Policy Discussion Paper #3: Agriculture Parks Model for the Capital Region

January 2013
Acknowledgements

This report is brought to you by CR-FAIR, the Capital Region Food and Agriculture Initiatives Roundtable. CR-FAIR, is a collaborative initiative of over 30 food and farm organizations (listed on the back cover) formed in 1997 that is managed by the Community Social Planning Council. CR-FAIR’s mission is to increase knowledge of and bring about positive change in the food and agriculture system. Our work is focused on the following areas: education and awareness raising, networking and information sharing, capacity building, research, and policy and planning.

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For information about this project or the report please contact: info@communitycouncil.ca, and find it on our website in the policy section www.communitycouncil/crfair
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Executive Summary

With an expanding population and increasing development, farmland in the Capital Region is under increasing pressure. Food security and building local food production capacity are rising priorities for the region’s citizens and local governments. The conservation and active use of farmland for agriculture are amongst the most important policy issues for planning in the region. The focus of this Discussion Paper is the concept of ‘Agriculture Parks’ as a strategy local government can use to protect farmland and create access to land for farmers while also realizing a full range of other community and environmental benefits. An Agriculture Park (Ag Park) is a park that is accessible to the public providing recreation and wildlife habitat at the same time as providing space and opportunity for a range of food growing and educational opportunities. Although there are common themes that form an Ag Park, there are a range of different models.

“An Ag Park is a combination of a working farm and a municipal park that is located at the urban edge. Ag Parks can serve as transition or buffer zones between urban and agricultural uses. They are designed for multiple uses that accommodate small farms, public areas and natural habitat”.

The Sustainable Agriculture and Education

The role local government can play in the development of Ag parks and examples of Ag park models occurring in the region are described. At the municipal level, Parks Departments have overseen the development of allotment and community gardens, as well as the installation of edible plantings in parks and boulevards. There are many aspects about Ag parks that are pertinent to this discussion and they are also covered in this paper: acquisition, design, activities, programs, development, management, and partnerships. Examples of Ag parks in BC, North America and the world help to illustrate the multi-purpose aspect of these parks and the people they serve.

This paper then looks at a current property that has been acquired by the District of Saanich – Panama Flats. This site has an agricultural history and has the potential to become a flagship Ag Park for the region. The bio-physic and neighbourhood features are detailed alongside the jurisdictional policy that could support an Ag park endeavour.

In regards to our case study on Panama Flats, some ‘Next Steps’ identified in this Policy Discussion Paper are:

- Community consultation about the development of the Flats; this includes looking at the potential of agriculture uses, mapping of potential land areas suitable for agriculture (alongside ecological systems and other values and uses)
- Review studies of land, soil, and water to determine land suitability and seasonality for agriculture
- Request new studies to be done as required?
- Assessment of buildings and infrastructure, potential for food hub?
- Determine land access and infrastructure needs of interested urban growers and commercial producers
- Survey surrounding neighborhood residents and businesses to determine support and concerns for agricultural use on the flats and potential for consumer interaction and

1 Website retrieved December 2012. [http://www.sagecenter.org](http://www.sagecenter.org)
support

- Determine partnerships, interests, roles and resources, and opportunities
- Explore potential funding
- Develop a plan for the “Way Forward”

More broadly, some important steps are identified that would be helpful in actualizing Ag Parks in the Capital Region:

- Increase public awareness about regional farmland issues and the benefits of strategies such as Ag Parks.
- Secure a Policy Direction in the CRD’s Regional Sustainability Strategy (RSS).
- Raise public awareness and support for agricultural uses on public lands, with a specific focus on parks or Ag Parks.
- Public and municipal advocacy for the expansion of the definition of parks within our municipalities and Regional District to include Ag Parks
- Raise awareness about the potential to accept gifts of farmland or purchase farmland that can honour the farm heritage and be kept in production through the Ag Park model
- Consider the potential to access the resources and infrastructure in place for Parks acquisition and management to support Ag Park acquisition, development and management

This Policy Discussion Paper and associated Policy Brief (condensed version) are available in the Policy Section of the CR-FAIR page at http://www.communitycouncil.ca/CRFAIR
Overview: Policy Discussion Paper Series

The Capital Region Food and Agriculture Initiatives Roundtable (CR-FAIR) is a group of 30 food and farm supporting organizations working towards positive change in the food and agriculture system in the Capital Region of British Columbia. A focus of CR-FAIR’s work is creating an enabling and supportive environment for local food production and a sustainable regional food system. Participation and collaboration from a broad range of actors is required to develop a regional food system; supportive local government policy and action has helped our community improve the strength and resilience of our food system. CR-FAIR aims to explore how an emerging concept and practice coined ‘Municipally Supported and Enabled Agriculture’ (MESA), can support and grow the viability of our regional food system. The concept is that:

Local governments can enhance and support local-scale, human-intensive, environmentally sound agri-food systems that can have direct and positive impacts on local and regional economies, protect and preserve farmland against urban sprawl, and promote increased food production, distribution and consumption self-reliance.

In the Policy Discussion Papers and companion Policy Briefs, we examine one of the most pressing issues in our region: agricultural land use and the opportunity local government has in working towards long-term systemic solutions to the challenges of land conservation and access to that land by food producers. These papers outline different approaches or models to reach that goal.

The ‘Policy Discussion Paper Series’ includes the following Policy Discussion Papers and associated Policy Briefs:

1. Policy Discussion Paper One: Role of Local Government in Farmland and Farm Viability
2. Policy Discussion Paper Two: Regional Farmland Conservation and Access Program
5. Accompanying Policy Briefs that summarize each Paper

The first paper examines the role Local Government has in supporting and enabling our regional food system. Increasingly Local Governments are taking a more comprehensive approach to local food system planning and using different tools and strategies to address many of the challenges that agriculture faces. We propose that Local Governments look closely at their current approaches in promoting local food systems and examine opportunities to incorporate additional innovations in planning and action in their jurisdictions.

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3 Ibid.

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Each of the other three Discussion Papers put forward strategies to accompany tools and actions currently being used by local governments, with a particular focus on fostering development of new farmers, protecting farmland into the future, supplying long-term access to land, and inevitably increasing local food production capacity. The Discussion Papers explain the concepts, provide examples, and examine policy and action opportunities. Recommendations are made in each paper for ‘Next Steps’ to explore these ideas in the Capital Region. The three papers should provide excellent fodder for discussion during the Regional Sustainability Strategy process. Each of the Policy Discussion Papers will be summarized in a Policy Brief. These papers and briefs can be found at www.communitycouncil/CRFAIR.

Who is the Audience?
CR-FAIR would like these Discussion Papers to be a resource for those interested in the role of local and regional governments in regional food systems. All four papers are laden with tools, models and examples which provide a springboard for discussion and action by communities, the agricultural sector, local governments, and funding agencies. There is much to investigate and much to be gained from local government involvement and leadership in food system policy and farmland conservation.

Our Aim - Stimulating Thought, Discussion and Action
A sustainable food system is one in which food production, processing, distribution, consumption and the disposal of end products are integrated to enhance the environmental, economic, social and nutritional health of a particular community and place. There is a critical need in our region to improve all aspects of our food system. This series examines the production (land use) end of this spectrum, and how our local governments can develop long-term strategies that can ensure regional capacity for producing locally produced foods into the future. It is CR-FAIR’s objective to see these series read, discussed and investigated by the public, food and agriculture organizations, and at the local, regional and provincial government level. Next steps are listed in each paper and CR-FAIR will be following up on these within the process of the Regional Sustainability Strategy, and in promoting such policies and actions in the future.
Introduction

The first report in this Policy Discussion Paper Series, ‘Role of Local Government in Promoting Farmlands and Farm Viability’, explores the role local government can play in supporting farmland conservation and farmer accessibility. The focus of this Discussion Paper is the concept of ‘Agriculture Parks’ as a strategy local government can use to protect farmland and create access to land for farmers while also realizing a full range of other community and environmental benefits.

