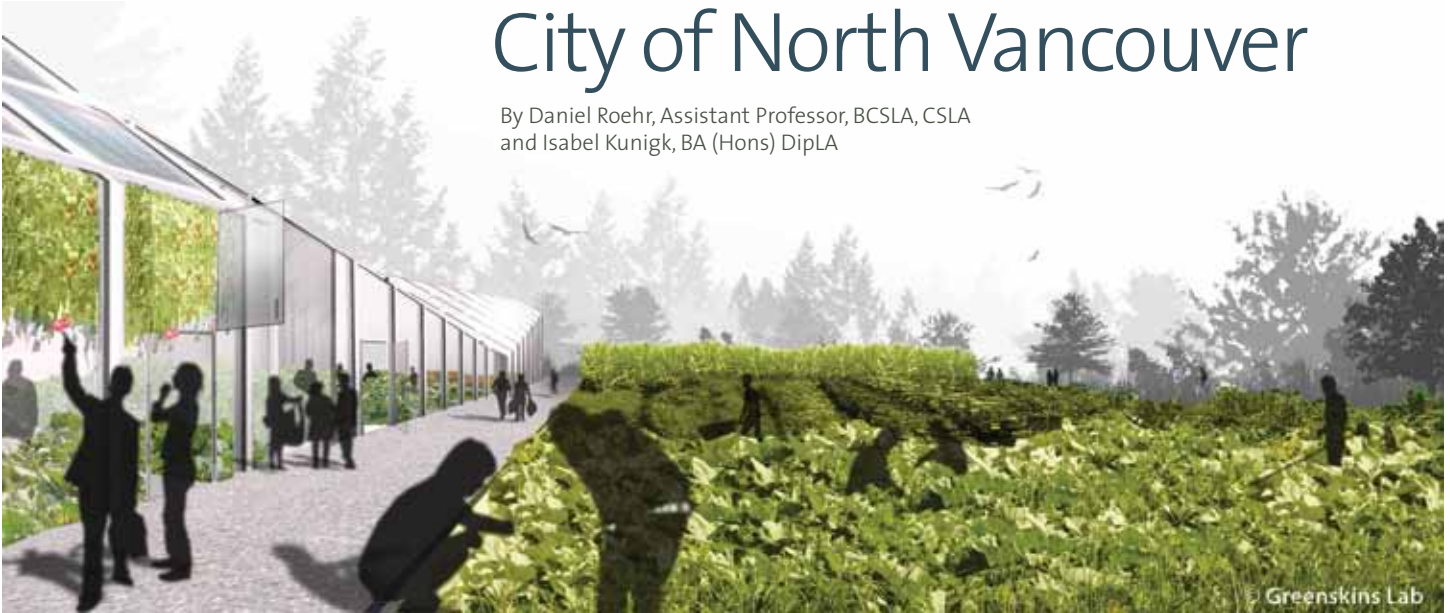


Urban Agriculture Pilot, City of North Vancouver

By Daniel Roehr, Assistant Professor, BCSLA, CSLA and Isabel Kunigk, BA (Hons) DiplA



Local food production initiatives and awareness in the Vancouver area, though intensified by the beginning of the financial crisis in September 2008, did not arise only from the economic fallout.

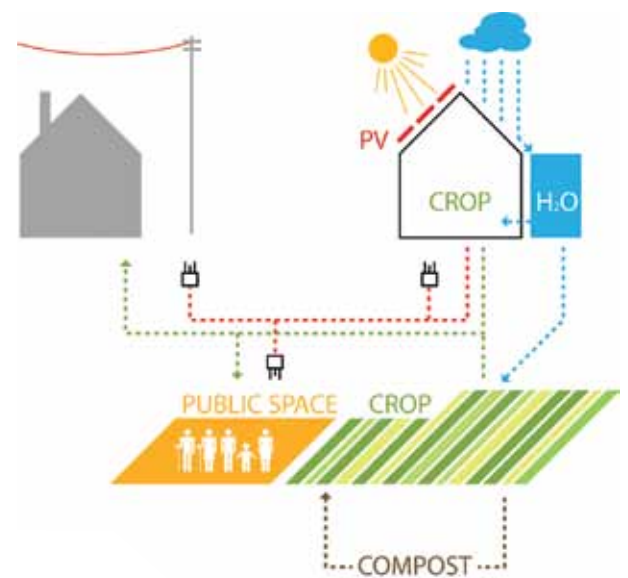
They have been part of Vancouver since the early 1970s. Since then, the greater Vancouver area has seen the creation of community gardens, demonstration gardens, organic farmer's markets and has, over the last thirty years, experienced a dramatic increase in the availability of more uncommon vegetable and fruit varieties due to the demands of a continuously growing international community with diverse eating habits.

During the past 10 to 15 years there has been a strong movement for a healthier lifestyle with a large variety of nutritious foods produced within local communities. A variety of projects currently explore the social benefits of urban agriculture. For example, integration programs for the homeless growing their own food or the development of skills in socially responsible urban farming for at risk youth. Recently, there has been a boom of not-for-profit and charitable organisations created to discuss and stimulate awareness in local food production and encourage such initiatives.

What has been missing so far is the implementation of a professional urban farm.

Such a facility would lend itself to experimenting with the latest growing and irrigation methods and the creation of a live model which could be monitored. In addition, valuable information could be gathered on the effects of a commercial farming enterprise that integrates social and aesthetic aspects of urban agriculture, such as nutrition education and food production training for residents.

A pilot project for urban agriculture in the City of North Vancouver is currently being developed and designed by Greenskins Lab, UBC in close collaboration with a group of enthusiastic volunteers from Vancouver and the North Shore. The project will be run by EcoUrbia Network, a not-for-profit organisation in the making that focuses on creating and facilitating sustainability-driven social initiatives. Aside from achieving the aesthetic and architectural integration of the farm into the urban surroundings and underused inner-city open spaces, a key objective is the exploration of two sustainable attributes: water harvesting and energy production. Water harvesting ensures the irrigation of the site during the dry summer months, when ▶



Top: The pilot program will focus on intense crop yields. Credit: Greenskins Lab

Bottom: Concept diagram illustrates resource relationship. Credit: Greenskins Lab

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water is needed most for the crop to survive. The photovoltaic panels on the greenhouse roofs produce energy for heating the greenhouse for food production and running the water pumps for the irrigation systems. In addition, extra energy generated from the rooftops can be fed back into the grid.

On Monday, September 21st, 2009 the City of North Vancouver unanimously approved granting Greenskins Lab and team a five year license to occupy a portion of Loutet Park for the implementation of the pilot project. In a few weeks time, the public consultation process will start. The project has two main goals: On the one hand it aims to increase awareness for local food production and establish a framework for social enterprise and education to benefit the whole of the North Shore community. On the other hand, the farm serves as a laboratory for monitoring and measuring water harvest, irrigation patterns and energy production, and to advance knowledge in this field as well as assessing the viability of such a venture. The findings will be disseminated and made

accessible to other interested groups. Hopefully, this initiative will start a movement to create more such projects in different cities of North America to accumulate enough

data to convince policy makers that entrepreneurial urban agriculture needs to be an integral part of any modern urban society. www.greenskinslab.sala.ubc.ca

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