but their functions shouldn’t be equated. Both should be allowed for, with minimal regulatory interference, on all flat roofs in the city.

Build it and they will eat

The tenth reference to food is on page 134, where the campaign for a dynamic downtown is presented. Downtown Toronto has big league sports and bigtime galleries, concert halls and museums. “Collectively they attract the people who keep our restaurants, bars and other retail stores pulsing,” it’s said. This statement, which implies that entertainment attractions draw the crowds to the restaurants, has a complex cause-effect relationship wrong. Build It and They Will Eat doesn’t work as a formula to predict

any automatic relationship between entertainment mega-projects and the restaurant trade, or any other spin-offs for that matter, as sadder and wiser planners from cities that have lost their shirts on mega-projects can testify. Few food reviewers ever raved about the fine dining enjoyed by the crowds that packed the old Maple Leaf Gardens or Woodbine Racetrack. Few baseball fans give thumbs up to the great food at or near the Dome. The popular summer playground at Ontario Place creates no walk-by trade for diners. Few restaurants for theatre-goers survive in the area around the Hummingbird Centre and St. Lawrence Centre For the Arts, or around the Winter Garden and Elgin theatres. Several blocks away, closer to the Royal Alex and its blockbuster shows, the restaurants are hopping. At best, the cause-effect relationship between entertainment centres and eateries is temperamental.

When restaurants and attractions share billing as the Main Event, however, as is the case with the Royal Ontario Museum and the Art Gallery of Ontario, both benefit. Synergies, not cause and effect, define the dynamic. Meanwhile, back on the main streets, restaurants do quite well on their own merits, thank you, without any need to ride the coattails of the entertainment industry. Clubs, bars and restaurants serve as draws to the downtown in their own right, often taking centre stage in lively restaurant districts where food is the Main Event.

Clarifying the complex relationship between Main Events and restaurant scenes isn't about quibbling over arcane distinctions in town planning theory. Getting this right affects the way the city invests its time and money. It's standard practice for city governments to devote subsidies to Main Events that are not expected to pay their own way. The theory, or rather wishful thinking, is that Upstream Spending will open the taps to Downstream Benefits, when visitors to the Main Event spend money in local businesses such as restaurants, which pay more taxes and pay down the city's initial investment. This theory is very popular among professional tourism and event promoters, who make sure they get paid at the Upstream Spending end, leaving the local businesses and taxpayers to wait for their Downstream Benefits ship to come in.

There are many things wrong with this Main Event theory. First, like all trickle-down theories of economics, it subsidizes the entertainment of relatively well-heeled groups. Opera goes or holders of season's tickets for sporting events get subsidized to watch events from a front-row seat, while the less affluent pay taxes to watch the events on TV. Second, the theory leads to sloppy thinking that overestimates the automatically positive impact of the Upstream Spending and underestimates the planning and support needed by the companies that are supposed to capture the Downstream Benefits. The fact is that tourists cost the city money if they come to see a subsidized game or show, then go back home without staying at a hotel or eating at a restaurant. The city only makes money when tourists stay at a hotel or eat at a restaurant, thereby helping to create jobs and pay the taxes that brought them their entertainment. Since the public benefit of the original investment is only captured when people spend money in local restaurants, shops or hotels, isn't that where the attention of planners, trainers and

community developers should be focussed? And shouldn't they be thinking about how the restaurants, shops and hotels can increase their local purchases so the economic impact of Main Event spenders is multiplied and optimised? If we think that the Downstream Benefits just trickle down inevitably from the Upstream Spending, we don't bother with the very details that make the public investment pay off. Restaurants and shops will only get the care and handling they need when they're seen in the same league as the Main Events, and appreciated as the folks who make the money that makes the Main Events go round.

Support your local grocer

The eleventh reference to food is on page 139. A dynamic downtown must have something for everyone, including bar-hoppers, it's said. Assuming that bar-hoppers eat some munchies, this could qualify as a reference to food.

A little further down the page, there's a list of the four highlights of a dynamic downtown: lively streets and public spaces, pleasant neighbourhoods, architectural excellence, and a warm, welcoming feel. No references to public spaces for food markets, such as St. Lawrence Market and Nathan Phillips Square, popular with tourists and residents alike. No comment on Le Marche, an innovative food court in BCE Place, an architecturally-stunning skyscraper. No mention of Chinatown, Little India, College and St. Clair's Italian restaurants and speciality food shops, or the Greek restaurants, bakeries and grocers on The Danforth, all of which are a draw for outsiders while contributing to lively neighbourhoods in the surrounding area. Is this just a case of Yogi Berra's truism on hot eating spots: no-one goes there anymore because it's too crowded?

Given that the downtown will soon be a prime residential area, with round-the-clock residents who need to eat and sleep as well as work and play in the city core, the role of restaurants and food markets in a dynamic city centre becomes even more important. If food were recognized either as a fifth highlight of a dynamic downtown, or as a common denominator of the four main highlights, then it would need to be planned for in the same way we plan for lively streets, pleasant neighbourhoods, outstanding architecture and welcoming feel. Once food gained that recognition, planners would take steps to designate affordable food retail outlets an essential neighbourhood service.

To add it all up, the eleven references to food issues in *Crossroads* take up about ten of the plan's 5000 lines, a compact 0.25 percent of available space. What's lacking in quantity is not always made up for in quality.

Food and the post-modern plan

It may be that the neglect of food issues in *Crossroads* reveals the legacy of a deeply-embedded Western view of progress and civilization, which exerts sub-conscious influence on the way planners see city forms and functions. In the conventional Western view, cities are signs of the ability of civilization to rise above the nasty and brutish animal drives associated with the weak human flesh. This distrust of lowly animal needs has had as much impact on city planning and social policy as on religion. Social psychologist Richard Sennett turned to the study of urban history "out of bafflement with a contemporary problem: the sensory deprivation which seems to curse most modern building; the dullness, the monotony, and the tactile sterility which afflicts the urban environment." He came to the conclusion that Western culture had "persistent trouble honoring the dignity of the body," and wrote *Flesh and Stone: the Body and the City in Western Civilization* to "understand how these body troubles have been expressed in architecture, in urban design and in planning practice."¹¹

Certainly, prejudice against serious consideration of humble and lowly details accounted for much of the initial hostility to Jane Jacobs' brilliant *Death and Life of Great American Cities* when it was published in the early 1960s. Many reviewers howled at the very idea that physical layouts of streets and houses could determine the social character of neighbourhoods, not to mention the economic and cultural wellbeing of entire cities. Today's planners have taken Jacobs' wisdom to heart, but a vestigial resistance to honouring the merely physical may account for continuing indifference to the impacts of food systems.

For a totally different explanation of the downplaying of food issues in social and urban planning policy, enter the world of Post-Modernist liturgy. Geographer David Harvey has analyzed the Post-Modern trend in architecture and urban planning in his book, *The Condition of PostModernity*. The *Crossroads* report reads like a checklist of Harvey's defining features of Post-Modernism: hostility to zoning, support for diversity, comfort with a city of collages, appreciation for life as a spectacle, and so on. Harvey doesn't believe the Post-Modern style of thinking about cities just dropped from a skyscraper. He argues that the shift to Post-Modern planning approaches fit with the economic shift in First World cities from mass production factories to post-industrial workplaces featuring computerized and flexible production. Mass production, the inspiration for the triumphalist ugliness of Modernist structures, moved to Third World countries after the 1970s, taking the high wages and job security for mass production workers with it. In place of mass production came small batch and flexible production: a software company at the top, a hamburger take-out at the bottom, no secure industrial jobs in the middle. The shift in social balance within cities inspired Post-Modernism, Harvey argues, much to the detriment of factory workers and the poor. While the sensibility and language of Post-Modernism appeal to many people of good will and conscience, Harvey warns that the Post-Modern Syndrome avoids the nitty-gritty issues that enable everyday people to make it through the night. "The rhetoric of post-modernism is dangerous," he writes,

"for it avoids confronting the realities of political economy and the circumstances of global power."¹²

Or, for another totally different explanation, it may be that deeply-held and rarely-examined assumptions about food account for the neglect of food issues by planners. Though people commonly eat with others, food is commonly seen as a strictly private matter. In fact, the taboo against talking to other people about their food habits is stronger than the taboo against talking with other people about ostensibly more private matters such as sex or religion. Though food is a biological pre-condition of life, the economy around food is also a largely private matter. There is less public sector direct involvement in, or regulation over, the food industry than is the case with any other major industry. One small example that makes the point: agricultural pesticides are the only chemicals not required to carry identification of their constituent parts, or the potential toxicity of these parts, under federal laws for Workplace Hazardous Materials Information Systems; and agricultural pesticides are the only class of pollutants exempted from reporting for the federal government's annual inventory of toxic releases. Likewise, nutrition is seen as fundamentally a lifestyle choice; none of the restrictions or sin taxes placed on tobacco or alcohol are placed on junk foods, and junk food advertisers are allowed unlimited access to children through targeted television programs and even school-sponsored programs. Statistics Canada collects no information on the extent of hunger, and feeding the hungry is seen as a matter for private philanthropy. There are no labels on food indicating what pesticides, hormones or antibiotics the foods were grown with, what seed stocks they were grown from (genetically-engineered or not, for instance), or what treatments (such as irradiation) they were subjected to. It took many generations before Canadians were won to the view that the state had no place in the bedrooms of the nation. But it's always been axiomatic that the state has no place in the kitchens of the nation. From this perspective, the neglect of food issues by planners is of a piece with the neglect of food issues by all branches of government.

Of course, it may well be that all the above efforts to explain the short shrift given to food issues in *Crossroads* are reaching too far. Sometimes, as Freud might say, a cigar is just a cigar, and a plan is just a plan. Food might have been overlooked in the *Crossroads* report simply by pressure of tight time deadlines and scarce space.

Fortunately, the thinking behind *Toronto at the Crossroads* is robust enough to include food issues with a few minor changes. A deeper appreciation of food issues, far from revealing incorrigible weaknesses in the *Crossroads* approach, amplifies its basic planning principles and resonates with its call for a series of citizen-based campaigns to highlight the benefits of urban living. The upcoming sections of this report will present some of the ways food policy can intersect at Toronto's *Crossroads*.

IT'S A SMALL WORLD AFTER ALL: Why urban agriculture can help stop sprawl

My friends are turning grey without recourse.
They've stopped talking of civilization and the slums.
This is what it's come to.

Together we drive cars we never intended, & live
In houses, essay to be ordinary.
Our children surround us like flags.
We teach them what our fathers knew, thinking it honest.
Together we converse & the old revolts are
Shaken into rows, laughable, curious, depleted as
Mod clothes.
Our lives diminished, real we say.

