Memo To: Executive Policy Council, City of Winnipeg
From: Winnipeg Food Council
Subject: Strengthening Legal and Administrative Protections for Community Gardens and Urban Farming in Winnipeg

Executive Summary

Community gardens and urban farming sites across Canadian cities face increasing pressure from redevelopment and gentrification. Winnipeg's current framework provides clear zoning definitions but lacks coordinated policy, accessible guidance, and secure tenure mechanisms. As a result, gardens remain vulnerable to displacement, particularly in neighbourhoods experiencing reinvestment or intensification. Evidence from other municipalities shows that the strongest protections come from combining legal recognition, administrative coordination, and durable tenure agreements. Strengthening Winnipeg's approach will require moving beyond definitions toward enforceable, stable, and publicly accessible protections that safeguard community food spaces for the long term. Aligning community gardening and urban farming with the goals of OurWinnipeg 2045 will advance the City's long-term vision for resilience, equity, and sustainable growth.

Relevant Terminology: Definitions

- **Urban Agriculture:** The cultivation, processing, and distribution of food within urban areas, including community gardens, urban farms, and educational growing spaces.
- **Community Garden:** A shared space where individuals or groups grow food collectively or in individual plots, typically for personal use, community programming, or local food security.
- **Zoning Recognition:** The formal inclusion of gardens or farms as permitted land uses within municipal zoning by-laws, providing the strongest legal protection against redevelopment.
- **Tenure Mechanisms:** Legal tools such as leases, land-use agreements, or multi-year licenses that secure long-term access to land.

Policy Context: Urban Farming and Community Gardens Across Canada

Across Canada, municipal approaches to urban agriculture range from legal protections to informal arrangements, leaving community gardens vulnerable to displacement. The strongest planning protection is provided by zoning recognition, which embeds gardens as legitimate land uses within municipal by-laws, a strategy successfully employed by cities like Hamilton and Charlottetown. Conversely, many cities, including Vancouver, Calgary, and Montréal, rely on administrative support and time-limited license agreements that provide operational assistance but fail to guarantee permanent tenure. This lack of legal security poses a significant risk of gentrification and displacement, most notably in Toronto's Regent Park redevelopment, where the demolition of culturally significant ground-level gardens in favour of expensive, less accessible rooftop plots led to a loss of community agricultural knowledge and food security. Three national patterns emerge:

- **Zoning-Based Protection:** Hamilton and Charlottetown embed gardens directly into zoning by-laws, recognizing them as legitimate land uses and shielding them from redevelopment pressures.
- **Administrative Support Without Legal Security:** Vancouver, Calgary, Montréal, and Halifax provide grants, coordination, and programming but rely on short-term licenses or informal permissions.
- **Mixed Models with Tenure Tools:** Some cities use multi-year leases or land-use agreements, offering stability when paired with zoning recognition.

Winnipeg's current model aligns most closely with the second category: strong definitions but limited legal or administrative protection.

Recommendations

To strengthen the protection of community gardens and urban farms in Winnipeg, the Winnipeg Food Council (WFC) recommends that the City move beyond informal short-notice arrangements and integrate urban agriculture into its formal planning, zoning and administrative frameworks. WFC advises the City to integrate community gardens into the OurWinnipeg 2045 and adopt the following proven strategies used in other Canadian municipalities, while clearly identifying the city departments best positioned to lead implementation.

1. Strengthen Legal Recognition

- Expand zoning provisions to explicitly permit community gardens and urban farms across more land-use categories.
- Introduce a dedicated "Urban Agriculture" land-use class to normalize gardens as permanent, legitimate uses.

  Responsible: City Planning / Urban Planning

2. Establish a Coordinated Administrative Framework

- Introduce low-cost annual business licenses for urban farms to help track active sites and support farmers in securing insurance and financing

  Responsible: Economic Development / Business Licensing.

- Publish accessible guidance for community groups, including processes for site selection, approvals, and maintenance.
- Integrate urban agriculture into citywide planning documents (e.g., Complete Communities, climate adaptation strategies). Responsible: City Planning / Urban Planning.

3. Implement Secure Tenure Mechanisms

- Replace the current 30-day notice period with multi year leases (1–5 years/3 -10 years) for gardens on municipal land, through standardized lease agreements or land-use agreements for gardens on city-owned land, enabling long term investment and stability.
- Consider designating long-term "Urban Agriculture Priority Sites" where redevelopment is restricted or requires Council approval. For sites where permanent tenure is not possible, encourage movable raised planters and container gardens that can relocate when development proceeds.

  Responsible: Parks, Recreation & Public Spaces / Land Management

Winnipeg has an opportunity to adopt a nationally leading model by combining legal recognition, administrative coordination, and secure tenure. Strengthening these protections will support food security, climate resilience, neighbourhood cohesion, and long-term community stability.