The standard view of a park is that it is protected land that offers a mix of purposes ranging from the preservation of green space, to recreational opportunities, to a place that enhances and restores biodiversity. It is typically a place for the public to enjoy and experience. An ‘Agriculture Park or Farm Park’ brings together a community’s interest and need of a public space to experience, celebrate, and steward natural areas, while also supporting food production that benefits the community in many ways. An Agriculture Park (Ag Park) is a park that is accessible to the public providing recreation and wildlife habitat at the same time as providing space and opportunity for a range of food growing and educational opportunities. Although there are common themes that form an Ag Park, there are a range of different models.

“An Ag Park is a combination of a working farm and a municipal park that is located at the urban edge. Ag Parks can serve as transition or buffer zones between urban and agricultural uses. They are designed for multiple uses that accommodate small farms, public areas and natural habitat”.

The Sustainable Agriculture and Education

This Discussion Paper investigates the Ag Parks model as a means for local government to create an innovative approach to the rural urban interface, and their quest to create livable communities that support and promote health, well being and agriculture. The conventional outlook on the role of parks is examined with a lens on how Ag Parks can be designed and managed to meet public objectives of recreation, ecosystem function and agricultural interest. Examples of Ag Parks in BC, North America and the world are provided. We look at one case study in the region, Panama Flats, as a municipal property that has the potential to be an Agriculture Park while also helping the municipality meet local government planning and sustainability goals. Specific next steps are recommended to take this strategy forward for Panama Flats. Looking at regional parkland with a lens on Ag Parks is also recommended and steps to move in that direction are outlined in the final section.

What is an “Agriculture Park”?  

An Agriculture Park (Ag Park) is a park that is accessible to the public providing recreational and wildlife habitat at the same time as providing space and opportunity for a range of food growing and educational opportunities. Although there are common themes that form an agriculture park, there are a range of different Agriculture Park models. They may:

1. preserve farmlands, most predominantly on the urban edge
2. increase public access to, and education about, food production
3. provide assistance to young or limited resource farmers through providing access to land and “farm incubation” and training grounds

4. provide space for walking, picnicking and recreation
5. act as a natural reserve area that provides valuable habitat and offers interpretive programming in order to educate the general public and student groups about ecosystems, watersheds, and environmentally sustainable and regenerative agricultural practices.
6. Often provide ways of financing park operations through programming, farm leases, agriculture production, and events.

Some features of agriculture parks that make them attractive to local governments and communities is that they allow small farm operations access to secure land and local markets. They provide fresh food, and an educational, environmental and an aesthetic amenity for nearby communities.

Ag Parks, also known as “Farm Parks”, “Food Parks” or “Foodshed Parks” can be located on either public or private land, vary in acreage, host single or multiple tenants, and have a variety of both agricultural and park components. The creation of a classification of parks where an agriculture program can be developed is not intended to develop natural areas parks into farms but looks to a new classification of parks, one where an agriculture program could be developed over time in harmony with the historical or geophysical characteristics of the site.

Ag Parks can come in all shapes and sizes. In the Capital Region there are some examples of larger Ag Parks, such as Newman Farm in Central Saanich, and also public spaces that demonstrate elements of Ag Parks on a micro-scale. These include Wark St. Commons⁵, Banfield Commons⁶ and Springridge Commons⁷. While there are a few initiatives that could be considered Ag Parks in Canada, there are many more examples in the United States. This is particularly true in California where there has been huge growth and development of urban centres that abut agriculture land. There are also many examples of Ag Parks internationally and this is outlined on page 17.

Role of Local Government and Parks
Over the last 15 years we have seen local governments step up within their policy and planning capabilities to examine and respond to the food/agriculture systems within their area. Paper #1 of this Discussion Series ‘Role of Local Government in Promoting Farmlands and Farm Viability’ examines the role of Local Government in land use planning and agriculture, and outlines the importance and jurisdiction for local government to be involved in promoting initiatives such as Farm Parks. Planners today are realizing that many benefits emerge from stronger community and regional food systems and Ag Parks can be one mechanism among a number of strategies to get there⁸. Significantly, the Capital Regional District is currently developing a Food Strategy as one of its cornerstone policies of the Sustainability Strategy for the region. Of note for this paper are the following goals for the food strategy (based on the their stakeholder engagement process):

1. Protect the land base for food production by securing and expanding the region’s farmlands
2. Increase the viability and diversification of food production while preventing non farm use of agricultural land.

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⁷ Webpage retrieved December 2012. [http://sc.consciouschoices.ca/](http://sc.consciouschoices.ca/)
3. Increase food self-sufficiency and community resilience.

4. Work toward environmentally sustainable food systems

Looking at strategies such as the creation of Ag Parks will be part of the conversation to explore how local governments can work together with diverse communities to meet these goals

**Role of Parks**

Traditionally Parks have been spaces for protecting significant natural spaces and ecosystems, preserving heritage and providing opportunities for learning and recreation. In Canada, different jurisdictions manage the following types of parks:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Jurisdiction</th>
<th>Size of Park</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Vision</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>National</td>
<td>Large</td>
<td>National Parks, Historic Parks, Marine Conservation, Wilderness, large natural areas</td>
<td>Commemorate, protect and present places that are significant examples of Canada’s cultural and natural heritage.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provincial</td>
<td>Large</td>
<td>Wilderness, large natural areas, conservation, hiking trails, campgrounds</td>
<td>BC Parks are parks, protected areas and conservation land held as a public trust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional (CRD)</td>
<td>7,000 to 5 hectares</td>
<td>Conservation, wilderness, natural area, outdoor recreation parks</td>
<td>Regional parks protect natural areas that define the geography of the CRD. Provide opportunities for non-motorized outdoor recreation experiences and activities for residents of the region. Regional trails provide a transportation route for commuting or recreation on designated corridors, and habitat for wildlife and plants.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Municipal/Electoral Area</td>
<td>1-100 hectares</td>
<td>Sports fields, playgrounds, recreation centres, trails, nature parks</td>
<td>Local parks, trails and pathways, playgrounds, natural areas, ecologically significant areas, altered landscapes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Island Trust (Gulf Islands)</td>
<td>1011 ha protected</td>
<td>Natural areas and covenants</td>
<td>Natural areas, ecologically significant habitats for plants and</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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in 80 properties on private land animals

**Capital Regional District**

At the regional level CRD Parks protects and manages more than 13,000 hectares of natural areas in 33 regional parks and trails on southern Vancouver Island and the Gulf Islands. The new CRD Regional Parks Strategic Plan (RPSP) sets the direction for regional parks and trails over the next decade and beyond. In June 2012, the CRD Board approved the Regional Parks Strategic Plan and supplementary Financial Program.

One thing that was learned from the process is that:

“Parks and trails have immense health benefits and are integral to both the ecological health of the region and to human health and wellness. The emphasis on healthy ecosystems and correspondingly to human health has taken a higher profile in people’s minds, particularly since the development of the 2000 Parks Master Plan. The increased importance of ecological health and associated human health is woven into the goals and strategic priorities.”

The RPSP also prioritizes the ability of regional parks to support the goals of the CRD Sustainability Strategy, which now encompasses local food security.

**Municipal Level**

At the municipal level, Parks Departments have overseen the development of allotment and community gardens, as well as the installation of edible plantings in parks and boulevards. The City of Victoria has also just launched a pilot project supporting agriculture in parks – see text box on the next page. Recently OCPs and Parks planning has taken a more serious look at growing food in Parks. The Saanich OCP looks to increase social well being; Food Security is one of the four indicators. Their goal is that, ‘Residents enjoy food security through the safeguarding of agricultural land and the promotion of community gardens and urban farming’.

The recent Parks, Recreation and Culture Master Plan works towards implementing this goal through Key Strategic Objective #SWB-5: Local Food Production.

“Explore the opportunities within the park and recreation system for individuals and communities to grow food locally.”

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10 CRD Parks website. Retrieved June 2012 [http://www.crd.bc.ca/parks/](http://www.crd.bc.ca/parks/)
There are implications for parks as well as local governments in the creation of Ag Parks. One may be the need to change the definition of Parks or add another classification of parks within the local or regional parks system.