.....

A life of friendship every six months renewed.
The old touch made strange, our talk
More & more polite. The generation we were, wanting to challenge all this,
Wanting to end:
Now it is our own backs
Turning from the young with their rough music,
The harshness of *Nuke the Suburbs*.

We are the parade of ourselves, maudlin & alive like ticks
In houses.
Our well-spent paycheques clutter us.
Like my father forty years past, we are sensible and articulate.
The planet is orderly.
Our lives, circle the building in which we are champion;
They labour to find an entrance without stairs.

Erin Moure, *Proceedings of the Wars*¹³

IT'S A SMALL WORLD AFTER ALL

A defining feature of the *Crossroads* report is its promotion of a "dense" and "compact" city, the antithesis of the sprawl that's led some commentators to describe the Greater Toronto Area as "Vienna surrounded by Phoenix." The *Crossroads* report champions the compact city as both an alternative and an antidote to what is commonly referred to as sprawl. Such compactness is probably our last best hope for land use patterns that harmonize with our environmental, economic and social needs. Developing a food system that fits with this compactness is central to the success of this venture.

The importance of getting the fundamentals right on the dynamics behind sprawl, and the most favourable ways of containing it, are hard to exaggerate. Pulitzer prize-winning architectural critic Allan Temko has called sprawled-over areas around cities the "slurbs." They are "neither suburbs nor cities but a continuous nonurban slime oozing over farms and orchards," he writes. And they trigger "a chain reaction of devastation."¹⁴ If we fail in our efforts to design for compact, affordable and pleasant cities, the spread of sprawl threatens to become the equivalent of a cancer that spreads uncontrollably, even as the host body wastes away.

Planners' efforts to contain sprawl need to move to the fore of any agenda to heal the environment. Sprawl may well be the most polluting industry in North America. Pollution is inevitable given the amount of fossil fuel energy that's consumed and degraded by the drive for *lebensraum* on agricultural countryside.

Even in the best of circumstances, concentrated energy, the kind most useful to humans, tends toward disorganization, or entropy, over time: hot baths get cold, in other words, not the other way around. When it comes to food systems, sprawl puts entropy on speed. Because of sprawl, fields of edible plants, which stored the sun's energy and fed the city from its own backyard as recently as the 1960s, have been replaced by homes, cars and pavement, which require additional energy from fossil fuels. The paving over of nearby food lands means that food must now be imported from afar, thereby extending the true reach, hinterland or "footprint" of sprawl by thousands of miles. As mentioned earlier, typical food products now eaten in a city like Toronto have commuted an average of 1500 miles. From that distance, the food needs extra jolts of highgrade fossil fuel energy before it's packaged, refrigerated and trucked to the consumer. More calories of energy go into packing, storing and carting the food than is in the food itself, and most of those extra calories go up in smoke: the foul exhaust fumes from processors' smokestacks and freight trucks' exhaust pipes. This is where the second law of thermodynamics meets the first law of thermodynamics to create pollution: while the intensity of energy decays over time, its quantity, as the first law holds, always remains constant. The energy itself is never lost, just its usefulness or benefit to humans, other species, or ecosystems. We now know from the evidence on global warming that the sky is indeed the limit. Because the planet, unlike the city,

remains a closed and limited system, there's no landfill in the Great Beyond where all this useless and degraded energy can be stored. The names we give to this energy which humans rendered useless and degraded are pollution and global warming.

The decay of economic energy under conditions of sprawl is just as destructive as the decay of physical energy. Most of the newcomers to what was recently heaven's half-acre of countryside want the same level of services they got used to in the city. They want flush toilets and sewers. They want phones, TV, electricity and utility poles. They want garbage pick-up and snow removal. They want nearby schools and hospitals. They want good roads and fast highways. It costs more to deliver such services to people strung out over sprawl's half-acre. In the Greater Toronto Area, the subsidy to cover this extra expenditure comes to about one billion dollars a year, according to Pamela Blais' careful calculations.¹⁵ This is the economic equivalent of a wasting disease. The long-term savings from containing sprawl are suggested by figures from the state of New Jersey, which expects to avoid \$9.3 billion in capital expenditures by preserving 70,000 hectares of productive farmland.¹⁶ It is costing us all a lot of money to finance the damage that sprawl does.

Degrading of social cohesion in sprawled-over areas comes next. Many of the people who migrated to the slurbs were lured by low housing prices as well as by a fantasy of a home in what was once countryside. The low prices are based on sleight of hand. The land developer – a curious title we give to those who take farmland out of commission – paid the capital cost of the land, but did not pay for all the operating costs that linger forever on tax and utility bills. Nor did the homebuyer. Taxpayers and utility ratepayers, mostly city taxpayers and ratepayers, picked up the tab for ongoing operating costs of servicing slurbanites in the style to which they've become accustomed, thanks to a labyrinth of cross-subsidies to sprawl from every level of government and public utility. In effect, sprawl is a publicly-subsidized programme supporting affordable housing for people who make their home outside the city. No forms to fill out, no permission needed, no means test, no waiting list, no line-ups, no stigma, no workfare, no drug tests, no literacy tests, no visits from welfare caseworkers; no other group receiving social assistance gets this treatment.

Subsidies to sprawl, and the false economic signals they send out to the marketplace, impose a double burden on the city. First, exurban subsidies bleed the city of provincial tax contributions that could otherwise be spent inside the city. Second, the slurbs drain workplace earnings out of the city economy. By day, most exurban residents use city roads to get to city jobs sustained by the city's infrastructure. Come nightfall, they drive home and spend their pay on goods and services and local taxes that employ exurban workers. They thereby deny the city the job-rich multiplier effect it used to capture when a local worker bought a local home, creating work for a local builder, spent money at a local restaurant employing a local worker, paid taxes that paid for a local teacher ... and on and on the virtuous circle used to go. With exurbanites, all that job-creating multiplier effect leaves town at sundown.

Because of this double whammy, the exurban exodus of people and jobs brought hard times to the city in double time. Robert Fung's report on renewing Toronto's waterfront, written in 2000, referred to Toronto as "a city in decline." Contrary to prejudices held across the country, Toronto is no city of fat cats. As a report from the Economic Development Office has shown, average incomes in Toronto fell by 12.5 percent in the five-year span from 1991 to 1996, compared to a 7.9 percent decline in the sprawled Greater Toronto Area. Differences in poverty rates are even more marked; 37 percent of Toronto households subsist on less than \$30,000 a year, compared to 20 percent in the rest of the GTA. In all, 70 percent of the GTA's poor families live in Toronto. An exodus of middle and high income earners is also well underway; only a third of Toronto households enjoy combined incomes over \$60,000 a year, compared to half the households in the GTA.¹⁷

Just when the needs of city residents on low incomes were highest, those most able to pay higher taxes took their money and drove. The subsidy cupboard was bare for affordable housing in the cities, having all been spent on affordable housing in the exurbs. Toronto home prices and rents shot up, and so did homelessness and hunger. The number of children relying on emergency food almost doubled, to 60,000, during the 1990s. Flophouses, soup kitchens and foodbanks in the city are the flip side of monster homes in the country.

That's not the way exurbanites see it, to be sure; on the contrary, they blame their high income taxes on people who mollicoddle the urban poor. Instead of the interdependence, diversity and tolerance that flourish in a healthy city, the politics of tribal resentment and division are getting a hearing, have even been classified as common sense. This nastiness is the social equivalent of pollution, the decay of positive public energy into negative.

Though it's commonplace to lay the blame for pollution and social polarization on globalization and free trade, it's just as plausible to look for the root of the problem a little closer to home: the government incentive and subsidy programme for sprawl. Sprawl affects food systems in at least two ways: by increasing the fossil fuel energy, and consequently pollution, needed to feed the city, and by increasing the pressures toward inequality and hunger within the city.

Once is not enough

Having said all these bad things about sprawl, we need a reality check. Those who favour land use which supports economic, social and environmental sustainability will butt their heads against the rock-solid wall of the North American Dream if they depict a compact and dense city as the alternative to sprawl. Most people who came to North America came to get away from compact and dense cities that gave them no chance to

own their home with a little backyard and open space. For them, dense and compact translate as cramped and crowded. So we need to pick our words and concepts carefully, and to avoid Alfred North Whitehead's "fallacy of misplaced concreteness." The object, after all, is not compact and dense; these are merely specific planning tools that promote values such as diversity and environmental sustainability.

Finding ways to "reconcile the forces of concentration and dispersal," to make the best of the inner city's tight and diverse forms while conceding "the power of the North American dream of dispersal and openness" has defined the brilliant career of Moshe Safdie, Canada's most famous architect. Safdie came to realize "the paradox of contemporary urbanism: the dream of a home and garden that are distant from the ills of the city *alongside* a desire for the vitality of downtown," as he reflected on Habitat, his youthful masterpiece integrating garden balconies with highrise apartments, which he unveiled to the world during Canada's Expo in 1967. He wanted to translate "this paradox into an architectural challenge: to invent a building type that provided the lifestyle of a house with a garden, but that was compact enough to be constructed in the central city." That way, he thought, "you could have your cake and eat it too." If we build on Safdie's insights and inventiveness, we will come to see that urban agriculture and urban compactness are not irreconcilable opposites but mutually reinforcing.

The keystone concept leading us in this direction is elegant, not dense, intensive or compact. Elegance is the knack of designing many uses and benefits into one space or activity. Because it raises productivity levels to the point where both city housing and urban spaciousness become affordable, it's a concept that has a chance at winning the battle of hearts and minds against sprawl.

People have long practiced elegance, because getting one thing to serve many purposes has always been the easiest way to get more from less. That's why campers carry trip scarves, which can be tied around the neck to protect them from sunburn, dipped in water to cool off their faces, used as a pot holder when taking hot pans from the fire, then tied around the head to keep insects out of their hair at night. It's why grandma and gramps had a kitchen woodstove that heated the home, cooked the meals, boiled the dishwater, kept the teapot on a perpetual boil to offset the dry indoor air in winter, provided ash for the garden, and gave off a special warmth that turned the kitchen into a social centre, all the while leaving the unheated basement for cold storage of veggies. By contrast, the "modern" basement furnace only performs one function, heating; to get all the functions of the old-fashioned woodstove, it's necessary to buy a series of one-use or dedicated products.

