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*URBAN AGRICULTURE Public Consultation*  
*Thursday June 21, 2012*

*1. State of Urban Agriculture:*

Definition: There are 4 forms present on the Island of Montreal

1. Agricultural farms still in operation in Towns as Senneville and Pierrefond.
2. Experimental farms such as MacDonald Campus of McGill University in Ste Anne de Bellevue and D-3 Pierres farmed by disadvantaged youth within the Cap St Jacques nature park.
3. Community gardens run by the City where each member pays a yearly rent for a plot and gardens independently for their own needs.
4. Collective gardens run by organizations such as CommuniTerre where citizens participate in the planning, planting, harvesting and the balance is donated to food banks.

All these forms are necessary to establish food security for all its residents.

### *Personal history:*

Although I am no longer a resident of the City of Montreal, I live in Montreal West, I spent the greater part of my life in NDG and have participated in many of their garden projects so I have pertinent experience. I presently practice **Organic Permaculture** methods. As the Montreal Permaculture Guild was forming I recommended that we have in our mission that our territory would be the CMM – Communauté Métropolitaine de Montréal wherein I am a resident.

My family had a vegetable garden in NDG where I grew up. We also purchased fruits and vegetables from the local markets in the fall and preserved these by canning, freezing and other forms for the winter.

I began a garden in the lane of my first apartment in NDG. I encouraged my neighbors to participate. The garden expanded every year by reclaiming more land and including more participants. This project was by mistake re-landscaped and covered with grass sod when the buildings were renovated. We not only lost the precious compost recently spread but the perennials herbs and strawberries. This event was devastating for All involved including the landlord as he had given the Landscapers instructions to work around the garden. The Landlord attempted to make amends to no avail.

I later became a member of the NDG Garden Club and received a plot behind the Eventide Home on St Jacques Street. The plot had been passed down to me by an elderly person. The soil was depleted. The first year was dedicated to enriching the soil. The second year I invested in medicinal herbs as I had been studying Herbology. I ordered these from several reputed suppliers across Canada. Mayor Pierre Bourque changed the zoning from Institutional to Industrial without a referendum to allow Parmalat to purchase Sealtest and build a refrigeration plant and parking lot. I lost a huge financial investment and 2 years of my time! I also lost my hopes for a location for my herbal business.

Very discouraged, I nonetheless persevered and joined the Cantaloupe collective garden then managed by Eco-Initiative. This is where I first leant Permaculture methods. I was informed nothing could be sold from their gardens. So I moved on in search for a suitable area to grow native indigenous plants in order to produce products I could sell.

I moved to Montreal West in 2001 I had a small plot but it was too shady and heavily rooted. It was also close to the Meadowbrook golf course and both the CN and CP rails. I discovered that all three use pesticides. And are allowed to do so as they are zoned industrial and thus are exempt from the municipal pesticides by-laws. I was shocked and once again discouraged I abandoned plot. Not the healthiest location to grow plants to be consumed.

Yet I persevered, I continued composting in the hope of having a new site as well as diverting the food waste from landfills. I compost 12 months of the year! I snow shoe to my site in the winter this shows my dedication to regeneration.

During this time I participated in other projects, which no longer exist today! These projects were gardens designed to attract wildlife; birds, bees, butterflies and bats. This is sad, as these should have had a longer life. They would have, had they obtained a **'Permanent Status'**. This occurred due to lack of long-term vision of those in charge of the institutions where they were located.

I now have a plot on Hydro Land. The lease is in the hands of a landowner wishing to sell. Again, I am in a precarious situation. I have invested in perennials such as fruit trees, berries and herbs risking loss once again. Hearing others speak, I am not an exception this has occurred to many. Loss due to zoning changes or ownership transfers are the main causes.

I feel I have been a nomadic gardener for the past several decades.

\* Food security is directly linked to security of the land where the garden is. There needs to be legal provisions so that local gardening projects are protected.

## *2. Opinion of the importance of urban agriculture in Montreal:*

### Food Shortages

Urban agriculture is essential because of the present global political, economical instability as well as due to climate changes, which can trigger unforeseen crisis, as the ice storm in '98. The City of Montreal is unprepared. The supply of food in local grocery stores and restaurants is estimated to be on average less than a week - a few days at best.

Food security issue has been raised through this conference.

\* What is the City of Montreal's definition?

\* What strategies are in place to increase food security in the event of a crisis?

### Quality Food Choices:

We need to enrich our local resources and not be dependant on products such as apples and grapes from Chili, pears from Argentina and berries from Mexico. Which carry a large carbon footprint due to their transport. If this produce is not organic purchasing it contributes to soil degradation and contamination due to poor agribusiness practices including the use of pesticides and GMO-Genetically Modified Organisms. If it is organic but not fair trade then the people producing the crops for export are not able to live off their wages making their country poorer in financial wealth but more importantly in natural resources. Montrealers are becoming increasingly aware of Global economics and many would prefer voting with their money by encouraging organic fair trade farms, yet many cannot afford to do so.