Other implications may be:

- Need to partner with the food and agriculture community organizations, industry or academic partners to support the development and maintenance of Ag Parks
- Hire or train park managers and employees to better understand, manage and maintain agriculture features and activities in parks; and create partnerships with organizations with expertise and capacity
- Develop policy related to new activities and public-private partnerships in Ag Parks
- Adjust parks planning, development and maintenance processes, schedules and activities
- Look at Parks Acquisition planning and priorities in relation to Ag Parks

The City of Victoria is partnering with two neighbourhoods on a Community Orchard Pilot Program and a community centre-based Kitchen Garden Pilot. A Community Orchard is a grove of fruit or nut trees in a **PUBLIC PARK** where a community group participates in the care, maintenance and harvesting of the trees. The food that is produced is then shared with the community. The Kitchen Garden project at the Fernwood Community Centre will transform the centre’s 1800 square foot front decorative garden beds that are currently maintained by City staff, into edible food gardens that will be managed by the Fernwood Neighbourhood Resource Group.


**Details on Agriculture Parks**

**Acquisition and Designation**
As previously stated, the intention of Ag Parks is **not** to develop natural areas into farms. The creation of Ag Parks looks to the development of a park type with its own distinct features and opportunities. Often Ag Parks are created from acquired or gifted land that has previously been a farm. Currently the CRD has a few properties that were once farmland (including Aylard Farm in East Sooke and Island View Beach Regional Park in Central Saanich). The CRD acquires new parkland through the Parks Acquisition Fund, and involves a range of partners.

**CRD Parks Land Acquisitions 2000 to 2010**

14 Webpage retrieved December 2012. [http://www.crd.bc.ca/parks/preservation/newparks.htm](http://www.crd.bc.ca/parks/preservation/newparks.htm)

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Since the establishment of the Land Acquisition Fund in 2000, Regional Parks, with its partners, has purchased 4,485 hectares of land totaling $48,018,264. Of that total, Regional Parks has contributed $34,887,559 (73%) and partners have contributed $13,130,705 (27%).

The Land Acquisition Fund was initially established in 2000. It is based on the vision and strategic direction in the Regional Parks Master Plan, which sets the direction for regional parks and trails for 2011-2020 and beyond. The Parks Master Plan states that parks will work to fulfill the sustainability goals for the region; acquiring parkland with agriculture potential could be part of this strategy.

Municipalities are gifted land or purchase land to meet their planning priorities and goals, and this can also involve external partners. Newman Farm and Haliburton Community Farm are examples of farms in the region that are operated as public amenities, and are featured below.

**Design**

Each Ag Park is different based on the natural features, the community interests and needs, potential partners, resources available and the goals set out for the Park. Ag Parks can be a mix of many different features including demonstration sites, community gardens, incubator farms, larger leases to farmers, recreation trails, picnic sites and natural areas. Another consideration is to look at potential park sites that are underutilized and the use of low maintenance perennial ‘Food Forests’ that have plants such as berries, fruit trees, and nut trees. These areas could provide food, opportunities for education, and be designed in such a way that they don’t interfere with the aesthetics and current uses of a multi-use park. Some Parks may also have heritage values or watershed functions that must be considered. The goals and features of the Park will be paramount in planning the site design and management model.

Some standard features that will be needed on site include parking, restrooms, fencing, water access, signage and refuse and recycling receptacles. Other built options may also be a gathering place with picnic tables and a covered area. If the Ag Park will have larger commercial production other amenities could include irrigation, storage sheds, greenhouses, animal barns or shelters, office, and farm market stand. A fenced storage area that keeps things organized and safe from vandalism and theft is also useful. Some Ag Parks, such as the Earthbound Farm Organic Kitchen in California, also have community kitchens and Farm Cafés.

Some of the important benefits that can be afforded by Ag Park design are:

- Recreation opportunity from: walking, biking trails, and gardening/farming activities
- Protection of natural areas, stewardship of ecosystems, storm water management
- Education and learning activities
- Increased access to fresh fruits and vegetables and farm products
- Promotion of social cohesion and cultural celebration
- Access to diverse products/activities: beekeeping, livestock and poultry, berries, field and forage crops, herbs, milk, dairy and eggs, flowers, nursery crops, tree fruits and nuts, grapes, mushrooms, forest and wildcrafted products
- Community economic development and poverty reduction initiatives

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One of the important parts of design of the Ag Park relates to its interface with the surrounding community. Often Ag Parks sit at the rural urban edge and can serve as a buffer or transitional space. In some cases consideration may be needed to create buffers between surrounding uses and the Ag Park itself. Some potential conflicts on urban rural edges relate to storm water management, rodents and pests, pollen, dust, noise, odours, bees, flies, and traffic. There are a range of features that can be built into Ag Park design to assist with these types conflicts including: vegetative buffers, built walls, fences or buildings, waterways, habitat corridors, and roads, paths and trails.

While the Ag Park idea and the development of an Ag Park system in the CRD would have significant impact in increasing the food production capacity in the area, it must be made clear that the design of Ag Parks is meant to have multiple benefits. Where public land is utilized, a great deal of public good can and should be realized through promotion of wildlife, recreation, education and community building opportunities. These are explored more thoroughly in the next section.

**Potential Features and Activities**

Ag Parks can offer one or a mix of activities and features. The following is a list of some of the kinds of activities that occur on existing Ag Parks across North America.

1. **Education and Outreach Opportunities**

   Public education and outreach about food growing is seen as a priority in the region, both by the CRD (i.e. Growing Climate Solutions Program) and by municipalities who are supporting food production primarily via partner groups or through recreation services. Invaluable experiential learning can be organized and delivered by the Parks and Recreation Department or by partnering organizations or individuals; opportunities are diverse and may include:

   - **Demonstration Sites:** Provide residents the ability to see food production up close and personal. Demonstrations of activities people may not normally experience such as bee-keeping or small animal husbandry can provide valuable examples that inspire and encourage backyard food production. Demonstrations of effective growing technologies such as Small Plot Intensive growing (SPIN), greenhouse production, conservation irrigation, watercourse protection, and pollinator promoting gardens can support the goal of ‘bolstering residents capacity to increase household food security as well as environmental stewardship’.

   - **Workshops and Classes:** Having a site for a hands-on workshop is invaluable and can span a range of topics including horticulture, nutrition and environmental stewardship. These types of activities can be catered to all ages, from children to seniors and to different user groups such as schools, youth at risk or special needs children or adults.

   - **Tours:** Volunteers, farmers on site, or park staff, can lead tours of the Ag Park. Other than providing education, tours can build interest and support for the Park and its activities.

   - **Summer Camps:** Many Ag Parks offer summer programming for children. Not only does this have recreational and education benefits for the children, but this activity also acts as a revenue generator for the park.
• **Apprenticeships or Internships:** Participating in the activities of the Ag Park through an apprenticeship or internship offers great hands on mentorship for new farmers. This hands on opportunity from more experienced farmers is invaluable.

• **Volunteer and “Friends” Programs:** A wide diversity of volunteer activities are possible; these benefit not only the Ag Park through the donated service, but also the volunteer from having a rewarding experience. “Friends of” programs provide an avenue for residents/public who want to support the park through work parties, fundraising etc. to support the park and its programs.

• **Community Celebration and Gathering Spaces:** Having passive recreation on site, where people can walk on trails, sit and enjoy the view, picnic and hold community gatherings and celebrations is another added amenity that Ag Parks can afford. Some host private functions such as weddings and family reunions as revenue generators.

2. **Training and Technical Programs**

An Ag Park can offer a range of services to new and existing growers. These services could be delivered either by the Parks and Recreation Program or in partnership with academic institutions, local non-profit organizations or contracted services. The types of programs that could be offered at an Ag Park:

• **Farm School, Training and Technical Support:** There are a wide range of training programs that offer technical support on production, processing, business planning and marketing. An academic organization is often partnered with to deliver these programs. There is a huge need for “farm extension” programs that were once supported by the Ministry of Agriculture but are no longer available to local farmers.

• **Research:** Ag Parks can involve partners from academic, agriculture and private companies who conduct research to look at such things as adaptation to climate change, plant varieties, integrated pest management, to different growing technologies. Other research could look at the role of parks in promotion of the Social Determinants of Health, Horticulture Therapy Programs, and Promotion of Community Resilience.