When elegance teams up with unused capacity, things really start to happen. Unused capacity is something that's already there and that's already been paid for, but that comes nowhere close to meeting its full potential of uses. A very small expenditure can turn this potential-in-waiting into doubled productivity. Unused capacity is the greatest untapped resource a city has for doing more with less. Unused capacity is an empty

room that can be turned into a home office which makes two uses of the same home, and eliminates the need to rent a separate office, the cost of which would make it impossible to start a small home business. Unused capacity is the small cubby-hole that's perfect for a child's room, as soon as there's a child's bunk bed that has a desk and chest of drawers built under it, in otherwise-unused space. Unused capacity is a school gym or auditorium that can be opened to the community at nights or on holidays when they're not being used. Unused capacity is a church with space no-one uses for six days a week that can be rented out as a childcare centre during the week. Adding elegance and stirring with unused capacity ain't exactly rocket science. In fact, we lost the knack for designing with elegance and unused capacity around the time when rocket science promised us a world without a need for limits or careful design.

As weird as it sounds, urban agriculture is the Swiss army knife of compact planning tools because it takes full advantage of both elegance and unused capacity. Growing food in the bustling city instead of the open countryside is counter-intuitive, to be sure. The idea that city farms would help create, rather than take up, free space is the opposite of what's called common sense. That's why it's worth a second look. Over the past several years, common sense has been exposed as an excuse for sanctioning knee-jerk prejudices at the expense of thoughtful and open-minded investigation.

The common sense view that farming takes up too much scarce space to ever be practical in the city is just wrong. Many crops can be grown intensively and economically on small plots that can be found anywhere in the city. With the possible exception of land, the city is as close as can be to most of the inputs that farmers need. What's more, the inputs are available for free in the city, unlike the inputs rural farmers have to pay for. Indeed, its capacity to make use of free inputs from waste and excess that the city only disposes of at great costs is part of what makes urban agriculture economically beneficial. Compost needed for soil conditioning relieves the city of the cost of getting rid of over 30 percent of its solid waste, at rates of about \$60 a tonne. Water for irrigation can come from rain barrels, making use of a resource that's otherwise wasted as "storm water," which creates flashfloods in city sewage facilities that are very expensive to upgrade. The city is also awash in waste heat for greenhouses and humanure for fertilizer. So most of the inputs for growing food are there for the asking. But most important of all, the city farmer is close to customers. Turning the city's very compactness into a major economic asset and competitive advantage is second nature in urban agriculture, one reason why it's so suited to reinforcing the *Crossroads* vision of a compact and diverse city.

The asphalt jungle

We need to keep our eye on the prize when developing plans for urban agriculture in a compact city. The prize is not a city that is dense and compact, though some may prefer their city that way. The public interest prize is a city where people step more lightly on

the earth, where heavy bootprints on natural systems are kept to a bare minimum. Right now, the city of Toronto stomps on an area so large that, according to research compiled for the City's Environmental Task Force, the world's population would need to sprawl over four planets if everyone lived the way Torontonians do. Either we invest heavily in space exploration to other planets, or we invest in space discovery right under our own noses, finding areas we can use more productively to meet more of our needs, including food-related needs.

Taking the roundabout way toward city farming would be the easiest, most pleasant and economical way to grow a compact city. A viable strategy to promote urban agriculture in a compact city cannot follow a straight line. A straight-line approach would mean something like zoning tracts of land for food production instead of housing. Though this might be the shortest distance between two bureaucratic points, it's a non-starter. Indeed, the view that urban agriculture competes against housing for sizeable chunks of scarce and expensive land is one of the great misconceptions about urban agriculture. The view assumes that food production requires vast tracts of land is wrong; it functions just fine in nooks and crannies. The view that food production requires scarce and expensive land is also wrong, as is the view that food production dominates or monopolizes the use of land; in fact, urban food production does just fine sharing space with other uses, making full use of something that's being under-used or has no other use. Urban food production and housing, in short, are not in the same markets, do not have the same impacts on land use, and exist in a relationship of synergy, not competition.

City farming is a case study in compact growth. The intensive urban gardener's equivalent of the high-rise is zucchini or grapevines trained to grow up a pole. The intensive urban gardener's version of a duplex is beans trained to grow up stalks of corn, the way Native peoples did before the Europeans came, because corn is a heavy feeder on nitrogen and beans draw down nitrogen from the air. The intensive urban gardener's imitation of the basement apartment is fast-germinating lettuce under-seeded by late-blooming cabbage, which pokes its head up just as the lettuce is ready for picking. The intensive urban gardener's equivalent of Neighbourhood Watch is onions grown beside tomatoes so that each protects the other from the other's predators.

So, where to look for food growing opportunities in the city?

Suburbia, where homes and services are most spread out, is where opportunities for food production lie like low-hanging fruit. Many post-1950s suburbs are well along in their transition from single-purpose bedroom communities to multi-purpose shopping, working and residential communities. Many are also well along in their transition from homogeneous white, middle income communities to multicultural communities that are home to people of all backgrounds and income levels. And many suffer from "downtown problems without downtown services," too spread out to offer easy access to public

transit, recreation, social services and shopping for people on low incomes. Elegant land use that makes space for food production is one way to keep problem-solving in synch for all these challenges.

Backyards are an obvious place to start. Lawns are pretty common in the suburbs. Converting a patch of grass into a vegetable garden, planting a fruit tree in the middle of the lawn, growing raspberry bushes alongside the fence: they're all steps toward intensification of land use. A yard that was once used for occasional recreation now has a second use, food production. Backyard food production is a study in compactness in its own right. Space is at a premium, so home gardening experts have worked up intensive methods that can produce 200 pounds of food from a patch the size of a small dinner table, 20 square feet. A few hours work a week can provide a season's worth of fresh veggies for a family of four.

There's no excuse for leaving highrise tenants out of this picture. Many highrise apartments are surrounded by patches of grass that add little to the attractiveness or community feel of the building. Indeed, according to University of Toronto Innis College student researchers, some innovative landlords have discovered that it costs less to offer unused greenspace to tenant gardeners than it does to pay professional landscapers to tend a space no-one considers their own. The opportunity to garden also stimulates community within otherwise-anonymous apartment towers, and thereby reduces tenant turnover, it's been found.

Highrises built without garden space are a monument to the one-use-only mass production paradigm of cheap shelter, and "the popular developers' axiom that the simpler the massing and the more cube-like the envelope, the greater the economy," writes Moshe Safdie. His vision of "for everyone a garden, for everyone a penthouse, for everyone a view" is technically do-able in highrise construction, he says, though expensive at the outset. The higher costs for initial construction don't deserve to trump other considerations, he insists, because "what has been considered economically sound in the past thirty years may prove, in the long term, to be more sociologically, politically, and even financially costly than we ever imagined," because of the loss of green space, personal space and community space. Given the *Crossroads* forecast of a million new people in the city over the next 20 years, and given that highrises are a standard way to fit that many people into a relatively confined area, doesn't it make sense for a city plan to suggest incentives that can override the short-term building costs that stand in the way of Safdie's vision?

For those who don't have access to yards or spacious balconies, most cities, including Toronto, have utility corridors with thousands of acres of abandoned land. The only function of the ground under the utility corridor is to provide empty air space to string wires over. Urban agriculture, alongside bicycle freeways, could put such lands to good use without restricting access to the air, where the wires are hanging. To get one measure of the potential value of this now-idle land, consider that urban growers

experienced in continuous cropping and other space-intensive methods can get as much as \$100,000 of high-value and speciality crops (all legal) off one acre in a good season. In a city like Toronto, that means the utilities are using a \$200 million a year asset to grow weeds.

The options for squeezing in agricultural land uses don't end with vacant spaces that are inefficiently used, be they in backyards, apartment grounds or utility corridors. When looking for vacant land, we can also think about freeing land by displacing pavement. Pavement use, not land use, governed the construction of suburbia. The car is a jealous god, and as a result, pavement covers about one-third of suburbia. "There are seemingly endless tundra's of parking lots," says California architecture critic Allan Temko, "even though they can also be seen as land reserves on which housing and other buildings may be built, and the cars hidden beneath them."¹⁸ Parking lots, highways and driveways, rarely used for more than half the day, have got suburbia in a Catch 22: people need cars to get around because there are too many spaces between places; but there's no room for more people or places because the best spaces are all paved.

There are elegant ways to turn these kinds of vicious circles into virtuous circles. Convert underused and low-value sections of strip plaza parking spaces into lots for townhouses, and let the new residents turn the strip plaza into main street businesses that have way more income potential than the no-name donut shops and variety stores sitting there now. Then use the flat roofs over one-story shops in the strip plaza for rooftop gardens that beautify the view from the street and draw in customers who plan to linger a while. When a restaurant sprouts up to use the fresh produce from the rooftop and serve the people who are hanging out, there's less need to hop in the car to the fat food drive-in. And more locals can afford to go to the restaurant because they're making money as professional gardeners on the utility corridor. Once elegance gets going, the momentum builds, and before long the synergy powers itself. There are more people, more houses, more jobs, more activities, and more green space, thanks to the ways urban agriculture helps crowd out pavement in a compact city.

The loving touch of planners from the imaginative architectural firm of GGLO has worked just this transformation at the University Village mall in suburban Seattle. Once described as a series of drab and stark retail islands in a sea of parking lots, the 33-acre site has been converted into a village-like main street with courtyards, gardens, water sculpture, landscaped footpaths, treed parking areas and rooftop gardens and greenhouses. The new Village sets the standard for what retail experts call, after Ray Oldenburg's *The Great Good Place*, a "third place," an authentic, familiar and multi-purpose hangout that completes the triad of work-home-neighbourhood. In the process, the made-over mall has attracted stellar tenants, including Starbucks, Eddie Bauer, Barnes and Noble, Robert Redford's Sundance Store, and a galaxy of high-end eateries, garden shops and nurseries.¹⁹

There's no reason for housing and food production to compete for the same land because food can be grown in nooks and crannies or makeshift arrangements that would never do for housing. Wherever there is a City-owned parking lot, for instance, pavement can be replaced by gardens. The garden will pay the City back in at least three ways. It will put the park back in parking lot, and enchant walkers with its beauty. It will produce food or flowers for sale. It will labour 24 hours a day as working landscape, storing carbon that otherwise storms off as global warming gases, breathing out fresh oxygen in places where the air is otherwise stuffy, soaking up stormwater that otherwise creates flash floods in sewers that then have to be widened, pumping out that rain water in summer as evaporation which cools the nearby area, taking in compost that would otherwise have to be hauled across town. Green space, in other words, doesn't just sit there; it's working, as in the term "working landscape". If the city had to buy machines to do all this work, it would cost more than the revenues lost from converting many one-use parking lots into multi-use gardens.

In a pinch, parking lot gardens can be planted on roofs where roofs. That's already the case with some underground parking lots. The rink, plaza and gardens in Toronto's Nathan Phillips Square are examples of what can be done with rooftops over parking garages, in this case an underground parking garage below City Hall. Why not do the equivalent with all the City's on- and above-ground parking lots, and install roofs that permit the parking area to be used for a second function, job-creating food production, as well as a third function, working landscape? The additional values available from the formerly one-use space can offset construction costs for the open-air roof.

