

Urban Agriculture Zoning Text Amendments

A public hearing will be held before the City Council on Wednesday, November 6, 2013 at 5:30 p.m. on the Urban Agriculture Zoning Text Amendments. If you can't attend the meeting, but would like to provide feedback, please post your comments here.

All comments sorted chronologically

As of November 6, 2013, 11:25 AM



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Introduction

The Urban Agriculture Zoning Study was initiated in October of 2011 by the Saint Paul Planning Commission. The goal of the study is to identify how locally grown food-related uses are dealt with in the zoning ordinance and if there is a need to revise the code to remove any undue barriers. Staff reviewed national best practices to develop draft amendments for those topics that are appropriately addressed by zoning.

The Saint Paul City Council will hold a public hearing on draft Zoning Code amendments pertaining to farmers markets and urban agriculture. The City Council had previously requested the study in order to support access to locally grown food, and bring the code up-to-date.

Agriculture

The study recommends zoning regulations that would allow agricultural uses to be located on privately-owned vacant lots. The most common form of agriculture in Saint Paul is community gardens. In residential areas conditions are recommended to ensure the use is compatible with an urban neighborhood. This study has no effect on backyard home gardens, but could allow residents to sell produce grown from their yard on a limited basis. There will be no animals other than bees (subject to existing bee permit requirements) allowed with agricultural uses.

Currently, most community gardens and other agricultural uses are located on public property, through leases from City departments. These zoning changes will allow these uses on private property and let the private market determine the best location for these uses rather than limiting it to City-owned land.

The proposed zoning requires agricultural uses of one acre (about 1/3 of a typical city block) or more to get a conditional use permit, which places additional requirements on the use to ensure it is compatible with the neighborhood. Agricultural uses of any size would need a site plan approval, which has a \$30 fee.

Farmers Markets

The study also recommends new regulations for farmers markets. The Planning Commission previously recommended creating these regulations because there was no clear guidance in the Zoning Code about how these uses should be regulated and thus every new proposal for a farmers market was a different process. The recommended regulations streamline the approval process and allow farmers markets in all areas of the city, but require markets to be located on parcels larger than one acre (such as schools, institutions, etc.) in residential districts. Sales would be limited to products of the farm directly from the producer.

The study recommends limits to the number of days and hours of operation for farmers markets based on the number of vendors. Farmers markets with more than five vendors would need a conditional use permit and all farmers markets would require site plan approval.

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The draft amendments can be viewed at: <http://www.stpaul.gov/DocumentCenter/View/68032>.

The public hearing will be held before the City Council on Wednesday, November 6, 2013, at 5:30 p.m. in Room 300 of the City Hall/Court House, 15 West Kellogg Boulevard. All comments concerning the draft Zoning Code amendments will be heard. Comments can also be submitted in writing to: Office of the City Council, 310 City Hall, 15 Kellogg Blvd. West, Saint Paul, MN 55102 or to Anton Jerve at anton.jerve@ci.stpaul.mn.us, or faxed to 651-266-6549.

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As of November 6, 2013, 11:25 AM, this forum had:

Attendees: 131

Participants: 10

Minutes of Public Comment: 30

10 participants posted comments

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Seitu Ken Jones inside Ward 1

November 6, 2013, 11:12 AM

I support the Urban Agricultural Zoning Amendments as a step toward aligning our City's laws and ordinances to encourage healthy local food production. I am concerned that the amendment's text around "Agricultural uses of any size" is not clear and while it does not refer to a backyard farm on a homeowner's lot, it may confuse St. Paul residents to think that they may need a permit to grow their own food.

The amendment specifies that any temporary structure (hoophouse, cold frames and other season extenders) over 120 square feet will require a permit. I think that could be expanded to a larger structure footprint before a permit is required.

While I do support the Urban Agricultural Zoning Amendments, I would like to propose that these amendments be closely monitored over the next year to determine if it is cumbersome or burdensome to urban farmers.

Barb Rose inside Ward 2

November 5, 2013, 8:30 PM

I am writing as a member of Growing West Side, a group of neighbors who are dedicated to promoting and developing opportunities for growing, producing and insuring access to locally grown healthy food in order to build a stronger community. One of Growing West Side's projects has been the development of a neighborhood farmers market. We are also exploring how to develop a public fruit tree orchard in our neighborhood. The Urban Agriculture zoning amendments are a great first step in reducing the barriers urban farmers face in providing alternative and healthy food choices to all of us close to home. I am encouraged by this support however I hope in the future there is a greater emphasis on reducing the barriers urban farmers face in locating permanent and safe for growing within our city.