• **Incubator Programs:** These programs are offered to new growers, and in some cases low-income growers, and are most often delivered by nonprofit organizations. Most programs offer infrastructure and support to start up farm businesses that allow them access to between 0.5-3 acres at no cost, or a reasonable rate. Programs often provide irrigation, fencing, greenhouse, storage, shared equipment and marketing support with the goal of growing new farm businesses. The Terra Nova Ag Park in Richmond is a good example of such a program that partners with the Kwantlen Polytechnical Farm School Program and offers farmer participants a plot of land for up to three years.

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• **Community, School and Job Training Gardens**: Offering spaces for experiential learning in a range of garden types where participants gain knowledge and practical skills. This training is not as extensive as the incubator model.

3. **Agriculture programs**

Agriculture programs support the production and sale of local food to residents in the region. An important aspect of this activity is to minimize perceived or actual competitive advantage to participating farmers. Ways to ensure this happens is to make the programs accessible to all farmers or to charge market rates for any land or services offered.

• **Access to Land and Infrastructure for Commercial Operators**: Creating leases with commercial growers is a common occurrence in existing Ag Parks. The State of Hawaii owns and manages over 3,600 acres that it leases to farmers in parcels of 20 acres or smaller. These arrangements may include land, or also access to other Ag Park amenities such as greenhouses and storage facilities. This type of lease is already in place on public lands in the Capital Region; the Airport Authority leases land to farmers in North Saanich.

• **Marketing**: Ag Parks can support the development of marketing opportunities both on and off site. This includes creation of a marketing stand, farmer’s market, community supported agriculture or “box” program, Farm-to-School program, farm to restaurants, the creation of a farm brand or assisting with farm marketing cooperatives.

• **Food Hubs and Value-Added Supports**: Farmers can also benefit from post-harvest facilities that provide space for washing, handling, and storage of goods. They can increase the value of their products through processing (referred to as ‘adding value’) because they can sell their products year round and provide consumer-ready foods. These products allow residents another way to access and experience local food and flavours. Two ways Ag Parks are undertaking this role is through the creation of food hubs and community kitchens on site and via the aforementioned farm stands and farm cafés.

**Development, Management and Partnerships**

Parks are developed and managed under a range of models and agreements based on the unique features of the park and the different activities that occur there. This would be no different for Ag Parks. The different phases of park development include: acquisition; planning; development; and ongoing operations. These stages may require different partners and management structures for Ag Parks.

Considerable research and consultation would be undertaken in the development phase of a park to determine the best fit for the land and community. A plan would need to be developed including many aspects such as the capital and operating costs, and possible partnerships. Many parks would already have a range of policies in place that would be applicable to Ag Parks (in particular around community gardens), however policies related to the specific needs and concerns of the Ag Park would need to be developed.
According to research from SAGE\textsuperscript{18}, the management model for Ag Parks on public lands operates on a few levels. The public agency, in our case regional or local governments (potentially School District or other authority), would have jurisdiction over the Ag Park as a whole and manage the overall park and its components (most likely through the Parks and Recreation department). This model is exhibited at Newman Farm, which is a District of Central Saanich property that is operated by the Farmlands Trust\textsuperscript{19}. The Trust is to develop the farm and bring it into public use. They could then either work with a partner (such as an existing organization or new entity) that would have the role of development and/or operations of the park under an agreement. The partner may also have more management responsibility (i.e the Haliburton Community Organic Farm Society – see page 17).

Generally this entity (the partner) would work to develop and/or implement the plan (and potentially the business plan) created for the park and be responsible to the local government. This entity would need its own governance, staff, volunteers and insurance to carry out this role. The organization may work with a wide range of groups to develop, coordinate and manage specific aspects of the Ag Park. It may or may not receive funding from the local government to undertake this service.

Another model sees the Local Government/Parks Department working to coordinate a number of agencies to implement specific programs related to their area of activity and expertise. Partnerships or agreements could be held with the following:

- Agriculture and food organizations
- Ecological and watershed stewardship organizations
- Youth and 4-H
- Schools
- Arts organizations
- Neighborhood houses and associations
- Community colleges
- Universities
- Health authority and community nutritionists
- Residents
- Urban Growers
- Farmers
- Other Private Businesses or Contractors

**The Use of Leases:**
As is practice in parks currently, areas of a park are often leased out to organizations or private business to operate specific park services or functions. Prospective Ag Park tenants could include established farmers, new farmers, agriculture and food community organizations, apprenticeship programs, and university programs. Revenues from leases are one way that Ag Parks can off-set some of their costs.

Farmers would need to understand the special circumstances of being part of an Ag Park; there would likely be both special support and unique challenges presented by farming on public land. Many farmers (especially new farmers) have indicated a need and interest in sharing infrastructure and/or working in

\textsuperscript{18} Website retrieved December 2012. http://www.sagecenter.org
\textsuperscript{19} Webpage retrieved December 2012. http://www.farmlandtrust.ca/
collaboration with other farmers, which is often the case in an Ag Park setting. Farmers have indicated a willingness to pay higher rates for land with infrastructure such as irrigation, fencing, greenhouses, and market stands in place\(^{20}\). In surveying organizations such as the Richmond Incubator Farm Project (which supports new growers) it was discovered that there is an interest and good fit for farming one to 3 acre parcels\(^{21}\). Long-term leases of no less than five years are preferable for established farmers, while new farmers are amenable to one to three year agreements for “farm incubation” programs, and where they have the prospects of moving onto land they either purchase or can have a long-term lease on.

**Ag Park Examples**

There are a range of Ag Park models which illustrate at least one and preferably several of the features outlined above. In particular, models with these features were sought out:

- Public land adjacent to urban centers
- Situated in North America with similar culture, history and land use planning frameworks
- Sites that had previously had some agriculture activity
- Ag Park had active agriculture taking place

We also looked for examples that:

- Incorporated watershed considerations
- Looked to promote and preserve wildlife habitat
- Had other recreation activities on site, especially walking trails
- Provided access to farmers with limited resources
- Increased public education about local food and access to an active farm
- Similar in size to Panama Flats (25 hectare) (the case study examined in this paper)

While not all of the examples have all of these criteria, many had multiple aspects that provide great examples of working models. The examples that best fit our criteria locally, in North America and globally are outlined below.

**British Columbia Examples**

1. Newman Farm, Central Saanich
2. Haliburton Farm, Sanaich
3. Terra Nova Farm, Richmond
4. Loutet Park Urban Agriculture Project, City of North Vancouver
5. Colony Farm Regional Park, Metro Vancouver
6. MESA Farm Park Pilot, Langley
7. Ruckle Park, Saltspring Island

**North America Examples:**

- Sunol Water Temple Ag Park, California
- Martial Cottle Park, California
- Hawaii State Agriculture Park Program, Hawaii

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\(^{20}\) CR-FAIR has gleaned this info from farmer events such as ‘Farmer to Farmer’

\(^{21}\) Personal communications with Richmond Incubator Farmer Colin Frith
International Examples:
- Barcelona Agriculture Park, Spain
- Shah Anam Ag Park, Malaysia

British Columbia Examples

1. Newman Farm Park, Central Saanich

Newman Farm is a 6.6 hectare (16.3 acre) municipally owned park located within one kilometre of Saanichton Village, in the District of Central Saanich. Though a single legal parcel, the Farm is crossed by the Patricia Bay Highway, Central Saanich Road and Lochside Drive, forming three separate land areas, two of which are located within the Agricultural Land Reserve. In July 2003 Newman Farm was officially transferred to the District of Central Saanich for use as public parkland. A master planning process was undertaken in 2006/07 in order to provide the District with direction for development and management of the Farm as parkland. In May of 2012 Central Saanich signed a three year management agreement with the Farmland Trust to manage the development and operation of Newman Farm.

The property offers an opportunity within the Central Saanich Park System to provide a unique community asset with an opportunity to engage people in a number of areas, including:
- Agriculture
- Heritage
- Ecology
- Education
- Recreation and park use

The Newman Farm Master Plan states that many of the attributes that characterize Central Saanich, including its agricultural setting, history, ocean frontage and natural landscape, are represented on the Newman Farm property.