What needs to be crowded out in the compact city, in other words, is one-use asphalt, not multi-use green space. Gardening space is competing for room against one-use pavement, not against housing. The fact is that cars monopolize much more space than houses. Each additional car requires almost a fifth of an acre for roads and parking; every five additional cars take an area the size of a football field out of commission. In the United States, Lester Brown of the Worldwatch Institute points out, the area devoted to pavement (16 million hectares) rivals the area dedicated to growing wheat (21 million hectares). "In a land-hungry world, the time has come to reassess the future of the automobile," Brown writes, and to build transportation systems which move people "without threatening food security."²⁰

There are many ways to use food production to double and triple the productivity and benefits of urban land without infringing on other uses of land that also contribute to compact and diverse development. The challenge for planners is to find ways all the strategies for stepping lightly on the earth can play to each other's strengths.

THIS BUD'S FOR YOU: Why food takes cities down the garden path to beauty

A thing of beauty is a joy for ever:
Its loveliness increases; it will never
Pass into nothingness; but still will keep
A bower quiet for us, and a sleep
Full of sweet dreams, and health, and quiet breathing.
Therefore, on every morrow we are wreathing
A flowery band to bind us to the earth,
Spite of despondence, of the inhuman dearth,
Of noble natures, of the gloomy days,
Of all the unhealthy and o'er-darkened ways
Made for our searching: yes, in spite of all,
Some shape of beauty moves away from the pall
From our dark spirits. Such the sun, the moon,
Trees old and young, sprouting a shady boon
For simple sheep; and such are daffodils
With the green world they live in; and clear rills
That for themselves a cooling covert make
'Gainst the hot season; the mid-forest brake,
Rich with a sparkling of fair musk-rose blooms: . . .
Nor do we merely feel these essences
For one short hour; no, even as the trees
That whisper round a temple become soon
Dear as the temple's self, so does the moon,
The passion poesy, glories infinite,
Haunt us till they become a cheering light
Unto our souls, and bound to us so fast,
That, whether there be shine, or gloom o'ercast,
They always must be with us, or we die.

John Keats, *A Thing of Beauty*²¹

THIS BUD'S FOR YOU

Food production can be a feast for sore eyes, and a major tool for addressing the *Crossroads* report's campaign to beautify the city. The old prejudice holding that "beautiful is beautiful and useful is useful, and never the twain shall meet" keeps us from seeing the possibilities of edible landscaping. Herbs such as lavender, lady's smock, mustard, clove pink, basil, borage, camomile, thyme, coriander and dill add variety to any yard, field or park, and add spice to many stews, soups and salads. Flowers such as marigolds, day lilies, nasturtiums, pansies, violets, tulips and roses strut their presentation skills in the kitchen after they've had their day in the garden. Their petals can all be used in butters, pancake batters, honey, jellies, ice cubes, salads, soups, stews, vegetable oils and vinegars.²² Fruit trees have beautiful blossoms before they bear fruit. Maple and birch trees produce syrup. Several species of stately trees produce nuts that can be put to a score of food uses. To celebrate our maturing beyond both romantic art's passion for the enchantingly useless and architectural modernism's glorification of utilitarian ugliness, beautification campaigns could include a budget for edible landscaping.

Urban food production can also be a tool of campaigns for environmental restoration. Many cities are experimenting with plans to clean up their "brownfield sites," vast tracts of inner city land left degraded and uninhabitable by earlier generations of polluters. Greenhouses built over cement floors are one way to make optimal use of urban brownfields while allowing the land to heal. Because the hydroponics medium used to grow food in typical commercial greenhouses does not come in contact with local soil, there's no danger of toxic contamination from the soil below. Some cities – Buffalo and Chicago come to mind – encourage agricultural renewal of their brownfields by providing incentives to greenhouse growers. Brownfield is beautiful, the saying goes.

Where healing and restoration of brownfield lands require more aggressive treatment, some cities are exploring the relatively new branch of plant science known as phyto-remediation. Many plants function as virtual vacuum cleaners, sucking up heavy metal contaminants, such as lead, from the soil. They work, they're cost-effective, and they're pretty. Sometimes, as in Minneapolis' Revival Field experiment, the concentration of heavy metals in plants is so high that the plants can actually be harvested and "mined" for their ores, the green equivalent of turning lead into gold. At other times, green inventors such as John and Nancy Todd have been called in to apply their principles of "biological design" and "living machines" to soil and water restoration. They commonly orchestrate the moving of toxic sludge through a symphony of plants and bacteria handpicked from around the world and contained in a greenhouse. This method has achieved miraculous results in some of the most polluted areas of the United States. One organism's poison is another organism's meat, it seems. All waste, and some toxins, are on some food chain; plants, bacteria and creatures can be matched with toxins in such a way that the toxins are either neutralized or stored safely.²³

In parts of the city where people live, food production can hasten environmental restoration by supplying “free ecosystem services.” In our gizmo-dominated age, we think of solar technologies as chips that collect the sun’s energy and use it to power motors. Once we start to imagine options outside the gizmo paradigm, hundreds of cheaper ways to use free energy from the sun and Nature come to mind. Most of these ways involve *displacing* machines, not powering them. Urban agriculture is one such set of solar technologies. It functions as a “working landscape” or “living machine” that does all sorts of jobs both beautifully and free, and beats paying for less pleasant-looking energy-intensive machines and infrastructure.

Community gardens in neighbourhood parks or garden plots on rooftop gardens are examples of environmentally restorative technologies. True, they’re usually thought of as pleasant places to grow low-cost food. But that’s actually their least important economic function. Each plot might only grow 400 dollars worth of food, for instance. But if the garden area serves as a neighbourhood drop-off for ten tonnes of compost, that function saves the city about \$500 in waste collection and hauling. When gardens soak up rain water that otherwise becomes storm water carrying untreated sewage into the lake – gardens generally absorb about 15 percent more rainwater than lawns, and compost-rich gardens absorb even more – they save the city money again. Ditto when they take in carbon dioxide, store the carbon in their roots and pump out fresh oxygen, or when they cool the local area with their evaporation.

Fruit, nut and syrup-producing trees and bushes in back yards can even help eliminate eyesores and health hazards such as coal-fired power plants. Using placement methods perfected by energy-efficient landscapers, the trees and bushes can keep the house cool in summer, and protect the house from cruel north winds in winter, thereby cutting back yearly energy bills by as much as 30 percent.²⁴ That beautifully reduces the need for power plants fired by fossil fuels in the city.

In such a scenario, the actual food produced by trees and gardens is only one benefit, not the sole reason, for growing food. Environmental protection is another benefit. So is environmental restoration. Beautification is yet another. Only food-based infrastructure yields all those benefits. That’s why food production lends itself so well to overcoming the problems of spending restraint, which too often relegate beautification and environmental enhancement to the categories of frill or afterthought: nice to have in our plan, but too expensive to implement this year. Food plants help lift beautification out of the frill category. Because of these multiple benefits, food production is a logical way to sustain programs of city beautification.

QUALITY RISES TO THE TOP: Why food makes for liveable communities

Politics, in turn, is also inseparable in Aristotle's mind from its ethical context. Men are "animals," a fact that greets us early on in the *Politics*, but they are animals of a very special kind. It is man's destiny or *telos*, if he is to fulfil his "true nature," to live in a *polis*. A *polis*, however, is more than a community or *koinonia*. It is a *koinonia* that has reached the ideal form of a shared commonality of purpose among men whose self-realization is the "good life."

. . . we are talking about one of the most elemental forms of human consociation – the city – where people advance beyond the kinship bond to share, create, and develop the means of life, culturally as well as economically, as human beings. Here, *humanitas* as distinguished from the "folk" comes into its own.

Murray Bookchin²⁵

QUALITY RISES TO THE TOP

Modern city planners, including those responsible for *Toronto At The Crossroads*, are renewing their commitment to "quality of life" for two sets of reasons. One set is economic. The other is environmental, spiritual and social.

Quality of life has emerged as a major locational factor for New Economy businesses. Knowledge-based companies don't have to locate where the coal, nickel, lumber or oil are. They go where the "inner resources," the human resources, the best and the brightest, are or want to be. More often than not, that means a city that features a high quality of life.

"Why did Bill Gates locate Microsoft in Redmond, Washington?" Nuala Beck asks in *Excelebrate! Growing in the New Economy*. Few people had even heard of Redmond before Gates moved his job-creating machine. Planners and economic developers in other cities wondered what Redmond had that they didn't have. "I'll tell you," Beck says: "it has a high-knowledge base, a beautiful natural setting, low taxes, peace and quiet, a low crime rate, nice neighbours and civilized living in an environment where every day can be a 'casual Friday' if you so choose."²⁶ Suddenly, quality of life has become a priority that has to be planned for. It's no longer good enough for city planners to turn themselves inside-out for economic development, then cross their fingers that this will still be a nice place to live. Once quality of life functions as an economic magnet, beautification, public health and sound social policy become make-or-break investments that cities can cash in on. Quality becomes Job One.

There are still other compelling reasons to make quality of life issues front-end planning priorities. Our increasing knowledge about the carrying capacity of Spaceship Earth makes it clear that there's only so much quantity of life the planet can take before we exhaust finite resources and choke in our own pollution. "Only when the last tree has died and the last river has been poisoned and the last fish has been caught," an old Cree saying had it, "will we realize that we cannot eat money." City plans that make space for the intangibles of the good life make good environmental, as well as economic sense. Friendliness, neighbourliness, safety, comfort, celebration: the best things in life are not only free, they don't use up finite resources or pollute.

This environmental vision of the city's future coincides with spiritual yearnings felt by many people keen to discover the secrets of taking more joy from the Good than goods. We now live in a have-do-be dream world: when I *have* a million dollars, I will *do* some fun things, and then I will *be* happy. The wisdom of the centuries tells us the opposite: when I am what I want to *be*, I will *do* and *have* things that sustain that quality of being.

Planning for quality of life is also a cornerstone of sound social policy. The more we plan

our lives around the fact that the good things in life come from simple abundance and simple pleasures, the more the good things of life are accessible to people of all income levels. This is critical in light of social and political trends likely to hold sway for some years to come. Internationally, senior levels of government, the ones that control most tax revenues, are downloading the costs of social programmes to cities, the level of government least able to finance them. As a result, city planners have to be on the lookout for high-quality, low-cost strategies that boost social equity and inclusiveness.

