

## **Kitchen Table Conversation Report**

**Name of Group/Organization:** Chinook Food Connect and Healthy Lethbridge

**Conversation Topic:** Environmental Resources

**Number of people in Conversation:** 10

**Date:** September 21<sup>st</sup>, 2016

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**Describe your Conversation:** In the early afternoon of September 21, 10 members of Chinook Food Connect and Healthy Lethbridge came together with City of Lethbridge Community Planner Perry Stein to hold a Kitchen Table Conversation about environmental resources and the local food system. The conversation was facilitated by Perry Stein.

There was clear consensus among the group on most matters relating to environmental protection and the main environmental challenges faced by the City (e.g., lack of alternative transportation opportunities, water quality and quantity, the use of pesticides, climate change, and energy efficiency). There was some disagreement around the pros/cons of water fluoridation and the local electrical utility's energy fees/regulations. There was also strong agreement when it came to food policy and what it takes to create a sustainable local food system in Lethbridge.

KTC participants brought expertise from a number of sectors, including food banks, health services, and environmental science and non-governmental organizations, which created an enthusiastic conversation.

### **Conversation 1: What are the main environmental challenges we face in Lethbridge?**

- We have a cumbersome transit system
  - The system needs to be more affordable and efficient
- Local farming industry (agricultural and confined feeding operations)
  - Use of pesticides in a windy place means that impacts spread beyond the farming operations
  - Also impacts water quality (e.g., stormwater runoff)
- Pesticide spraying in City parks is a problem
- We lack a pedestrian culture in this City
- We have an inconvenient recycling system – shouldn't need to drive to drop off recyclables (seems counterproductive)
  - Recycling needs to be accessible
  - Grasscycling and composting need to be more accessible to the average resident
- Fluoridation is a concern to some people from a health and environmental perspective (though not everyone agrees)
- Impact of food waste on the environment
- Lawns impact water quantity
- We need to improve water conservation and management practices (e.g., city watering its lawns when it is raining outside)
- The source of our energy is also a concern
  - Lethbridge electrical utility fee structure currently does not disincentivize the use of electricity for heating (the current structure is still pro-natural gas)
    - Some participants saw this as a relative argument as natural gas is better than coal, and hydro is better than natural gas
- The city needs to create energy conservation incentives for residents

- We need to include energy efficient design into all public buildings (e.g. maximizing solar exposure)
- Pedestrians need to really be the priority in our City – this requires taking an integrated approach to how people move through the City, how we ensure healthy spaces for people etc.

### **Conversation 2: What are the ways in which we as individuals and as a City mitigate these environmental challenges?**

- Increase education about environmental problems to get support
- Need to give people a reason to do things differently
  - E.g., incentives
  - Pilot project funds / incentives
- Need to try different things
  - Goats no pesticides (e.g., Calgary)
  - Natural area parks not manicured parks
- Create pedestrian corridors on a more permanent basis (e.g., Stephen Avenue)
- Add drinking water fountains into parks (some for dogs too)
- Encourage community gardens
  - Support the infrastructure
  - Provide land and water
  - Bring communities together to support them
  - Make gardens part of the community plan. Perhaps organizing them around community centres/hubs
- Before we can get curbside...
  - We need to encourage people to recycle in the meantime
  - Consider more decentralized options for people (recycling stations in neighbourhoods to make it more accessible and convenient)
  - In Lethbridge it is too easy to throw things away.
    - Instead of Free Saturdays at the landfill, we need a “Free Store” and encourage residents and businesses to use it.
- Climate change
  - We need to understand what it means for us (potential impact: water, social/health outcomes, changing weather)
  - We need to mitigate the impacts
  - We need to adapt our behaviours
- We need to incorporate / enhance pedestrian access (e.g., to commercial areas like grocery stores)
- We need to encourage more local commercial / grocery stores to create a more “village-like” atmosphere in our neighbourhoods

### **Conversation 3: What does a sustainable food system look like in Lethbridge?**

- Support more small / local businesses
  - Create small villages in our neighbourhoods
- Certain areas of the city are expensive for local grocery stores to relocate to (e.g., West Lethbridge)
- We need more farmers’ markets
  - They can be mobile to increase access to them
  - Maybe in more of a food truck style or like the bookmobile
- Need to be able to access food in our neighbourhoods and not just by car
- We need as a community to be committed to stop food waste
  - Moving goods from food bank to community-based partners (e.g., seniors organizations)

- Commitment from whom? foodbank (to distribute goods/food); local produces (to donate waste); general public (to consumer wasted food, only buy what they need, volunteer)
- This process takes dedicated funding to be sustainable—there may be an opportunity to partner with different levels of government
  - E.g., Alex Food Centre in Calgary (community hub, food based social services)
- There are also challenges around coordinate the pickup and delivery of donated foods
- The changing demographics of our community need to be better reflected at the farmers' markets
- How do we make farmers' markets more affordable and accessible?
  - Online platforms that allow people to buy from local producers (this has worked in other cities)
- Planning policy to increase the number of grocery stores in high density/traffic areas (many of these areas are also currently food deserts)
  - E.g., Downtown, around University of Lethbridge
- We need targeted taxes/incentives to change social behaviours
- Keep the connection between grocery stores and community (they are vital in placemaking and nourishing a sense of community)
- Need to increase education about food and the environment in our schools
- We need healthier vending machine options in our City facilities
- We need to encourage community stewardship – more community-based programming and ownership over outcomes