2. Haliburton Community Organic Farm, District of Saanich

Webpage retrieved December 2012. [http://www.centralsaanich.ca/hall/Departments/planning/community_services/Parks/Parks_Inventory/Newman_Farm.htm](http://www.centralsaanich.ca/hall/Departments/planning/community_services/Parks/Parks_Inventory/Newman_Farm.htm)


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Haliburton Farm is not a park but is designated within a specially created “Rural Demonstration Farm Zone”, by Saanich. It operates much like an Ag Park. In 2001 the 4 hectare property, located in the Agriculture Land Reserve, was scheduled for a housing development. Concerned citizens worked with Saanich to purchase the land. The Haliburton Community Organic Farm Society was established to lease the land from Saanich and steward the site. The property has a water reservoir, wetland, forested area, fruit orchard, and cultivated areas that are farmed by four farm business who have leases with the society. There is also a teaching garden and farm stand. The previous residence acts as a site office and meeting space.

There is considerable community involvement in the site, with farm volunteers and educational activities as listed on their website:

- workshops for organic farmers, gardeners, and consumers
- opportunities for farmer-driven research
- opportunities to host post-secondary student research projects
- educational activities for school groups
- volunteer activities for community members

3. Terra Nova Rural Park, Richmond

Terra Nova is a rural park in Richmond that has a mix of activities within a park setting: Sharing Farm, which is a community garden that provides fruits and vegetables to emergency food agencies in Richmond; The Richmond Farm School where new growers can learn the basics of farming, processing, marketing and sales; and an incubator farm where new farmers and graduates of the Farm School can access plots of land, up to one acre for three years, to kick start their farm business. The park has the potential to have over 186 acres in production.

4. **Loutet Park Urban Agriculture Project, City of North Vancouver**

The Loutet urban farm is located at Rufus Avenue and East 14th Street. This urban agriculture pilot project is a publicly accessible and inclusive space with aesthetic and experiential appeal. It is described as “intriguing and educational”, with goals for maximizing food production to a commercially-viable level within a not-for-profit organizational structure. It is administered by the North Shore Neighbourhood House, a not-for-profit society. The goal is to create a socially, economically and environmentally self-sustaining not-for-profit enterprise. Envisioned as a way to help people get back in touch with growing food, the farm will also enable people to buy locally-grown food that the community at large can enjoy - versus a community garden where plots are designated to individuals. Any income will be reinvested into the project to pay salaries, purchase seeds, tools, etc. The commercial aspect of this site is only a means to an end, with the end being the creation of an ecologically, financially and socially self-sustaining space within a park. The farm will be managed by two farmers with experience in intensive, organic food production.

The City will monitor the project on an ongoing basis as a model for using public land in a non-traditional park or recreational manner. The City’s intent is to have a commercially-viable and efficient urban agriculture model created that inspires members of the community to use it as a public amenity. It will serve to educate the public about food security issues.

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5. **Colony Farm Regional Park, Coquitlam**\(^{27}\)

Colony Farm was developed through a community planning process that looked to balance needs for habitat conservation along with goals for local food security and sustainability. It was originally a Federal Government Experimental Farm that is now owned by Metro Vancouver. The farm totals 647 acres, and some of the land is used primarily for farming, some for habitat, and some for both farm and habitat, to show how habitat can coexist with agriculture or even be enhanced with animal and bird hedgerows, corridors and trails. The main farm is 40 acres and produces berries, livestock and produce in a market garden. Another 77 acres is made up of 2 to 10 acre micro farms operating as small managed parcels and 32 acres is set aside for the use of schools, universities, allotment and therapeutic gardens.

6. **MESA Farm Park Pilot, Langley**\(^{28}\)

The Institute of Sustainable Horticulture (ISH) has entered into a partnership with the City of Langley, BC to assess the viability of a Municipally Enabled and Supported Agriculture (MESA) demonstration project utilizing a BC Hydro Right of Way. The project was initiated over two years ago when ISH partnering with the Collaborative Applied Landscape Planning (CALP) team at the University of British Columbia to

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\(^{27}\) Webpage retrieved December 2012.  
[http://www.metrovancouver.org/services/parks_lscr/regionalparks/Pages/ColonyFarm.aspx](http://www.metrovancouver.org/services/parks_lscr/regionalparks/Pages/ColonyFarm.aspx)

\(^{28}\) Webpage retrieved December 2012.  
[http://www.kwantlen.ca/ish/research/agri-food/projects.html](http://www.kwantlen.ca/ish/research/agri-food/projects.html)
produce a concept plan for the City of Langley, which provides an overall vision for the site. This vision sees the site divided into four distinct zones:

**Zone 1:** ‘The Entrance’, is an area for public interaction and to host a farmers market, as well as for demonstration of sustainable accessibility features such as permeable green parking lots and bike parking.

**Zone 2:** ‘Demo and Research’, will be an area dedicated to plots for research and demonstrations of organic gardening features.

**Zone 3:** ‘Production’, is where community gardens and market gardens will be located and incubator farm space made available for graduates of the Richmond Farm School and other Kwantlen agriculture programs.

**Zone 4:** ‘Natural Systems’, will be an area that will increase the biodiversity of the local area and provide ecosystem services. The entire site will incorporate flowering hedgerows and connect with adjacent greenways and habitat corridors. Currently, the project is in the initial start-up phase - gathering information to convey the nature, elements and purpose of the proposed project.

### North America Examples

1. **Sunol Water Temple Ag Park, California**

Located in the San Francisco Bay Area, this model Ag Park is located on 18 acres of land leased by the non-profit group, Sustainable Agriculture Education (SAGE) from the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission. Six farmer tenants work rented plots in the park and sell their produce at farmers' markets.

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produce stands, to restaurants and through CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) programs. Tenants jointly share infrastructure, get training in organic agriculture practices and pay rent and water costs.

2. **Martial Cottle Park, California**

Martial Cottle Park is a 290 acre site located in a mixed residential and commercial neighborhood of San Jose California, under the jurisdiction of the Santa Clara County Parks Department. The Lester family gifted it to the county under agreement that it be utilized for agriculture education. The park combines productive small-scale agriculture with educational and interpretive elements, community recreation and gardening opportunities. The commercial agriculture component covers about two-thirds of the park. It is currently under a planning process to further develop the park to include more education elements, and picnic and recreational elements. Currently site plans indicate zones for commercial agriculture leasing, a 4H and Youth garden area, a Master Gardening and Demonstration Area, Community Farm, Urban Forestry, Native Plant Nursery, and Visitor Center. Plans also include exploration of building a market and produce stand to sell to the adjacent residents as well as develop a packing facility that can be utilized to pack CSA boxes or products to market to restaurants, schools and another institutional customers.

3. **Hawaii Agriculture Park Program**

Currently, the Hawai`i Department of Agriculture, manages the Agricultural Park Program which makes land available to small farmers at a reasonable cost with long-term tenure. Through its Agricultural Resource Management Division, it operates ten agricultural parks - four on Hawai`i Island, four on O`ahu, and one each on Kaua`i and Moloka`i. In addition, there is one agricultural park on Maui in Kula, but it is managed by the County of Maui. All of the State’s lots are presently under lease. The lessees are engaged in diversified agricultural crops or aquaculture and are small farming enterprises (under 20 acres).

**International Examples**

1. **Baix Llobregat Agricultural Park, Spain**

The Baix Llobregat Agricultural Park is located to the west of Barcelona, approximately 10 minutes from the city centre. It is a valley and delta area that has been the main supplier of fresh fruit and vegetables to the city of Barcelona. Under pressures of urban development the 2,938 hectare park was created with a view to conserving the agricultural and environmental value of these areas.

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30 Webpage retrieved December 2012. [http://www.sccgov.org/sites/parks/Future-Plans-Here/Pages/Martial-Cottle-Park-Project.aspx](http://www.sccgov.org/sites/parks/Future-Plans-Here/Pages/Martial-Cottle-Park-Project.aspx)
The park is comprised of land belonging to 14 municipalities. In 1998, two tiers of local government (the Diputación de Barcelona -Provincial Council of Barcelona- and the Consejo Comarcal -County Council- of El Baix Llobregat) and the leading professional farming organization in Catalonia, the Unió de Pagesos -Farmers Union, together with the 14 municipalities with agricultural land within the Agricultural Park founded the Agricultural Park Consortium with the aim of “to consolidate and develop the basis for land use and to facilitate the continuity of agriculture”.