I am part of this group. I am vegetarian and often do not eat my daily quota of fruits and vegetables because I face a conundrum which is not always a price issue. For example if I am choosing fruit and have the choice of an organic pear from Argentina which, is not fair-trade and a local pear that is not organic which to buy? Often I'll choose neither. This is why I prefer to grow my own. Choosing seeds and seedlings grown locally on Certified Organic farms preferably of Heritage varieties.

The fruits I mentioned earlier; apples, pears, grapes and berries are easily grown here. Much of the island was farmed for good reason as it has rich fertile soil as it has reaped the benefits of the St Lawrence River for millennia. Agriculture was a great part of all the towns, which formed the present day City. It is a part of our cultural Heritage and should be protected, as are the wetlands under provincial law.

I was pleasantly surprised last Thursday, June 14 at the meeting at the St Raymond center to find out that “*The Permanent Agriculture zone was decreed by the Government of Québec to protect agricultural activities*”. Etat de l’agriculture urbaine a Montreal p.10. On the same page, it states “*Ville de Montreal hopes to maintain the permanent agricultural zones.*”

\* Please define ‘**hopes**’; what restricts you if these zones are now law?

Is it due to the fact that much of the west island farms are now in the hands of developers looking to build more residential complexes for people working in the center City? There is not enough public transit to accommodate these future residents. I support the TOD – Transport Orientated Development. And I support the idea of land swaps, where developers would be given gray zone lands in the center city. They should also be required to create green spaces including gardens to attract people to stay in the city rather than migrate to the suburbs creating larger carbon footprints. These issues were discussed at the recent fall PMAD – Plan Métropolitain d’Aménagement et de Développement Conference.

According to CMM’s Perspective, April 2012, 58% of the territory is zoned agriculture, of that the City of Montreal has 4%. Most of it is large monoculture crops and dairy. Fruits and vegetable production is low. But, this is where individuals and small community groups can fill the gap.

### *3. Problems and barriers:*

#### Nature Deficiency Disorder

**‘Nature deficiency Disorder’** as described in Richard Louv’s book Last Child in the Woods is becoming prevalent in our high tech society. We are raising a generation of human beings, which have no concept of what food is, or where it comes from. These children have a great disconnect from nature. This in turn fosters apathy towards all environmental issues.

Gardening greatly reduces **‘Nature deficiency Disorder’** by teaching children where food comes from. This in turn, increases respect for food and the value of waste, which can be recycled into compost, which is the foundation of life. By participating in the various stages of food production children become aware the cycles of LIFE. It also encourages people to eat a healthier more varied diet and to lead healthier lifestyles. This in turn fosters an appreciation of other natural resources such as water and the need to protect and conserve them.

Collective gardening increase community involvement, shared goals, problem solving, skill acquisition and pride of accomplishment. These benefits are key to keep children in schools and out of jails. (see Videography Special Features, Dirt the Movie).

#### Pollinators

Pollinators are essential to food production. 40% of our food needs to be visited by bees in order to produce fruits and vegetables. Bees cannot survive in mono crops as they are like deserts. Bees are dying due to wide usage of pesticide called **‘colony collapse disorder’**. To help bees survive they need a varied source of foods, as do humans, produce gardens provide this.

#### *4 Recommendations, suggestions and commentaries.*

##### *Feedback from other sessions*

Thursday, June 14 – Centre St Raymond:

1. Actually, to answer my question, beekeeping is under Provincial jurisdiction by FAQ-Fédération des Apiculteurs du Québec where hives must be registered. Yet, there are restrictive by-laws in other adjacent municipalities as in Montreal West where bees are considered a nuisance.

2 There were questions arising regarding potato restrictions. In Permaculture practices plantings are done in guilds where plants are grouped in companionships as they are beneficial and help each other. There are also trap crop that deter pests. Plant such as Dead Nettle, Flax, Tansy and Horseradish (see bibliography) all deters potato bug. I have successfully tried tansy in the past and this year I am trying flax. Experimentation is key to learn to adapt to landscape differences and to climatic changes.

Monday, June 18 – OCPM:

3.a. Fruit trees were brought up by a few presenters. I too favor this suggestion.. If fruit trees are planted in Municipal Parks, Community and Collective gardens they need expert care.

Note: There is a prevalence of diseases affecting the many fruit trees presently on the Island of Montréal. Apples are affected by a fungus known as '*apple scab*' and the plums are affected by '*black nut*' also a fungus.

3.b. Choosing dwarf disease resistant varieties would eliminate the need for pruning and spraying. Shorter trees make the fruit more accessible without need of ladders. Reducing risk, injury and need for extra insurance. See [www.greenbarnnursery.ca](http://www.greenbarnnursery.ca). - A nursery on Ile Perrot who has developed many disease resistant and dwarf varieties of fruit trees.

