

## 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:** Ian Robertson

**Office Seeking:** City Council

**Party Affiliation (if any):** NPA Vancouver

**Public Website:** <http://www.npavancouver2014.ca/the-npa-team/ian-robertson/>

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. Food issues should be a major priority of municipal government. The beauty of food issues is that there's no downside: the cost of implementation is low, yet they provide significant positive impact and benefits across multiple sectors.

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

I would take guidance from the VFPC in choosing the order of implementation. They are experts in the sphere and have already listed their priorities. I would suggest that whatever is implemented first should produce the greatest impact at the lowest possible cost. Issues like food access and sustainability are too important to delay action.

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

As Park Board Commissioner, I was an ardent supporter of planting fruit-producing trees in Vancouver's parks. I am on the board of the VanDusen Botanical Gardens, a pillar of promoting and advocating for horticultural space in our city. Personally, I embrace growing my own food – I am a "weekend gardener" who plants corn in his front yard, and tomatoes, basil, and rhubarb out back.

4. Given the many priorities of a municipal government, how do you feel food can contribute to our city?

Food initiatives can play a part in achieving many municipal goals, such as reducing child hunger, building community, and strengthening neighbourhoods. Community gardens bring more people into our parks, increasing physical activity and reducing community isolation. The NPA has committed to a comprehensive program to address child hunger, and local food production initiatives can play an important role in achieving that goal.

One way municipal government can be used to best effect is to implement a buy-local policy in food procurement for their own institutions, such as community centres and parks. This stimulates local business and helps create demand for the mid-level infrastructure that is crucial to any effective local food strategy.

## 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 committed to community engagement and bringing together neighbourhoods, and local food infrastructure is an essential part of achieving that mission. I would reduce red tape for farmers markets and pocket markets, and encourage more community gardens in parks where residents have indicated a desire for them.

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

The biggest challenge here is to provide multi-family dwellings with the ability to separate garbage and divert organics effectively. This is a responsibility that we share with Metro Vancouver. As City Councillor, I would advocate for this and pursue a collaborative solution.

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?

There are plenty of opportunities to improve Vancouver's urban agriculture community that have gone untapped. I would first look to expand community gardens across the city. There is plenty of unused city land across Vancouver that could be temporarily made available for local community gardens.

The City of Vancouver has just begun to explore possibilities for food production and access in major new developments. This process could be expedited and expanded. The City could also engage local partners, like the Vancouver Food Bank, in an effort to reduce dependency on their services through initiatives like Community Kitchen Education.

There are plenty of areas where red tape could be reduced. One example is the permitting process required to keep backyard farm animals like chickens and bees. Though there are understandable fears about their costs and neighbourhood harms that must be addressed, literally hundreds of cities allow these animals. It is a low cost method to encourage local food production.

A process also needs to be put in place to allow the legitimizing of businesses based on local food sales – urban farmers, for example. These businesses need to be able to be properly licensed so they can get insurance while also respecting the concerns of neighbours. This process is underway, but is complicated and contentious, and could be streamlined.

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 would be happy to work with other levels of government on food security issues that are relevant to the city of Vancouver. However, it is important that our focus be primarily directed on what we can do as a municipality. That will allow us to be most effective as a local government.

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

Local government can help sustainable food programs grow and expand by assisting in the implementation of successful models for initiatives like community gardens. The Vancouver School Board's association with the Fresh Roots Program is an excellent example of this. With Board support, the program assists local schools to get beyond parent-teacher volunteers and instead contracts out management of school gardens to farmers. These farmers then integrate the garden with the school curriculum and neighbouring community, families, and food buyers. Our job as a municipal government is to facilitate these connections in order to best serve our residents.

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?

Engagement is key in local food strategy discussions. One of the biggest benefits of local food initiatives is the building of community – bridging cultures and generations. Consulting local communities and neighbourhoods is essential to creating an effective strategy that addresses their needs. I would seek advice from the Vancouver Food Policy Council in creating effective engagement strategies surrounding local food. They have experience in this field that we can tap into. Collaboratively, we would develop a strategy to ensure that residents' concerns are heard and taken into account.