“The basic mission of the park is to consolidate and develop the territorial base and to foster the continuity of agrarian activity, promoting specific programmes to conserve production, ecological and cultural values in the agrarian space and developing its economic, environmental and social roles in a framework of sustainable agriculture integrated into the territory and in harmony with the natural environment”.

2. Shah Alam Malaysia Agriculture Park, Malaysia

Located in Shah Alam, Malaysia’s first agriculture park was established in 1986. It is 1,295 hectares of tropical rain forest that produces rice, cocoa trees, oil palm, rubber trees, coffee, coconut and other fruit trees. The website points to many attractions for visitors such as the Spice Garden, Ornamental Garden, Orchid Garden, Cactus Garden, Bamboo Garden and Mushroom Garden. The purpose of the park is for tourism, recreation and educational purposes.

Current Context in Capital Region

In the last three decades the population of the CRD has more than doubled, and is expected to increase by another 30% in the next three decades. This has led to significant development pressure on the region’s farmland. As a result of this development pressure, farmland in the region currently sells for $70,000 to $100,000 an acre, a market value which is equivalent to land used for residential and industrial uses. Farm businesses can rarely provide adequate returns to justify this investment. As a result, new farmers struggle to enter the industry, and the region’s stock of farmland is gradually being lost to other non-agricultural uses.

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33 Ibid.
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As an example, to illustrate this point, a study conducted at the University of Victoria recently revealed that in Saanich, land prices rose from an average of $25,480 per hectare in 1974, to $666,504 per hectare in 2006. The study concluded that this price increase may be attributed to speculation on land in the Agriculture Land Reserve (ALR), and to an increase in farm parcels being bought for residential purposes (estate farms)\(^{37}\). With respect to speculation on the ALR, data from the Agricultural Land Commission indicates that of the 12,085 hectares of CRD land placed in the Reserve in 1972, nearly 1,500 hectares has been excluded, with 281 hectares being removed since 2001.

These very serious land use pressures are exacerbated by the fact that farm incomes in the CRD are relatively low. Over half of the farms in the region are small operations of less than 2-3 hectares (10 acres), with total gross farm receipts per hectare close to $6,000\(^{38}\). There were 991 farms reporting in the CRD in 2006 with average gross farm receipts of $54,754\(^{39}\). With over half of region’s farmers hitting the age of retirement in the next decade, we will also see a huge loss in production capacity if we cannot get new entrants into the sector.

Taken together, these characteristics of low farm incomes and high land prices are creating significant barriers in terms of accessing land, farm succession, and for capital investment and innovation in the agriculture sector. The region’s farmland and farmers are under threat and action is required to address and improve the situation. It is beneficial that the region’s population is increasingly interested in and concerned about food security, and the importance of maintaining the capacity to produce local food.

The ability to make land accessible and expand production is a significant need in the region, as is making farming an attractive occupation and activity. Parks could have a role to play in protecting land for agricultural uses and providing access to farmers that need land for production. A case study for an Ag Park in the Capital Region is presented below.

**Possible Agriculture Parks in the Capital Region: Panama Flats**

There are many possibilities in the Capital Region District to look at the development of Agriculture Parks. There is a current opportunity for an Ag park in Saanich - Panama Flats. This section of the Discussion Paper looks at a specific piece of municipal land that has historically been utilized for agriculture and plays a significant role in watershed management and as habitat for birds and other forms of wildlife. Panama Flats was chosen as a case study because:

- It is a publicly owned piece of land (District of Saanich)
- The municipality has supportive policy in place (see page 30)
- The municipality will soon be entering into a public consultation and planning phase for the land

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\(^{39}\) Statistics Canada. 2006. *Census of Agriculture*
Panama Flats has fertile agriculture land and has been farmed for over a century, as well as an agricultural building that would be appropriate for a “food hub”
- There are compatible other uses (recreation, watershed management and wildlife habitat)
- The land is in the Agriculture Land Reserve and abuts a residential area
- It is a agricultural land use planning issue

In this next section we will look at the history and current context of Panama Flats, its potential as an Agriculture Park and conclude with next steps to realize this opportunity.

**Context**

Panama Flats is a 25 hectare (62 acre) tract of land bound by Carey, Interurban, Wilkinson, Roy and McDonald Roads in the District of Saanich. The flats sit near the urban containment boundary and are zoned A-1 Rural, with one third in the Agriculture Land Reserve. The flats are a natural floodplain and wetland that drain into Colquitz Creek. They provide habitat for hundreds of waterfowl and bird species and also play a vital role in stormwater management in the watershed. Panama Flats is surrounded by clay based soils, but has very fertile “peat rich” soils on the flats that are well suited for growing root crops. This area has been farmed since the early 1900’s with grazing for cattle and seasonal crops like potatoes, carrots and corn (crops that can be planted after the water drains in the late spring).

On February 10, 2011 Saanich Council approved the purchase of Panama Flats for $2.4 million with the intention of consulting with the community as to the future uses of the flats. At purchase time, the following were outlined as the community benefits offered by the site:
- Floodplain Management
- Habitat
- Parks and Trails
- Food Security

**Potential for Panama Flats to be an Ag Park**

From the outset, it must be clearly stated that planning and visioning of an Ag Park at Panama Flats must be done in concert with planning for the other values of the park. The agriculture activities must be developed in such a way that the ecosystem, recreational amenities and watershed management role of the site are not compromised, but enhanced.

Consultation must be undertaken with key stakeholders and the general public to spark imagination, create a vision of what Panama Flats
could look like as an Ag Park and to hear the needs of the community. CR-FAIR has heard from discussion with the public that there is a vision for a multifunctional park that integrates the habitat, recreation and watershed management values of Panama flats with agricultural production.

Suggestions have surfaced about seasonal farming being done on the flats and that long-term leases to farmers on the plains portion could remain as a central activity. In addition, there is interest in having a community picnic and demonstration garden, and community gardens above the floodplain along Roy and Carey Roads. There is also interest in investigating the site hydrology to see if there is the potential for modifications that would extend the season of farming. There is keen interest in the potential for an incubator farm either at Panama Flats or at the adjacent park - Quick’s Bottom Park.

Quick’s Bottom Park, District of Saanich. Natural Areas Atlas.

Having two sites close together as part of a network of incubator farms with a food hub would be of great benefit to supporting agriculture in the District.

Panama Flats History

Ancestors of the First Nations people lived in the area we call Saanich for at least 4,000 years before early European settlers arrived in the Greater Victoria area. By the mid-1850s, employees of the
Hudson’s Bay Company and the first colonial settlers embarked on transforming the virgin forests of the Peninsula into one of the oldest agricultural settlements in British Columbia. The farms and dairy herds of Saanich soon became a vital source of food for Victoria’s expanding population and by the turn-of-the-century the district was renowned for its cultivation of fruit and flowers\textsuperscript{41}.

Early assessment roles show that 111 acres was sold to Henry Tyor for 22 pounds. In 1904 it was part of the 1200 hectares of land acquired for farming by Mr. McDonald who had been a chief engineer on the construction of the Panama Canal. The lands and wetland reminded him of the steamy jungles of South America and he dubbed the area “Panama Flats”.

Throughout the early 1900’s the flats were used to grow root crops that could be planted after the plain drained, and for summer grazing of cattle. Over the years small ditches for irrigation and to drain flooded areas were developed. Applications for subdivision in 1910 and 1911 were turned down by Saanich due to the flooding issues. In the 1940’s it was also the home of a “modern” dairy farm operated by John Edge. In 1978 it was purchased by the Vantreight Family who farmed it seasonally for over twenty years. Geoff Vantreight saw the promise in Panama Flats for potato production, however in order to make the land more productive he needed to decrease the flooding. He could deepen the ditches and build a pump house, however he ran into problems as he would need to build part of this infrastructure on Saanich owned adjacent lands. A political tangle ensued which was complicated by the fact that Vantreight was also a District Alderman at the time. Vantreight’s had a refrigerated barn, warehouse and outbuildings on the site and did some work to deepen the ditches producing over 1200 pounds of potatoes a season in the early years.