Fortunately, city planners can put their hands on some levers that will lift social standards at a very low cost. Indeed, it might be argued that we used to have too much money for our own good, and spent money to give the notion of motion while avoiding difficult and courageous policy decisions. Due to the fear of confronting the prejudices of rate payer groups, for instance, we used to pay top dollar for affordable and tax-subsidized housing units, when we could have freed up many low-cost living places simply by removing restrictions on rentals of in-home rooms or apartments, a policy only finalized in Toronto in the year 2000. Courage, it turns out, is in shorter supply than money.

Certainly, there are plenty of "low-hanging fruit" that can be picked for little money or effort and still make significant contributions to quality of life. Basically, it just takes a commitment to the strategic principle of public health known as environmental support: make it easier to do the right thing by placing fruit or juice, rather than pop or coffee, in the most convenient spots, for example; make it less convenient to do the wrong thing, by restricting cigarette machines in public buildings or banning alcohol sales at gas stations, for instance. "*Placing and the making of places* are essential to social development, social control, and empowerment in any social order," David Harvey writes in *Justice, Nature and The Geography of Difference*.

Applying the principle of environmental support can stimulate high quality of life at low cost. Take the field of public transportation. We presently force 75 streetcar riders to stay put while one car-driver waits for a yellow light to make a left turn. Environmental support suggests bylaws banning left turns on streetcar routes and other measures to ensure that people who do the right thing, take public transit, get first go. Take the field misnamed waste management. We presently pick up organic waste for free and charge people for composters, instead of charging people to pick up organic waste and installing free composters. We force people who buy reusable bottles to pay a deposit, while those who buy a package going into the landfill pay no penalty and have no hassle with returns.

Healthful food has most to gain from rolling out environmental support as a planning principle. So-called convenience foods are only convenient because all the public subsidies go to them, not to people who cook from scratch. The garbage from convenience foods is picked up for free. The electricity that keeps them frozen is subsidized by public utilities and low taxes on utility bills. Packaged foods are available

any time, anywhere, while reasonably-priced fresh fruit and vegetables are harder to get. By contrast, aside from specialized programmes sponsored by Public Health, the city offers no general courses on cooking from scratch in schools or Parks and Rec offerings. There are few public places where people can grow their own food, and no accessible or public spaces where they can be preserved. Far from making healthy food more affordable, these costly packaging subsidies support a food system in which packagers get more of the food dollar than farmers.

Revitalizing what was once common knowledge about cooking, much like creating common space for food-growing, requires a shift in thinking on the part of public policy makers. Conventional planning and regulation centred on overcoming what's been called "the tragedy of the commons." Because air and water were free resources that belonged to no-one, it was free to pollute them, so governments were supposed to step in to protect the commons. We now need to take up a new set of challenges that flow from "the tragedy of the market." The market has no way to calculate or promote the value of anything that's free. The market can supply bottled water, for instance, but it can't protect water so it doesn't have to be bottled. Governments have little experience promoting free goods either. Whether it's breastfeeding, walking, composting or gardening, the public promotional programs are few and far between. Quality of life commitments challenge planners to qualitatively change the way they approach their work. Food provides a nice place to start working with this new paradigm.

Retail access

One low-cost but essential fixture of a liveable community is barrier-free access to outlets where nutritious food can be bought at reasonable prices. Surprisingly, this issue receives no attention in *Crossroads*.

To date, most Canadian cities have escaped retail access problems that are commonplace throughout the United States, where downtown cores have been hollowed out by the out-migration of middle income families that supermarkets cater to. Instead of supermarkets, the poor living in U.S. inner cities get corner stores with over-priced packaged foods, proving once again that it's expensive to be poor. By contrast, many low-income areas in a city like Toronto are still well-served by food retailers. That's probably because people in Toronto's different income and ethno-cultural groups often live within walking distance of each other in neighbourhoods that fit together like a jigsaw puzzle. A large neighbourhood of Italian working class homeowners, for instance, usually attracts good grocery stores that can also serve a nearby neighbourhood with low-income tenants. It's important to note that social settlement patterns, not institutions and not planning requirements, deserve the credit for this good fortune. Toronto lacks the consumer co-ops that flourish in Calgary and many other cities, where co-op members have a say on the location of retail outlets. And food access has yet to be defined as an essential service by city planners.

The absence of institutional and planning support makes the city vulnerable to new trends in food retail. The superstore is quickly replacing the supermarket. To meet the expenses of running such superstores, smaller chains are merging with larger ones, pressing the level of corporate concentration in the grocery industry, already the highest in the world, even higher. The merged superstore both draws on and requires more customers than yesterday's smaller and more decentralized supermarkets. Inevitably, the increased customer base needed by superstores means customers will be drawn, and probably have to drive, from farther afield. Some of the new superstore customers will actually be cannibalized from the parent company's old supermarket customers once the old supermarket has been closed. "There is some roadkill with all of this," A&P president Brian Piwek admitted to a conference of grocers.²⁷ If the pattern in other cities holds, superstore owners will shut down their own supermarkets, then put covenants on their old properties to stop them from being sold to competing food retailers. The free market doesn't always favour competition, a market failure that planners need to compensate for. If closures of local supermarkets become commonplace at about the same time as banks start closing down branches no longer needed in the era of electronic banking, we face the prospect of main streets that will look like ghost towns.

Planners and the general public need to be aware of the traumatic impact that superstores might have on main streets. Traditional chains, whether they were selling food, books, hardware, office supplies or whatever, actually created a market niche for independents. Because the chains closed early in the evening and on Sundays, the mom and pops had a leg up in certain time periods. And because the chains didn't go in for anything unusual that didn't appeal to the lowest common denominator, the independents survived by offering a variety of specialized products and services. Health food and organic stores, for instance, did well precisely because old-style supermarkets couldn't be bothered with the minority of customers they served. Widespread and diverse retail access, to that extent, was due to benign neglect. Superstores, by contrast, are in direct competition with the main street moms and pops and speciality stores. Superstores have the floor space to expand their customer base by appealing to all the niche markets, and they have the buying power and price points to blow away the old neighbourhood and niche operators. The superstore offerings will be priced at points the moms and pops can't meet.

This shift in the business strategy of dominant food retailers, and the inevitable results in terms of a more centralized and car-dependent retail system, will have profound consequences for food accessibility. We have already seen what superstores have done to independent bookstores and main street hardware stores. If the official plan does not guarantee food access on a neighbourhood basis, the dominant retailers won't either. Mind-boggling consumer choice at superstores will become standard for car-owners with high incomes. But the poor, the disabled and the elderly, the very people with high needs for healthy food, will have no real options outside convenience stores. Vulnerable citizens are not treated this way in a liveable city.

Growing Community

Encouraging community gardens in local parks is another way to cultivate liveable communities. Gardens themselves aren't anything new for city parks. But it is new to grow something edible, not just decorative, and to leave the growing to citizens, not supervised staff. In progressive cities, community gardens are valued because they make parks inviting to people seeking what's called "passive recreation". This group has been overlooked since the early 1900s, when parks were designed primarily to keep young and lusty boys off the street, playing themselves out in good, clean and organized competitive sports, followed by a brisk cold shower. By today's standards, however, gardening is considered part of an active lifestyle. By modernizing the definition of active recreation and extending the range of groups welcomed to parks, community gardens put the parks back in Parks 'n Rec. By extending the user groups, the community gardens also extend the hours that the park is busy and safe. The early gardener gets the worms, so they often turn up as the sun rises, just in time to keep early-morning joggers company. Others avoid the summer heat by working at dusk, just when the last strollers are heading home. The more uses there are to a park, the more the park is a people place. The more neighbourhood eyes there are to protect everyone when it's dark out, the safer the park is for all users. In gardens as in parks, security and stability come from diversity, not monoculture.

We now have evidence to show that baking bread in parks is a good introduction to breaking bread in parks. The baking oven at Dufferin Grove Park, a neighbourhood park in Toronto's multicultural west-end, is fast becoming a legend. A park where public safety and good relations among different communities were once at risk is now thriving as various ethno-cultural groups bake their unique breads in a common oven. It takes a lot of time for bread to rise, time that can be used to raise community feeling. An official plan alive to the opportunities food creates for liveable communities would consider designating community gardens and bake ovens mandatory in all parks where space is available.

Crossroads notes that schools can become the hubs of liveable neighbourhoods. Since the parents on any given street have jobs and friends all over the city, the relationships that are unique to a residential neighbourhood have become more and more kid-centred. It takes a child to raise a village, we might say. Neighbourhood is where kids go to the playground, library, school, rink and swimming pool. The school has more staying power than the playground or rink, so it's a natural catalyst for a fuller, family-involved sense of neighbourhood. Food programmes enhance the capacity of schools to evolve in this direction. Programmes can feature ethno-cultural meals prepared by neighbours near the school, and invite the neighbours to talk with the students in their social studies classes about their culture and food heritage. The meal programme can source some of its food from a schoolyard community garden, perhaps built on a rooftop. Parents can get to know their own children's friends by volunteering once in a while. And school meal programme leaders get to know local business and community

leaders as they do the rounds canvassing people with something to donate to the school.

People come together around food, and food brings people together, in school years as in all stages of life. For this reason, cities looking for ways to bring people together to improve quality of life should consider ways to integrate food into their programs.

GETTING DOWN TO BUSINESS:

How food sets the course for the new economy

Cities must not only attract resources, they must hold them and grow them. What keeps brainpower, labor or investors in an area is quality of life and quality of community – the ways that businesses gain strength from association with others in the area, that talented people gain well-being from staying there.

Therefore communities must offer more than their connective physical infrastructure of roads, bridges, buses, subways, airports, seaports, electric power lines, and telecommunications networks. They must also have a social infrastructure that helps forge linkages relevant to global success: networks among small and large companies in related industries, between suppliers and customers, between ethnic groups and neighbourhoods, or among institutions in a community that contribute to quality of life. I call this infrastructure of collaboration.

The infrastructure for collaboration consists of the pathways by which people and organizations come together to exchange ideas, solve problems, or form partnerships. It helps people move across the barriers of localism, parochialism or provincialism that divide them. It is the means by which people and organizations come together across sectors to recognize, value and leverage their area's assets for mutual gain.

Rosabeth Moss Kanter²⁸

GETTING DOWN TO BUSINESS

The new economy and the new public health live on the edge of the new city. Edge is a term used by ecologists to describe the dynamic places where forest meets meadow, land meets marsh, salt water meets fresh water. Where forest meets meadow is where brambles can get sunlight they can't get in the deep forest, and where rabbits and mice can hide from predators. Where land meets marsh is where beavers can find building materials, where bulrushes can feed on nutrients washed down from hills, where animals come for water, where insects come for the animals, where birds and frogs come for the insects, and so the chorus grows. Edge is where the sum is greater than the parts, and where diversity itself becomes an engine of growth.

