

## COUNCIL MEMBERS' MOTION

*For consideration at the Standing Committee on Policy and Strategic Priorities meeting on  
September 17, 2025*

### **6. Removing Obstacles Preventing Sustainable Food Systems in Vancouver**

Submitted by: Councillor Maloney and Councillor Orr

#### WHEREAS

1. Vertical farming, also known as Controlled Environment Agriculture, produces crops indoors using hydroponics, artificial lighting, and other technologies to carefully control growing conditions;
2. Vertical farming businesses can be established in underutilized urban spaces—including buildings, parkades, and other non-standard sites that are difficult to lease for traditional commerce due to factors such as inadequate loading areas or insufficient ceiling heights;
3. Vertical farming businesses strengthen local food security by expanding our ability to produce food locally year-round, reducing our reliance on imports. For example, as of 2022 British Columbia was importing 81% of its spinach and 70% of its lettuce from the United States ([Bajaj and Ramankutti, 2025](#); [Wickramasinghe, 2025](#));
4. Vertical farms create local jobs and reduce greenhouse gas emissions by shortening food transport distances. Vertical farms can quickly respond to changing consumer demand and can produce low-volume, niche, or culturally important plants, benefiting restaurants, hotels, and catering and grocery businesses, as well as residents;
5. Currently, Urban Farm Class B businesses—the City's designation for vertical farms—are only permitted as conditional uses in all relevant zoning district schedules. This forces proponents to navigate a complicated, time-consuming and costly review and permitting process;
6. The City of Vancouver recognises the challenges of the current permitting process for vertical farms and has previously granted development permits that grant relaxations to work-around by-laws created when vertical farming was a fledgling industry;
7. Vertical farming businesses often have the opportunity to operate on multiple floors of a building, but City regulations currently limit Urban Farms to a single floor in many industrial district schedules (such as I-1, I-1A, I-1B, I-2, I-3, IC-1,

and IC-3), preventing farms from taking full advantage of available space to maximise crop yield;

8. Certain by-law requirements intended for larger commercial operations—for example, design standards for loading zones—undermine the commercial viability of smaller vertical farms that may wish to operate on non-standard sites;
9. Possible solutions to the challenges faced by vertical farming businesses include changing Urban Farm Class B from a conditional approval use to an outright approval use and categorizing vertical farms as temporary structures. The City already provides avenues for permitting temporary structures and farm buildings ([Building By-law No. 14343 s. 1.1.1.1](#)), and this may offer a streamlined process similar to existing exemptions for construction, outdoor patios and other temporary uses;
10. Vertical farming businesses are ineligible for the support and assistance that the province provides traditional agribusinesses. The City of Vancouver restricts Urban Farm Class B operational size to 7,000 m<sup>2</sup>. This prevents vertical farm operators from applying to the province for farm status [Urban Farm Guidelines s. 2.2 \(iv\)](#), as BC Assessment will not approve farm classification for vertical farms unless they are on leased land outside the Agricultural Land Reserve and are at least 8,000 m<sup>2</sup> ([Classification of Land as a Farm Regulation \(B.C. Reg. 411/95\)](#)); and
11. The City could help level the playing field for vertical farming operations with traditional agricultural operations by enabling vertical farms to operate on multiple floors of a building and removing the 7,000 m<sup>2</sup> size cap.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT Council direct staff to:

- A. Explore and report back on the feasibility and implications of:
  - i. Streamlining the change-of-use process for farms seeking Urban Farm Class B licenses, especially those which are not making significant changes to the structure of an existing building;
  - ii. Designating Urban Farm Class B as an outright approval use instead of a conditional approval use for certain zoning district schedules;
  - iii. Revisiting the 1:1 Floor Space Ratio requirement for Urban Farm Class B operations in selected district schedules, which would allow Controlled Environment Agriculture on multiple levels of a building; and
  - iv. Allowing vertical farm businesses to operate in underutilised spaces, such as parkades.

- B. Write to British Columbia's Ministry of Agriculture to express the City of Vancouver's support for extending to vertical farming businesses the same benefits and subsidies provided to traditional agriculture.