The Island Berry Company purchased the land in 2007 and initiated work to develop a blueberry and grape operation on the site. In an attempt to make the land more productive they began to bring fill onto the flats to develop a berm along the edge of the watercourse. There was much public outcry and concern over the alteration of the floodplain and wetland ecology and resulting increase in flooding that would occur downstream; the District of Saanich put a fill injunction in place to stop the fill from being deposited on the farmland. Part of the flats sits in the Agriculture Land Reserve and because developing berms is a permitted farm practice, the Island Berry Company farm plan was approved by the Agriculture Land Commission. The Island Berry Company also believed that they were in their “Right to Farm\textsuperscript{42}” by building the berms. With the potential for a long drawn out legal battle in front of them, the District decided to purchase the lands to preserve a valuable asset for watershed and flood management, wildlife habitat and to promote regional food security.

**Site Features/Description**

Panama Flats is a 25 hectare (or approx. 62 acre) tract of land bound by Carey, Interurban, Wilkinson, Roy and McDonald Roads in the District of Saanich. The flats are specifically designated as outside the Urban Containment Boundary and are zoned A-1 Rural, with one third in the Agriculture Land Reserve. The Flats currently play different roles within the environmental and social landscape.

\textsuperscript{41} District of Saanich webpage retrieved May 2012. http://www.saanich.ca/discover/artsheritagearc/heritage/heritage.html

Rainwater/Stormwater Management

Panama Flats play a vital role in rainwater management for the Wilkinson Valley. The Colquitz creek is a major collector of rainwater in the area, with seasonal rains and storms resulting in the overflow of the river and flooding of the flats. Normally the flats floodplain is covered with water between November and April. Since the increase in development of the surrounding area, stormwater has been directed towards Colquitz with 11 stormwater drains along the flats. Interurban road, the surrounding houses and residents downstream are protected from flooding by this vital role of the floodplain.

Recreation

Panama Flats has and continues to be a popular site for recreation. Trails and routes along the perimeter are loved by dog walkers, bird watchers, and joggers alike. Ice skating has been a popular activity for almost a hundred years, when it’s cold enough to freeze the flooded fields in the winter.

Panama Flats borders Colquitz River and the Colquitz River Trail System. The trail goes through Panama Hill Park at the North end of the flats and runs along its west side where it links to Colquitz Park and carries on along southwards as part of the regional trail system. Back in 1967 the Provincial Capital Commission of Victoria suggested a trail to follow along the Colquitz River; the concept was endorsed by Saanich Municipality Council in 1968 and land acquisition by Saanich began shortly thereafter. This 24km trail is still being completed as part of the Regional Trail System extending from Beaver Lake to Portage Inlet.

Agriculture

Panama Flats has been farmed for almost a century. The soils are rich in peat which is favourable for seasonal root crops. The site is an active floodplain, consequently season extension has always been a concern and many ditching and berm creation efforts have occurred over the years. On Carey Road there is a building that was previously utilized for post harvest handling and storage that has the potential to act as a “food hub”. This Food Hub could be used for tool and equipment storage, post harvest washing, handling, for storage and also as a market stand.

Habitat and Wildlife

The flats are a rich ecosystem that offers habitat to for geese, ducks, Trumpeter Swans, eagles and many other resident birds and migrating water fowl. The Colquitz River was once full of salmon and community restoration efforts have been underway to bring back the salmon. Panama Flats presents a very unique site for learning and research due to the extensive habitat; there are many opportunities for community engagement around restoration, ecology and stewardship of wetlands and watercourses. For decades the municipality, environmental and neighborhood organizations and residents have been
exploring avenues to integrate flood management and human use in a way that supports and enhances the biodiversity of the area. This will be focus in moving forward, however that lens may broaden out to an agroecological approach to the site. Agroecology is the study of ecological processes that operate in agricultural production systems. It is about linking ecology, culture, economics, and society to sustain agricultural production, healthy environments and viable food and farming communities.

Neighborhood, District and Regional Context

The neighborhood surrounding Panama Flats is suburban-type development of single and multifamily residential units and some commercial and industrial properties. There are five elementary schools (Marigold, North Ridge, Strawberry Vale, Glanford, and McKenzie) and two secondary schools (Spectrum and Colquitz) within a few blocks walking distance. In addition, there is a small village core with a store, restaurants and gas station to the North and a larger business center and Tillicum Mall to the South. The area is diverse in terms of income and urban population.

There are a number of agriculture properties, with a few of these designated in the ALR in the neighborhood. There has been a few significant residential developments on agriculture land in the last decade (Wilkinson Valley), however the nearby urban containment boundary has limited most development of nearby agricultural lands that are just outside the Carey Road boundary.

Panama Flats currently sits outside the urban Containment Boundary and is considered a Rural Property zoned A-1 and a portion of it in the Agriculture Land Reserve. There are no farmers’ markets in the vicinity, but there are a few farm gate stands along Wilkinson road.

Community Interests
The community associations that serve the adjacent neighborhoods are (a number of these associations are actively involved in food security and agriculture initiatives):

- Strawberry Vale Ratepayers Association
- Wilkinson Valley Residents Association
- Glanford Homeowners Association
- Carey-Tillicum Ratepayers Association
- Royal Oak Community Association (ROCA)
- First Trestle Ratepayers And Residents
- Courtland Hastings Agricultural Preservation Society
- Knockanback Hill Preservation Society

Gardening and Farm Organization Interest
The following groups will definitely have a voice in the planning stages of the flats:

- Saanich Allotment Gardens Advocacy group (SAGA)
- GTUF - Gorge Tillicum Urban Farmers
- LifeCycles Project Society - supports the development of Community Gardens and has run youth agriculture entrepreneurship and business incubator projects
• South Island Organic Producers Association - involved in young farmer mentorship
• Capital Region Food and Agriculture Initiatives Roundtable (CR-FAIR) - made up of 28 Food and Farm organizations working on the protection of agriculture land and the promotion of local agriculture and food security.
• Peninsula Agriculture Commission - the advisory body for the District of Saanich in terms of agriculture issues.

Jurisdiction and Supporting Policy

District of Saanich

Local Area Plan
Panama Flats sits within the District of Saanich and falls within the Carey Local Area. The Local Area Plan has as a goal to “Retain contiguous agricultural parcels for agricultural use” and outlines in policy 7.3 “Initiate an application, in consultation with the owners, to designate the farmland within Panama Flats as Agricultural Land Reserve”43. The plan is also supportive of allotment gardens on unused portions of farmland.

Strategic Plan
The District of Saanich recently completed its Strategic Plan for 2012-201644, as well as its Parks Master Plan45. Both of these planning exercises and documents indicate that the protection and use of agriculture land and growing of food for the social well-being of local residents is a priority for the District.

Fact Sheet
It would appear that the development of Panama Flats as an Ag Park is envisioned, or at least supported by the District of Saanich, as ‘Food Security’ was one of the primary stated community benefits at the time of purchase.

In the Fact Sheet on the Panama Flats Purchase, the District of Saanich states46:

> “As the owner, Saanich could act on this policy to preserve farm land and enhance food security. Leasing a portion of the lands for agricultural use compatible with the surrounding neighbourhood or community allotment gardens are options”.


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OCP
In addition, the Saanich OCP has a number of statements that support the retention of agriculture land and support the development of food growing opportunities for its citizens47:

4.2.5.2 Maintain farming, food production, and large lot residential as the predominant land use on rural lands.

4.2.8.14 Consider opportunities to incorporate food producing community gardens into parks and other public open spaces, where appropriate.

Section 5.1. ‘Agriculture and Food Security’ covers the support the District has for agriculture and food production; there are several policies focusing on community gardens (5.1.1.12) and related activities.

All planning regarding the Ag Park concept must always keep the Flats’ ecological function as a floodplain to handle stormwater, top of mind; the District OCP supports this, as shown here:

4.2.10.19 Continue to maintain and improve the environmental quality of the storm water management system within urban areas, to improve watershed function.

4.2.10.20 In rural areas, retain an open-channel stormwater drainage system comprising watercourses, ditches, flood plains and other water retention and detention opportunities, to enhance water quality and environmental features.

Corporate Strategic Plan
In the newly developed Corporate Strategic Plan 2012-2016 there are some very specific goals, indicators and targets that would support an Agriculture Park concept at Panama Flats. Perhaps the most significant are found in the vision for Social Wellbeing (page 6).