It's the same for human systems, the most edgy of which is the cosmopolitan city. The more edge there is in a city, the more bohemian, student and counter-culture quarters bump up against immigrant and traditional working class neighbourhoods, the more residential neighbourhoods melt into main streets, the better. That's where the niches are, the incubators, the diversity, productivity and innovation. It's where the new economy and new public health will co-evolve in a ricochet romance.

Harvard's famous business analyst, Rosabeth Moss Kanter, captures this dynamic in a book title that links tomorrow's *World Class* economy to *Thriving Locally in a Global Economy*. Successful cities offer the right amount of glue, what webmasters call a sticky site, for cohesion and stability, and the right amount of magnet, she argues. Far from being miles apart, the glue that allows a city to generate collaborative and win-win partnerships among its many diverse elements is precisely the magnet that draws in new companies like moths to a light. The money and effort spent on nurturing a collaborative city, in light of this argument, is every bit as important an investment as the money spent on roads and utilities.

Kanter's analysis is certainly consistent with the new economy success stories of the 1600s, when capitalist industrialism emerged in European cities. A "rich patchwork" of intimate, human-scaled relations in early modern cities "fostered cooperation rather than competition," Murray Bookchin writes in *The Rise of Urbanism and the Decline of Cities*. The cultures and institutions of these innovative cities were "more participative than adversarial, more moral than predatory," and "provided the individual producer with a stronger material base for the exercise of citizenship," Bookchin writes. Such cities "tended to dissolve barriers between local communities and adjacent regions, opening the doors to new ideas, cultures, values, and the interchange of skills and technics."²⁹

Food is full to busting with opportunities to nurture the collaborative, win-win relationships and institutions essential to economic success today. All city residents win when the city becomes more self-reliant in its food sourcing and reduces imports

because the additional local purchases increase the multiplier effect, whereby A buys from B buys from C buys from D and the same dollar goes further simply because it didn't go farther away. Likewise, no-one in the city wins when some go hungry; the problem of under-nourishment just crops up in higher medical bills that everyone pays for. Finding community resources to solve the problem of hunger, Toronto's Food and Hunger Action Committee maintains, presents an opportunity to polish up the city's collaborative skills. Unanimous support for the Phase I and II reports of this committee by city councillors of all political stripes indicates the potential for centering this civic emotional intelligence around food.

Food also has the spice to knock community economic development up a notch. Community economic development, or CED, rests on four pillars of business success. The first three are location, location and location. The fourth is schlep, as in: it's not what you know, it's who you know. Companies that rely on a CED strategy are usually based in local services where neighbourliness, just-in-time delivery, trust and open lines of communication are more at a premium than size and power. To that extent, CED's reliance on social capital and knowledge rather than raw resources and brute strength makes it part of the new economy. CED was adopted as a strategic direction for the City in the report of the Environmental Task Force, accepted unanimously by City Council in the spring of 2000.

Food is particularly well-suited to CED. What economists call "the barriers to entry" are relatively low in the food industry. A new restaurant or food processing company doesn't cost as much to open as a new steel mill, for instance. And many food products don't need a full-fledged marketing machine; good local networks and word of mouth advertising are often enough. A good number of CED entrepreneurs service minority groups overlooked by mainstream companies, so competition is low and access fairly direct, personal and low-cost. These low barriers to entry explain why the food industry has so often served as a springboard for immigrant entrepreneurs.

The same is true for social entrepreneurs, usually based in Non-Governmental Organizations, or NGOs, serving disadvantaged groups. The NGOs initiate and broker partnerships among governments, community groups, angel investors, foundations and charities. In today's economy, such partnerships often account for as much as one-third of urban employment, particularly among younger professionals and para-professionals. That's probably why Peter Drucker, the guru of management and knowledge economy studies in North America, calls NGOs essential to a knowledge economy. Food is adaptable to this contingent of the new economy because it lends itself to partnerships and community service. There are several success stories of NGO-inspired restaurants staffed by psychiatric survivors and street-involved youth, for instance. Scadding Court Community Centre is a hive of food entrepreneurship, with community gardens, a greenhouse, worm composting, and an internet cafe already in operation, and an apple orchard and trout pond in the works. The community centre helps area residents get on their feet socially while stimulating business development along nearby main streets.

It's also likely that local farmers on the outskirts of the city will become major suppliers of industrial materials and energy in the new economy, up-ending all the old economy rules about basing local businesses on closeness to natural resources. Hemp, which can be used in some 30,000 industrial products, is the lead candidate among industrial and energy crops, though flax, straw, jerusalem artichokes and switchgrass will also be players. Canada has a unique opportunity to lead with industrial development of hemp because hemp is legal in Canada and still misidentified as a drug south of the border. Toronto could well become a centre of innovation with such fiber and textile crops because of its dynamic design and fashion industry, its imaginative advertising and marketing specialists, and its plentiful supply of mechanical engineers who can invent new-generation machines to process fiber and textile crops. Hemp grows well in soil and climate regimes such as the Greater Toronto Area's, and farmers in that area need a high-value crop such as hemp to sustain their operations on high-value land. But these industries won't reach take-off without the same kinds of government support that every other emerging industry gets. Developing the policy tools to spur such industries should certainly be within the mandate of an official plan dealing with a city *At the Crossroads*.

Food production needs to be appreciated as a keystone of the new economy that taps into the world wide web of nature. All the factors of production and distribution depend on knowledge. Good local land comes by grace of nature, but the soil can only be sustained by growers who know how to sustain and enrich it. Seeds are a product of human as well as natural selection, and require the gentle touch of people with a long view of place, productivity and diversity. The value-added in processing is about preserving the value of the original food, an exacting process for those who refuse chemical additives and preservatives that compromise the food's wholesome goodness. The selection, preparation, presentation, serving and eating of food also require knowledge and artistry, especially if they are to nourish social skills and personal health.

An economy that does not deal with food in new ways cannot claim to be a new economy. Convergence is one of the hallmarks of the new economy, usually understood in terms of the convergence of new media and communication technologies that have knocked down the walls that once separated companies and industries. Food was about convergence long before there were fibre optics, satellites and digital technologies. In bits and bites, it has always been found at the crossroads of biology, economics, culture, health and spirituality. A city that is *At the Crossroads* will know how to work with it.

GIVE PEAS A CHANCE:

How to make a city plan that sticks to the ribs

1. **Insist on rights of humanity and nature to co-exist** in a healthy, supportive, diverse and sustainable condition.
2. **Recognize interdependence.** The elements of human design interact with and depend upon the natural world, with broad and diverse implications at every scale. . . .
3. **Respect relationships between spirit and matter.** Consider all aspects of human settlement including community, dwelling, industry and trade in terms of existing and evolving connections between spiritual and material consciousness.
4. **Accept responsibility for the consequences of design** decisions upon human well-being, the viability of natural systems and their right to coexist.
5. **Create safe objects of long-term value.** . . .
6. **Eliminate the concept of waste.** Evaluate and optimize the full life-cycle of products and processes to approach the state of natural systems, in which there is no waste.
7. **Rely on natural energy flows.** Human designs should, like the living world, derive their creative forces from perpetual solar income...
8. **Understand the limitations of design.** . . . Those who create and plan should practice humility in the face of nature. Treat nature as a model and mentor, not as an inconvenience to be evaded or controlled.
9. **Seek constant improvement by the sharing of knowledge.** Encourage direct and open communication between colleagues, patrons, manufacturers and users to link long-term sustainable considerations with ethical responsibility, and re-establish the integral relationship between natural processes and human activity.

William McDonough³⁰

GIVE PEAS A CHANCE

On September 6, 2000, the Toronto Food Policy Council voted to ask the City Planning Division to convene a workshop where experts in the area of food and hunger could dialogue with City planners about the possibilities of raising the profile of food security issues in the Official Plan.

We need to talk. Dialogue is necessary because both planning and food security experts have yet to develop concepts, language and tools that can help them overcome their two solitudes. Planners face difficulties finding means to stimulate beauty, justice, well-being or happiness – deals that don't translate easily into instrumental-rational planning lingo. Food, which hinges on beauty, justice, well-being and happiness, seems just as difficult to grab hold of. This is a problem that has to be "worked through," as Cornell University planner John Forester puts it, by "deliberative practitioners."³¹

In preparation for that dialogue, the Toronto Food Policy Council asks that consideration be given to the following proposals:

1. Designate food processing as a strategic industry.

Food processing is a hinge that swings a doorway wide open to a variety of economic, social and environmental opportunities.

Most heavy industries avoid big cities like the plague. Cities have too little space, too much traffic, too many regulations, too high taxes, too high wages, too many citizens complaining about noise and odours, and too many companies competing for the best workers. Food processing is one of the few exceptions to this big city avoidance pattern. That's because cities offer food processors some compelling locational advantages, such as immediate access to consumers, product designers, financiers, brokers, advertisers, journalists, trend analysts and trend setters. For this reason, industrial-scale food processing has been an exception to the trend of the last 20 years, which has witnessed an exodus of manufacturing jobs from major cities in the First World.

Toronto gains some strategic advantages from having food processing centred here. As the City's premier industrial employer, food processing employs many thousands of manual workers, often at decent rates of pay. The industry is a dependable contributor to the City's tax base. Since no-one has yet invented a way to make virtual food, food processing is likely to remain a bricks and mortar operation for some time; that means it will be paying its fair share of taxes, which can't always be said for companies domiciled in cyberspace. The closeness of Toronto processors to the most fertile land in Canada opens up the possibility of sourcing raw materials close to the home base, thereby sustaining local farms that help preserve Toronto's greenbelt. Based as it is in Toronto, this industry can proactively help the City reduce its packaging waste. Being next door

to the largest population of consumers in Canada makes it possible for Toronto-based processors to adopt customized packaging for the Toronto market, environmentally-responsible packaging that doesn't have to withstand the wear and tear of long truck rides and shelf life. Though the food processing industry has its share of pollution problems, it's not an industry where chemical toxins are valued or tolerated; to that extent, it's a relatively clean industry. Finally, because production overruns and minor cosmetic imperfections are virtually inevitable in the food industry, processors have become mainstays of food banks -- which, like it or not, have become part of Toronto's social safety net. In short, a surprisingly large number of projects can thrive or die, depending on whether the processing industry does well or poorly.