3.c. With the large population of squirrels in our parks I have doubts of the success of such a program. On the other hand, I do believe that urban wildlife has its place and requires healthy food sources rather than depending on human garbage. Human must be educated to share food with its fellow inhabitants.

4. There has been questions arising whom and what territory should Urban Agriculture fall into.

As I participated in the PMAD – Plan Métropolitain d’Aménagement et de Développement Conference, I feel the CMM – Communauté Métropolitaine de Montréal should be the level of government as the conference had **3 challenges** or/ou **3 Défis: Aménagement, Transport et Environnement**. Where in the third – **Environnement** “*La mise en valeur des activités agricoles*” was an important topic. The final plan issued in April states that the PMAD has made a commitment to increasing agricultural lands by 6%.

Critère 1.3.1 – “*La Communauté établit l’objectif d’une croissance de 6% de la superficie globale des terres en culture, d’ici 2031, à l’échelle métropolitaine... entend poursuivre certaines démarches:...l’adaptation du REA – Règlement sur les Exploitations Agricoles afin de permettre la remise en culture des terres en friche.*”  
PMAD, Avril 2012, page 112.

I saw the difficulty of territory as it came clear that ‘*Terre en culture*’ is farmland – businesses for profit. Whereas ‘*Agriculture Urbaine*’ is a collection of social cultural projects requiring funds. These are very different concepts.

I believe the PMAD’s Environment department and the OCPM should work together to bridge the gaps and create a common understanding for the many aspects of food production whether it is sold or not. Especially, for some issues as beekeeping as with pesticides decades ago where borders can easily be crossed. As bees can travel up to 5 km from their hive while foraging (they would travel less if a healthy food supply is readily available i.e. in a urban garden)

What the City could do:

Urban planning & regulations

1. The Ville de Montreal could purchase some of the west island farmlands and create urban farms. These farms could have a mandate to store a percentage of their yield as crisis relief and a percentage to supply food banks. These could employ graduates from the many environment departments of our Universities.
2. Reclaiming (through purchase) more waste spaces and greening them would increase neighborhood beauty and peaceful oasis from the stressors of the City.
3. Planting orchards of fruit and nut trees in municipal parks not only ornamentals to increase local food resources.

4. Create requirements that developers include **'functional'** green spaces in their urban residential projects rather than **'street appeal'** designs, which alienate passersby's from strolling into them. These become **'no-access / forbidden zones'**. The **'functional'** green spaces could include edible landscapes as fruit and nut trees and collective gardens.
5. There needs to be legal provisions so that local gardening projects are protected.
6. Creating more community gardens to reduce the waiting list times.
7. Increase funding for more collective gardens to support their educational components.
8. a. Urban by-laws should be updated to allow beekeeping as long as those who wish to do so are trained, qualified and certified to care and maintain healthy beehives.
8. b. If bees are to be allowed in community and collective gardens there must be a responsible trained beekeeper to care for the hives.
- 8.c. There needs to be safe wintering sites.

Educational provisions (work with the province)

8.d. Education regarding safe handling and behavior around hives must part of the introduction of bees in gardens where families with young children are present. Thus reducing fear of these beneficial insects.

Note: that most stings are from wasps not honeybees.

9. Putting gardens in daycares, preschools, elementary and High Schools and other institutions like libraries and churches is essential to curb **'Nature deficiency Disorder'**.
10. Placing composting programs in all school cafeterias is also a priority to reduce waste going to land fills but also creating a local resources for gardens.
11. Work with the province to prioritize agriculture education in schools and funding projects to enrich the lives of the disadvantaged and at risk youth by providing them with projects and skills to be proud of.

## *In Conclusion*

The City of Montreal takes pride in being a leader in cultural festivals. It is time for the City to take steps to be a leader in the **Transition Town** movement, [www.transitionnetwork.org](http://www.transitionnetwork.org), [www.communityrenewal.ca](http://www.communityrenewal.ca), where cities are becoming self-sufficient in their food and energy needs.

Permaculture as Defined by P3 Permaculture Design:

*“ Permaculture is the conscious design and maintenance of agriculturally productive ecosystems which have the diversity, stability and resilience of natural ecosystems. It is the harmonious integration of landscape and people providing their food, energy, shelter, and other material and non-material needs in a sustainable way. Without permaculture there is no possibility of a stable social order.”*

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### *Videography*

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[www.DirtTheMovie.org](http://www.DirtTheMovie.org). Special features: 1. Alice Waters and The Edible Schoolyard 12:25, 7.David Orr – On Ecology and School Gardens 2:17

**Queen of the Sun – What Are the Bees Telling Us?** DVD 82 minutes 2011.  
[www.collectiveeye.org](http://www.collectiveeye.org)., [www.queenofthesun.com](http://www.queenofthesun.com).

**The Growing Edge ...beyond sustainability to regeneration... exploring real solutions to our grave ecological crisis** – A documentary by Donna Read & Starhawk. DVD 45 minutes 2010 [www.belili.org](http://www.belili.org).