Saanich offers opportunities for balanced, active and diverse lifestyles. Housing, public services and amenities are affordable, accessible and inclusive. Residents enjoy food security through the safeguarding of agricultural land and the promotion of community gardens and urban farming.

The following table outlines the indicators and targets set to reach this goal, and the opportunity that Panama Flats presents48.

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Social Well-Being - OCP indicators</th>
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Food Security - Hectares of land area used for agriculture | 2036 target | Opportunity
--- | --- | ---
· Taxable commercial farmland | Increase by 5% (1% every 5 years) *According to the 2006 Census, the amount of ALR land is 1866.9 hectares⁴⁹, which means increasing the land base by 93.4 hectares (230.8 acres) in total or 18.7 hectares (46.2 acres) every 5 years | Acreage for farmland as part of taxable base
· Backyard vegetable garden or poultry keeping | Increase by 66% | Demonstration/teaching gardens facility
· Allotment gardens – Annual (Currently 2 District) | 1 within each of 12 local areas | None currently in this local area

Parks Master Plan
The Parks Master Plan utilizes the Strategic Plan as a basis for its vision and priorities. It refers to the Social Well-Being indicator around Food Security and states⁵⁰:

“The Department delivers a wide range of programs and services to residents of Saanich where opportunities to grow food locally are fostered.”

Consistent with District of Saanich policies, Panama Flats could have a teaching and learning facility or allotment gardens to provide residents the opportunity to learn how to garden. Those with no backyard would have a place to learn about agriculture and connect with the process of growing food. The site could be an asset not only to Saanich, but also to the region.

In appendix A of the Parks Master Plan, Under Key Strategic Objectives #SWB #5: Local Food Production, it states:

“Explore the opportunities within the park and recreation system for individuals and communities to grow food locally.”

The Discussion around this objective concluded that food production is an appropriate use of land in a public park, “we all benefit from the smaller eco-footprint that locally grown food produces”.

Also worth noting is that Council adopted a policy in 2003 which allows for the expansion of community gardens and other related initiatives.

**Capital Regional District**

The CRD is currently undertaking the development of the Regional Sustainability Strategy. Within this strategy is the development of a new strategy focused on Regional Food Security. A draft framework has been developed with a number of specific goals identified that link to the Ag Parks proposal:

1. Protect the land base for food production by securing and expanding the region’s farmlands
2. Increase the viability and diversification of food production while preventing non farm use of agricultural land.
3. Build food processing and distribution capacity to expand the (local) food supply.
4. Increase food self-sufficiency and community resilience.
5. Work toward environmentally sustainable food systems

Recent regional agrifood sector work in the District of North Saanich resulted in an *Economic Development Strategy for Agriculture* for the area. Opportunities to get farmers onto the land and in a supported “farm incubator” setting was recommended to support sector growth. The Panama Flats location could offer the community many benefits for agriculture.

**Establishing an Agriculture Park at Panama Flats**

It must first be stated clearly that any development of an Ag Park at Panama Flats must be done in concert with planning for the other values of the park. Specifically the agriculture activities must be developed in such a way that the ecosystem, recreational amenities and watershed management role of the floodplain are not compromised, but enhanced.

A consultation with key stakeholders and the general public is required to understand the needs and opportunities identified and supported by the community in order to move forward; however it is

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51 Ibid.
possible to spark imagination and consideration of what could be for Panama Flats as a unique Ag Park. The ideas that we have heard through various Food Roundtables, and conversations with agriculture and community stakeholders are to look at the development of:

- Demonstration or Teaching and Learning Garden
- Community garden
- Nut and fruit tree project
- Leases to farmers
- Incubator farm
- Storage and farm market stand
- Packing and distribution centre

Some of these ideas may or may not be practical on the site due to a range of factors, in particular due to the seasonal flooding. There is a large building on site that has traditionally been used for farm purposes and has cold storage and dry storage areas. Many point to the potential of this to be a resource hub for the area, and farm market stand.

Other Park Features that could co-exist with the agricultural activities of the park:

- Recreation and Walking and Biking Trails
- Ecosystem and Watershed Stewardship and Interpretation
- Floodplain Management

**Challenges**

The major challenge identified with Panama Flats is the compatibility of stormwater management and floodplain function with year round food production interests. The hydrology of the site could be a limiting factor for purposes beyond the issuing of long-term leases to farmers for land on the floodplain. Current reports and new investigations into the hydrology of the site will be necessary to determine stormwater management opportunities. Previous efforts to create berms and ditches were not sufficient; downstream flooding must always be averted with any such planning. Without this study it is difficult to see how much land could be utilized for year round producers and for activities such as the farm incubator program. Community members have suggested using the adjacent park off of Wilkinson Road for a “farm incubator” program. There are also small areas along Roy and Carey Road that may be appropriate for community and demonstration gardens; the existing buildings could be utilized for storage and for a farm stand.

**Next Steps**

**Panama Flats**

The future use and development of Panama Flats is within the purview of the Saanich Parks and Recreation Department. They are currently entering into a consultation phase that will surely exhibit many different views on this land. It is critical that this work is done considering the Strategic Plan of the District, the Official Community Plan and the Local Area plan, as well as Could We Consider the Ag Park Model for Panama Flats?
including a wide range of community stakeholders. Agriculture will be but one component of the overall land use and conservation plan for Panama Flats, but it will be an important one.

With an agricultural focus, some next steps include:
- Community consultation about the development of the Flats; this includes looking at the potential of agriculture uses, mapping of potential land areas suitable for agriculture (alongside ecological systems and other values and uses)
- Review studies of land, soil, and water to determine land suitability and seasonality for agriculture
- Request new studies to be done as required?
- Assessment of buildings and infrastructure, potential for food hub?
- Determine land access and infrastructure needs of interested urban growers and commercial producers
- Survey surrounding neighborhood residents and businesses to determine support and concerns for agricultural use on the flats and potential for consumer interaction and support
- Determine partnerships, interests, roles and resources, and opportunities
- Explore potential funding
- Develop a plan for the “Way Forward”

**Capital Region**

With the development of the Regional Food Strategy, it will be important to consider the role of agriculture parks in the CRD to promote goals for food and sustainability. There are many opportunities to look at the development of Agriculture Parks. Some of these opportunities include:

- Sandown Raceway, North Saanich
- Newman Farm, Central Saanich
- Panama Flats, Saanich
- Quick’s Bottom, Saanich
- McConnell Farm, Metchosin
- Aylard Farm, Sooke

The creation of Ag Parks is an innovative, sustainable way to view the use and enjoyment of public land. It will be a new concept to many, but one that could provide diverse benefits for the community. Some important steps that would be helpful in actualizing Ag Parks are:

- Increase public awareness about regional farmland issues and the benefits of strategies such as Ag Parks.
- Secure a Policy Direction in the CRD’s Regional Sustainability Strategy (RSS).
• Raise public awareness and support for agricultural uses on public lands, with a specific focus on parks or Ag Parks.

• Public and municipal advocacy for the expansion of the definition of parks within our municipalities and Regional District to include Ag Parks.

• Raise awareness about the potential to accept gifts of farmland or purchase farmland that can honour the farm heritage and be kept in production through the Ag Park model.

• Consider the potential to access the resources and infrastructure in place for Parks acquisition and management to support Ag Park acquisition, development and management.
References


CR-FAIR Members

- The Land Conservancy
- Direct Farm Marketers Association
- Community Social Planning Council
- FoodRoots
- Gorge Tillicum Urban Farmers
- Sooke Food Chi
- North Saanich Food for the Future Society
- Dogwood Initiative
- Victoria Compost Education Society
- Feasting For Change
- The Farmland Trust
- Vic West Food Security Collective
- Victoria Downtown Market Association
- Vancouver Island Health Authority
- Ministry of Agriculture
- Office of Community Based Research
- COABC, Certified Organic Association of British Columbia
- North Saanich Agriculture Advisory
- LifeCycles
- Transition Town Victoria
- Island Chef Collaborative
- HomeGrown Collective
- Friends of Madrona Farm
- Island Natural Growers
- Salt Spring Agriculture Alliance
- Saanich Allotment Garden Advocacy group
- SOUL Stewards of Urban Lands