One way of planning for and optimising the benefits of the two-way relationship between the City and its industrial-scale food processors is to designate the industry as strategic. A strategic industry doesn't get special privileges, favoured treatment, or separate rules, any more than a Most Valuable Player in sports gets exempted from standard sporting rules. But there are even-handed and non-discriminatory ways for the City to give the industry the attention it requires and deserves. Among other activities, the City could:

- highlight the importance of the industry to Torontonians, and draw attention to purchasing choices that help maintain hometown jobs.
- develop focussed programmes through the Better Buildings Partnership to help food processors become more energy-efficient, just as the City has already done with high-rise office towers. It's a win-win proposition: the industry saves money on fuel bills, new jobs get created for energy conservation contractors, and the City gets cleaner air.
- promote partnerships, perhaps with the Design Exchange, to help processors develop customized low-impact packaging for the Toronto market. By taking advantage of the short trip to local customers and by being proactive about the City's waste disposal problem, the industry and its partners can explore reusable and biodegradable containers that are both cost-efficient and environmentally-friendly.
- work with the industry to help it find economical ways, perhaps inspired by the principles of industrial ecology, of reducing waste that ends up in sewers, landfill or the air. Most of the "pollution" coming from food processors is simply a resource in the wrong place, and the trick is to find ways of retrieving the resource, thereby turning pollution-reduction into a profit centre; industrial ecology is a design system for placing companies with a waste problem in relationship to companies that can turn that problem into an asset. The more the City helps companies meet high standards of environmental cleanliness, the faster public health and environmental standards can be raised higher -- another win-win relationship.
- develop zoning regulations that meet food processors' needs for affordable land prices and insulation from residential neighbourhoods that try to limit the 24-

hour-a-day noise, traffic, hustle and bustle that are increasingly part of the logistics systems of all warehouses and factories. Without zoning or its equivalent, no industrial-scale processing will survive in Toronto.

- designate emerging food micro-processors as a key sector advancing Community Economic Development.
- include the food processing, preparation and service industries as primary clients in City efforts to plan for and train an adequate labour force over the next 20 years.

2. Designate food micro-processing as a critical sector for advancing Community Economic Development.

In the spring of 2000, Toronto City Council unanimously adopted the Environmental Task Force report, which, among other things, promoted Community Economic Development (CED) as a centrepiece of the City's economic development strategy.

Few sectors are better-suited to CED than micro-processing. The common inspiration for CED is local job creation through import substitution, creating neighbourhood jobs by providing products or services that used to be imported from afar. For this reason, CED is rarely about competition with already-existing local companies; there's no win-lose relationship between micro-processing and industrial-scale processing. Food processing had its start as a cottage industry – hence cottage cheese – where the idea was to use a lot of labour and a little technology to preserve foods so they could be sold to neighbours for a little spare cash. Processing continues to invite bootstrap entrepreneurs because start-up costs are relatively low; it takes a lot less money from the Bank Of Dad to start selling homemade jam to neighbours and friends than it does to start up an auto company, for instance. Small-time operators don't need a Harvard degree in marketing or a Madison Avenue firm to handle advertising; if they're street savvy and close enough to the ground, they'll know niche markets that aren't being served by large-scale processors, and they'll learn how to network their way into niche markets with people power. Size doesn't matter for micro-processors, who can exploit many advantages from being small, local and fast on their feet. The little guys can take full advantage of small-batch and flexible production opportunities - buying oddly sized and off-grade fruits and vegetables at a massive discount, for example, and using them in soups and juices, where former appearances count for nothing. Being neighbourhood-friendly, micro-processors can forge partnerships with Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and community groups; health clinic kitchens can be used as incubators for caterers specializing in meals for food-sensitive populations, for instance, or kitchens in places of worship can be used by start-up processors serving the needs of religious minorities.

Fundamentally, CED is about informal, neighbourhood-based, mutual support and self-help. People in marginalized communities learn to get by with a little help from their friends, because they can't rely on Big Banks or remote levels of government for anything other than gratuitous advice. But CED animators do look to city governments,

which they see as closer to the people, for support that helps level the playing field a little. If the City decides to help micro-processors grow, these are some of the things that can be done to lend a hand up:

- The City can help micro-processors form organizations that can provide leadership, training, advocacy and public education.
- The City can support a local micro-processors' lobby favouring provincial and federal government training programmes that respond to their specialized needs, just as other government training programmes respond to specialized needs of other industries.
- The City can work with local post-secondary schools to make the case for a new programme in urban food production that helps local cottage industries in the same way conventional agricultural schools help multinational agribusiness.
- The City can establish an industrial ecology unit that promotes linkages, which can turn one company's waste into another company's low-cost supply. Industrial ecology, all the rage in the U.S., is a local dating service that puts companies that need to get rid of waste cheaply in touch with companies that can turn waste into value-added products. Industrial ecologists are matchmakers for bakers and brewers; they put bakeries next to brewers, so the bakers get easy access to tasty and protein-rich grain residues for speciality breads and the brewers get rid of an expensive headache because they no longer have grain residues to get rid of. Or they arrange a blind date between a woodworking shop and a micro-processor; it will be love at first sight when the sawdust meets the veggie scraps in the composter, because carbon and nitrogen go together like a horse and carriage when it comes to top-quality compost that both companies can sell as a by-product, instead of paying to have waste hauled away. The City wins because waste is eliminated and new tax-paying, job-creating companies are created.
- The City, which already regulates micro-processors along the same lines as restaurants, can provide training for streamlined enforcement of health regulations.
- The City can open farmers' markets on civic squares and other public spaces to local micro-processors.
- The City can endorse and promote a Toronto-specific CED label, Moosetown's Munchiest or Toronto's Tastiest, to boost shopper awareness of and confidence in local micro-processed products.

3. Designate urban food production as infrastructure contributing to clean air and water as well as food security.

Urban food production can function as "working landscapes" and "living machines," doing a job that would otherwise have to be done with expensive infrastructure made of metal and cement. If the "free eco-services" of a tree were ever calculated – that's done by counting what it would cost to achieve the same results with machines or human labour – no-one would ever doubt that money grows on trees. It's estimated that one

city tree earns \$40,000 over a lifetime of conditioning air, trapping industrial dust, pumping out fresh oxygen, purifying water, storing carbon, preventing erosion, breaking winter winds, shading summer sunrays, and so on. If the tree also yields fruit or syrup, that's icing on the cake. The economics of urban agriculture point to food being classified as a by-product, much like straw bedding for barn animals is a by-product, not the economic rationale, for growing wheat. It would be ass-backward for the country farmer to make the straw bedding pay the costs of raising wheat; and it would be no smarter for the city farmer to make apples or syrup pay the entire costs of raising a tree.

Given the multiple public benefits of green infrastructure, it makes sense to explore ways that the City can encourage it. This is an unusual case where the public benefits of a private business activity outweigh private benefits. No backyard gardener will ever make \$40,000 selling apples over the lifetime of an apple tree. No community gardeners will save as much money growing their own food in an allotment plot as the City will save from having a drop-off point for neighbourhood compost that no longer has to be hauled 20 miles across town. No rooftop gardeners will make as much money raising food as the city will save by having rainwater absorbed on a flat roof and kept away from the flash flood swamping the sewage mains and filtration plants after a downpour.

Government planners exist because the best of all possible worlds doesn't just happen, contrary to Voltaire's *Candide*, when everybody tends their own garden. There need to be incentives and regulations to tend the garden of the public interest. Planners need to find or invent tools to do this. The most straightforward way to approach the issue is to estimate the marginal cost of absorbing rainwater in new gardens versus the marginal cost of having that water handled by a new water filtration plants. If green infrastructure saves money, appropriate incentives should be put in place – some equivalent to a charitable tax deduction off municipal taxes, for example. If a composted garden in the front yard saves the City \$100 in stormwater sewage management – gardens tend to absorb more rain than grass, and composted gardens absorb and store more water than non-composted gardens – it costs the City nothing to provide a \$100 tax rebate to organic gardeners.

Although the disproportion between the private and public Return on Investment for urban agriculture suggests what economic planners call a market failure, the real problem is a planning failure. If planners could figure out how to grease the palm of the invisible hand, there would be less conflict between the public and the private good. Then, economic incentives would regulate behaviour, and the hand of the law need not be heavy at all.

Unfortunately, few civic functions are planned that way. Some people throw their vegetable scraps in the garbage and have their garbage picked up for free, for example, while other people compost their vegetable scraps and have to pay for the composter. People who let rain fall off their roof into the sewer, then water their lawn from a hose,

pay no more taxes than people who save rainwater in a barrel to feed their garden during a dry spell. People who grow apple trees in their front yard pay as much tax as people who pave their yard for an extra parking space, even though the parking space forces more water down the sewer, which has to be cleaned at municipal expense. Until planners arrange to give the right tax signals to people, people are going to get the wrong message: bad information, bad decisions, garbage in, garbage out. One place to start sending out accurate signals is in the field of urban food production, with appropriate tax rebates for people who provide free eco-services to the City by conserving rain, composting and adding carbon to the soil.

4. Set a goal of "zero nutrient loss" for City resource (aka waste) management systems.

Waste is a verb, not a noun, the saying goes. Like most cities its size, Toronto wastes some 600,000 tonnes of organic material a year by throwing it in landfill. As much as ten percent of that organic material could be salvaged for human use – bruised tomatoes that could be made into salsa, for instance, or rotting bananas that could be used for banana bread. The rest has what it takes to be converted into a number of value-added products, including livestock feed, pet food, feedstock for methane-fired electrical generators, and compost. One way or another, it's just a matter of time before the organics end up as soil conditioner that nourishes new life in the soil. The same is true of humanure, until recently incinerated along with any other toxins that got into the sewage plant. Properly treated, it too can be returned to the soil as part of the mix of nutrient-rich humus.

The City is now committed to waste reduction, which needs to be re-envisioned as resource recovery if it's to be effective. It's hard to wag a dog by the tail, to solve the waste problem by waste management; the problem's been grabbed at the wrong end. To get rid of waste takes someplace where that waste is treated as a resource. As soon as that happens, we are no longer getting rid of waste; we are finding a home for a resource. Recycling is most cost-effective when there's a ready market of end-users. The best way to get rid of used books is to have a university with students who want to buy used books. The best way to get rid of unneeded skates is to have hockey teams with kids who need second-hand skates. The best way for seniors to get rid of old chesterfields is to have younger families who need some low-cost furniture. The best way to get rid of old clothes is to have teenagers who think they're not too shabby. Whenever those with a depreciated product can be linked to those with the right needs, money can be made and jobs created by bringing the two parties together and converting what could have been waste into a resource.

Whenever there is no effective end-user who can close the loop, recycling efforts hit the wall. If there are no companies that need green glass or waxed cartons or multi-material packages ("tetrapaks"), City recycling programmes lose a lot of money. Compost is a rotten business to be in for the same reason. That's why landfill seems like such an

appealing option to many people in waste management. To change the mindset of waste management, however, requires closed loops that flip the issue to resource recovery.

