



VanRIMS No.: 08-2000-20

## MEMORANDUM

March 16, 2010

TO: Mayor and Council

FROM: Titania Lam  
Meeting Coordinator

SUBJECT: Inner-City Urban Farming in Vancouver

The following is a biography that was provided regarding Will Allen, CEO, Growing Power:

Will Allen, is a former Professional basketball player in the American Basketball Association and European Professional League, the first African American basketball player at the University of Miami, Florida, and also a farmer and community activist, dedicated to supporting low income and small family farmers and bringing healthy, affordable food to urban areas. Will, is the founder and president of the Rainbow Farmer's Cooperative. One of the only African American farmer's in the State of Wisconsin, Allen has struggled vigorously to alleviate the plight of the small family farmer. He works a 100-acre farm in Oak Creek, WI and is responsible for organizing most of the farmers markets in Milwaukee.

Will is also the CEO of Growing Power, a national not for profit organization supporting the development of community food systems. He has over fifty years experience in farming, marketing and distributing food and has shared this knowledge with youth, adults, community groups, immigrants, farmers, and consumers. Will is referred to by many as a modern day George Washington Carver, a person that Will greatly admires. Will Allen is known as an innovator and creator of food systems that are leading efforts in getting good food to all people world wide.

Will has developed an innovative bio-intensive growing system using worms. This system is being used in urban and rural agriculture projects around the world. He has also developed a system to grow food in the winter without conventional heating system. Growing Power's Community Food Center in Milwaukee, WI is considered a

model for communities worldwide. Will believes that food is the cornerstone in building healthy communities and that we have a responsibility to pass on our knowledge to youth and adults about food for future sustainable food systems.

Will, is also leading the effort to vertically integrate our youth into healthy eating habits to end juvenile obesity. Will is also putting Growing Power in a position to become energy self-sufficient by installing solar and a high solid Methane producing Anaerobic Digester. Will was honored in 2005 by the Ford Foundations Leadership for changing world Award and is a featured speaker on Food Systems worldwide. Will was recently awarded the 2008 \$500,000 Mac Arthur "Genius Grant" for his efforts to promote sustainable farming methods in low-income neighborhoods. He is driven by a desire to make quality fresh fruit and vegetables accessible to underserved innercity populations. He targets "food deserts," communities that rely on corner markets which load their shelves with junk food and liquor, and rarely stock quality produce.

### **Passion For Farming**

His national non-profit organization, Growing Power, remains based in Milwaukee, but he has spread his urban farming message from Africa to Europe to South America. Since winning the award, he has been interviewed by Good Morning America, CNN, NPR, New York Times and more. He oversees 14 greenhouses where greens, vegetables and herbs are cultivated year-round. He and his staff also raise chickens, turkeys, perch and tilapia. He has become an expert composter and turns food waste into fertilizer and methane gas. And he maintains a 33,000 square-foot warehouse where 300 small-time farmers store their produce and prepare it for market.