

## Vancouver Food Policy Council All Candidates' Questionnaire



The Vancouver Food Policy Council (VFPC) is an advisory group to Vancouver City Council, providing ideas and policy recommendations toward creating a thriving local food system. The primary goal of the VFPC is to examine how our local food system operates and provide ideas and policy recommendations to Vancouver City Council on how it can be improved. VFPC is comprised of passionate people from various sectors of the local food system. Members include farmers, food distributors, nutritionists, processors, waste managers, activists, and academics engaged in the food system. The VFPC functions as a bridge between citizens and civic officials, coming together to work on food policy initiatives that benefit all Vancouverites.

**Candidate Name:** Gwen Giesbrecht  
**Office Seeking:** Vancouver School Board  
**Party Affiliation(if any):** Public Education Project  
**Public Website:**

Please complete the questionnaire and send back to us at [info@vancouverfoodpolicycouncil.ca](mailto:info@vancouverfoodpolicycouncil.ca). We'll post your responses on our blog, and on the wall at our All Candidates Forum Oct 15<sup>th</sup>.

### General Questions:

1. Will you endorse the Vancouver Food Strategy and/or the Park Board Local Food Action Plan if you are elected?

I will

2. What actions in the VFS and/or LFAP would you focus on first?

My focus would be to work to ensure that community garden locations be sustained, not subject to being dismantled when development and infrastructure changes take priority.

3. What have you already done for food in your community?

Participated. As a community gardener for more than a decade, and a new member of a community orchard. For me, greater participation in initiatives like these are effective tools for bringing greater awareness to the broader community. As a parent, and having learned from own parents the lessons in food cultivation, preservation and self sufficiency, I was eager to give my son the benefit of those lessons. Not an easy task while living in an apartment, close to the centre of a big city. Access to community cultivation spaces means that the lessons of food importance can be had, while still supporting other environmental imperatives such as density, and green transportaion methods.

As an advocate for the inclusion of gardening spaces in school yards, purchasing seasonally for locally sourced produce, and as a member of the Grandview-Woodland Food Connection advisory committee, I send the message as often as I can on the importance of food source, security and sustainability.

4. Given the many priorities of a municipal government, how do you feel food can contribute to our city? Not only our city, but much more broadly to influence societal shifts. Food has traditionally been a strong determiner for building community. As our relationship to food has changed, so too has changed how we function as a society. Increasing isolation, indifference to others, lack of empathy to and understanding of, cultural differences, are all troubling trends. Creating a new ( restoring an old ) relationship with our food,

where it comes from, what we do with it, how we share it, can be a powerful tool in finding ways to building stronger connections between and within communities.

### Issues Based Questions:

5. Given the Greenest City Action Plan's goal "to ensure that the majority of residents live within a five-minute walk of a basket of fresh produce" and the Vancouver Food Strategy's goal to "improve access to healthy, affordable, culturally diverse food for all residents", what initiatives would you use to support these goals?

I am strongly drawn to a community usage model. As well as the community use of space for the growing of food, I would like to see the expansion of that concept through the implementation of community shared space for preparing, preserving, and storing of food. I am a candidate for School Board, so I have a few comments on the integration of schools and community through the food lens. We have schools with commercial kitchens. We have schools not full to capacity. We have school yards with outdoor spaces not in full use. I am very interested in exploring how all of these pieces could be connected. The benefit of having these concepts of community participation, where our students learn of them as a matter of course, at their school locations presents to me some very exciting possibilities.

6. Given Metro Vancouver's upcoming 2015 organics ban, what initiatives would you support to get us to zero food waste.

I would support approaching the purchase of fresh food from a different perspective. Often produce is pre-packaged in amounts that can't be consumed before spoiling. I would also like to see community composting facilities made available. Close to where I live there is a large industrial composting depot, which is not available for community use. Similarly, inclusion of composting depots in all community garden spaces would help promote community presence in garden spaces, for gardeners and non-gardeners.

7. Given that Vancouver has a rich urban agriculture community (e.g. community gardens, urban farming, beekeeping, backyard chickens) what is our biggest missed opportunity to this point?

I think our biggest missed opportunity has been in the re-development of Yaletown and the Olympic Village/S. False Creek neighbourhoods. We had an opportunity to create neighbourhoods close to the city centre that could have been built keeping a stronger connection for residents to the ground they occupy. I don't believe that creating density through high rise development lends itself to promoting connectivity to what is going on at ground level. While some attention has been paid to creating green spaces within those areas, the very fact of tower accommodation inhibits relationship to the green spaces. I feel there was an opportunity there, which would have had the result of lesser densification, but perhaps a better ability to reach the goals of a greener city in terms of fostering an awareness of urban agricultural possibilities. As future densification initiatives are pursued, we need to remain mindful of the disconnection between home and 'garden' as the built environment goes higher.

8. How would you as a municipal politician work with other levels of government on issues that may be considered outside of Vancouver's jurisdiction e.g. ALR, raising welfare rates, GMOs, migrant farm labour, others?

I don't consider any of these issues outside of the impact on Vancouver, regardless of whose jurisdiction they fall under. As a School Board candidate, I feel many issues that fall within the provincial and federal mandates have a direct bearing on what happens in the district schools. Education funding comes from the provincial government. As a municipally elected trustee for public education, with a keen interest in promoting the environmentally critical issue of food sourcing and security, ( particularly for those students and families impacted by policy regarding income levels and work conditions ), I anticipate raising these issues.

9. What role do you think local governments play in supporting healthy and sustainable food in schools?

I think there is a role for local government to play in supporting healthy and sustainable food in schools; through the Board of School Trustees, because of their direct link to provincial funding for schools, through the other municipal boards by looking for innovative integration of funding available. Public schools are a wonderful means to connect with a very large number of current and future community members. For local government to build a partnership with the provincial government to promote healthy and sustainable food in schools could potentially build that awareness far beyond school walls.

10. The Vancouver Food Strategy and Talk Food To Us program engaged thousands of residents in the development of the strategy. What kind of engagement process would you utilize in food policy work?

Looking at this from the perspective of an elected School Board Trustee, I would want to build on the work that has been done engaging students, their families, teachers, other school staff and administrators in food policy work. I feel there is a huge potential in this engagement, that we have only partially realized. If elected, one of my goals is to deepen and expand the dialogue for food awareness through out Vancouver school communities. Expanding that dialogue through schools, opens doors to far wider communications.