This is why urban agriculture needs to be looped in with recycled organics, along with recycled water and heat, all plentiful in the Big City. A major competitive advantage of city farmers, other than being close to customers, is closeness to a resource base of recycled and low-cost soil conditioners and fertilizers. The operative term, therefore, is not waste reduction, but "zero nutrient loss." That's the term that closes the loop and gets the job done.

5. Identify "edible landscaping" as a cost-effective way to beautify the city.

It's old-fashioned to think that useful plants can't be beautiful and beautiful plants can't be useful. Crab apple trees, for instance, issue beautiful blossoms in spring and tasty and nutrient-dense fruit in the fall. A host of trees, bushes, flowers and vegetables do double duty as neighbourhood beautifiers and food producers. And, as we know from recommendation 3, a third function can be added: free infrastructure services. Thus, edible landscaping has what it takes to be cost-effective. This could be reflected in City beautification strategies and budgets.

6. Explore greenhouse food production, "phyto-remediation" and "living machines" as strategies for reclaiming contaminated "brownfield" sites.

Brownfield sites, monuments to industrial polluters of an earlier age and policy gridlocks of our own, are part of the landscape of most cities. Cities create opportunities to beautify themselves and free up prime space for new value-creating activities when they learn to heal and restore these abandoned districts in cost-effective ways.

In some respects, brownfields is a misnomer. The areas could be called "greenfield sites," a term used to describe new projects that can start fresh, with no holds barred and no dead weight of tradition or technology inherited from the past. New construction from the ground up always costs less than renovations, while giving the green light to go state-of-the-art. That's why industries planning greenfield sites always take the time to re-envision, to think what the industry will be like and what public expectations will be like 25 or 50 years down the road. That's a complete break from renovation thinking, which imbeds defining elements from the past in adaptations to the future. We can think much more boldly with brownfields, because there's no choice but to start anew. When this opportunity is presented to entire economies – think of Japan's jumping from behind to ahead of other industrial nations after World War II – economic historians refer to the leapfrogging phenomenon as "the advantages of backwardness." We can turn brownfields into the same kind of advantage by re-envisioning them as greenfields.

There's enough space in Toronto's brownfields, and enough low-cost recyclable

organics, water and heat right near the brownfields, to build enough greenhouses to supply the city with most of its fresh fruits and vegetables year-round. With greenhouses, there are ways to contain contaminated soil at ground level. The greenhouses are built on top of cement floors, and the growing trays – usually based on hydroponic, not soil-based, systems – are normally well above ground level.

Brownfield restoration gives us a chance to redress one of the major errors of city-builders of the recent past: their dismissal of urban agriculture opportunities. Those opportunities are all the more cogent today, when the types of industries that once filled brownfield sites have moved to Third World dictatorships. The greenhouse option is being pursued in many areas, including Buffalo and Chicago. It could be prevented from happening in Toronto if City agencies in charge of brownfields insist on land prices that can't possibly be met by infant industries such as urban agriculture, where the cost of rural land beyond the city's outskirts is a defining competitive reality. If the Planning Division would like to keep greenhouses as a live option for the abandoned industrial district, it will be necessary to deal with the issue of land costs in a way that avoids "penny-wise, pound-foolish" dictates. It makes no economic sense to lose the long-term gain of a labour-intensive industry that supplies multiple public health and environmental benefits for the short-term profit of a land sale.

With greenhouses, the contaminated land would be left to heal itself over time. Where more aggressive restoration of damaged lands is required, the Planning Division could consider an active exploration of biological remediation, or clean-up. These include emerging strategies based on phyto-remediation and living machines, both of which evolved in response to needs to restore damaged and toxic lands and water. Toronto firms already have some expertise in this area, thanks to clean-up efforts at some northern Ontario mines. The City's brownfield site is an Olympic-quality site for putting these techniques in the limelight.

7. Designate retail access to fresh food as an essential service in every community.

In the spring of 2000, City Council unanimously adopted *Planting The Seeds*, the Phase I report of the Food and Hunger Action Committee, which made the case that retail outlets selling nutritious and affordable food were essential to food security in all neighbourhoods. In the same time period, City Council adopted the Environmental Task Force report, which argued for a city where people can get to most basic services on foot, without having to drive. In March 2001, City Council adopted *The Growing Season*, the Phase II report of the Food and Hunger Action Committee. It reaffirmed the importance of local, quality food retail outlets to food access for people who are disabled, elderly and poor, and can't simply hop in the car to go food shopping. These proposals shouldn't cause grave difficulties for planners. The principle is already established that planners do not grant approvals to new neighbourhoods that lack roads, sewers, schools, street lighting, parking or parks. Nor is any neighbourhood safe and

liveable without reasonable access to healthful food.

Equitable food access doesn't mean that every area has to have a superstore and gourmet specialty shop. Open-air food markets, mom and pop grocers, co-ops, healthfood stores and reasonably-priced home delivery are all options. As human rights legislation makes clear, it's "reasonable accommodation," not exact uniformity, that's required in the treatment of people with special needs.

Equitable food access in all neighbourhoods also honours the public health principle of "environmental support," recognized in the City's food charter adopted in March 2001. When environmental supports are in place, the most healthful choices are the easiest ones to make, while the least healthful choices are less convenient. That's why beer stores aren't open late at night, why liquor stores are never (in Canada) located in gas stations or gun shops, why weaker beers are sold at community celebrations, why cigarette vending machines aren't allowed in schools. No person's "right" to smoke or drink is restricted by environmental support. People just have to "exercise" their right to an unhealthy option by going a bit out of their way. Inequitable food access undermines this public health principle. If an area is serviced only by a convenience or smoke shop, vulnerable populations either make an easy choice to buy low-quality foods, or they have to go out of their way to make healthier choices.

The principles of environmental support and reasonable accommodation have direct significance for planners' use of space, because the general environment, not the heavy hand of the law, are relied on to guide sound decision-making. This gives planners an enormous responsibility and power to do good in important areas that previous planners have often neglected.

8. Campaign for laws that protect what remains of Toronto's greenbelt.

International experience shows that greenbelts around cities must be protected by legislation. There's a simple reason for this. Farmers work hard and take great financial risks in return for little money; real estate companies offer farmers a lot of cash in hand just for going out of business. In an unregulated market, the sale of farm land to developers is an economic no-brainer. That's why it's a no-brainer for a society to let its future food security and green space be decided on in the marketplace alone.

The Planning Division could propose zoning schemes, based on lessons from British Columbia, Quebec and elsewhere, to protect the recreational, tourist, ecological and food resources on Toronto's outskirts. Once an appropriate scheme is adopted, the City needs to support it with a vigorous action plan, conducted as if our lives depended on it. They do.

9. Consider ways to make farmers markets and fresh food markets standard features across the City.

Farmers markets and fresh food markets, commonplace in cities and towns outside of North America, fulfil many beneficial public functions. They put food shopping on public and community space, which means people feel comfortable being free to loiter, linger, watch entertainers, become part of the scene, even if they're not buying something every minute. Because markets are such lively people places – amazing how food has that capacity to create a people place, but sales of other goods don't – they attract tourists. Markets usually bring traffic into nearby main streets and revitalize local businesses. It's even been shown that farmers markets increase sales in nearby conventional food stores. That's not as weird as it seems, because most food is bought on impulse; so if people traffic increases, it stands to reason that general food sales will also increase. Farmers markets support public health by making top-quality produce readily available. They support local farmers, micro-processors and artisans by giving them a chance to sell their wares, a chance they rarely get from mainstream retailers. Canada has one of the world's highest rates of corporate concentration in food retail, so public markets grant rare market access to those who can't meet the supermarkets' terms for marketing budgets or mass production quantity and prices.

Given the multiple public benefits of farmers markets, not all of which can be captured at the cash register of any one store, planners should consider policies to make public space available to stimulate community-building, health-positive shopping alternatives that support local farmers and artisans.

10. Explore an accounting system that helps City officials make decisions leading to long-term public benefits.

Almost everybody knows that our present method of accounting for wealth, the Gross National Product, is arbitrary and obsolete. The GNP treats all cash transactions the same, and is therefore like Oscar Wilde's cynic, who knows the price of everything and the value of nothing. A car that has to be repaired after an accident counts as an increase in the GNP, but a mom who breastfeeds her baby instead of buying inferior formula does nothing for the country's economy. An old-growth forest left alone is worth nothing to the GNP; it acquires value only when it's cut down. Cigarette sales boost the GNP. Walking to work leads to a drop in the GNP. Accounting measures are supposed to do more than count up the income and costs from good and bad decisions alike. They're supposed to guide good decisions in the future. The GNP offers no such guidance to those charged with serving the public interest.

Planning for wise food and agricultural decisions is almost impossible if we stick to a GNP-based accounting system. Sound nutrition isn't worth a cent on the GNP scorecard. Cities that want a big GNP had better look to heart bypass operations, not promotion of

leaner foods. Backyard composting is a big fat zero, which no City would encourage if it wanted a better GNP. No cash registers ring when more people grow more of their food in community gardens; that can't be worth anything. The GNP picks up when people spend money on food that comes from California instead of growing their own food; better build some more speedways so more of that happens. Planners trying to make smart food and agriculture decisions on the basis of the GNP are working with directions that point the wrong way. So, if accounting systems are going to support good planning and healthy public policy, they need to be based on more than the ring of the cash register and the click of the credit card. The Planning Division is in as good a position as any to explore alternative benchmarks by which to measure real progress in the City's quality of life.

END NOTES

- ¹ Transcript from an Ontario Public Health Association Workshop on community food mapping, Toronto, Ontario, September 11, 2000
- ² Kami Pothukuchi and J. Kaufman, "The Food System: A Stranger in the Planning Field," *American Planning Association Journal*, Spring 2000
- ³ Kami Pothukuchi, "Community Food Mapping," address to Ontario Public Health Association workshop on community food mapping, Toronto, September 11, 2000
- ⁴ A. Shulman, "The Rhetoric of Portions," *Food and Eating Habits: Directions for Research*, ed. Michael Jones (Los Angeles: Folklore Society, 1983)
- ⁵ M. Rowe, ed., *Toronto Considering Self Government* (Ginger Press: Toronto, 2000)
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- ¹⁴ A. Temko, *No Way To Build A Ballpark and Other Irreverent Essays on Architecture*, San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1993) pp. 7, 145
- ¹⁵ P. Blais, *Inching Toward Sustainability: the Evolving Urban Structure of the Greater Toronto Area* (Neptis Foundation: Toronto, 2000)
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