L. Stolarczyk inside Ward 4

November 4, 2013, 7:48 PM

I think there is a good point about herbicides, sprays and such. Our local community garden has organically grown vegetables only and I think that is a very good idea. There are many options to herbicides etc....for pests in an organic garden. Perhaps a mention of humane traps for the larger pests might be a good idea; such as groundhogs, rabbits, occasional deer etc..sometimes even birds can be destructive in a garden.

I wonder though about the reference to fixed locations for farmers markets. "An outdoor market at a fixed location consisting principally of farmers and gardeners for the purpose of selling the products of their farm, garden, greenhouse, apiary, or forest directly to the public." Once a fixed location is found, there is no possibility of a change or should there be an option, in case of emergency etc.

The use of the term forest, most forests are on protected land locally.

Apiaries are usually on wider expanses than city blocks such as in St Paul. Of course, I am aware that

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such projects are already in existence. I am hopeful they passed by community councils to begin with.

The term organic should be used, many dangerous chemicals could be used, over used and ingested from gardens when dealing with larger populations such things must be considered.

Lastly, since we are speaking locally within city limits, there should be a clause indicating humane removal of larger garden pests; such as racoons (of course, they don't really usually need a garden, a trash bin would do), gophers, deer and such.

Thank you

Patricia Ohmans inside Ward 1

November 2, 2013, 9:49 PM

As a public health worker, avid community gardener, and co-founder of Frogtown Park & Farm, I support any changes to St Paul zoning regulations that make it easier for me and my neighbors to cultivate, buy and eat locally grown food. To me, the proposed zoning changes seem like a modest step in the right direction. I defer to the urban farmers who have been trying to make a living selling their produce, and the urban planners who are trying to balance health and safety concerns, to hammer out specifics about acceptable soil lead levels, hoop house height, permitting processes and other concerns that will doubtless be raised at Wednesday's hearing.

Drew Johnson inside Ward 3

October 25, 2013, 12:41 PM

As a St. Paul resident, I fully support zoning changes that make it easier to people to grow and sell their own food, both on their own land and through farmer's markets. Anything that can be done to increase access to public and private land for growing food, reduce the cost of growing and selling food, and increase customer access to locally grown food is a win for St. Paul.

Erik Riesenbergs inside Ward 3

October 22, 2013, 2:26 PM

I'm glad to see that these zoning amendments are finally making their way in front of the city council. Some issues I have with the existing amendments are these. First, as others have already said, the line the city is drawing being gardening and agriculture is still a bit vague. It's improving from where it started, but clarification would be nice. Second, no changes were made to the accessory structures language. Currently I have a two car garage, a shed, and a chicken coop. According to this language, I've already met my accessory structure limit and have no ability to add a season extending structure even though I still have ample space. Third, there really should be a person/people overseeing these proposals (in addition to DSI's site plan review) that have experience/expertise in matters pertaining to agriculture. We can't really expect DSI to know the in's and out's of agriculture enough to be able to thoroughly inspect the sites. For example, as someone else has stated, what happens if someone is spraying toxic pesticides in a densely populated residential area. Is DSI going

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to know what to look for? In this same vein, if we DO choose to limit what chemicals farmers/gardeners can put on their crops, then we better be doing the same to residential lots. It's unreasonable to say that a homeowner can spray their lawn with toxic chemicals, but a gardener can't. To be clear, I'm not advocating for allowing anyone to spray toxic chemicals, just for equal treatment under the law. Other than that, I think the planning commission and the city have done a great job at addressing the issues that have been brought up along the way.

Katie Schmidt-Plese inside Ward 5

October 18, 2013, 11:46 PM

I agree with Margaret; the wording is a bit ambiguous. If the 30 dollar fee is confined to those who intend to sell produce on a large scale, fine. However for the hobbyist or someone who occasionally sells a sack of tomatoes or zucchinis, I think the fee is a bit out of hand and more than just a bit "big brother". We live in the most expensive urban area in the Midwest. No sense in making it even more so-

Nate Kaselnak inside Ward 5

October 18, 2013, 9:14 AM

I think this reflects the community's growing desire to have locally sourced and healthier food options. I would love to have more options to stop and pick up vegetables without having to park and go into a grocery store. I think there are good provisions set to ensure proper soil quality, but I'd also like to see some guidelines regarding what growers can put ON their produce. I think there should be organic guidelines around the use of pesticides and herbicides.

Margaret Owen Thorpe inside Ward 1

October 17, 2013, 12:32 PM

It's not clear from either the summary statement or the proposed amendment text if "Agricultural uses of any size would need a site plan approval, which has a \$30 fee." applies to ordinary backyard vegetable and fruit gardens or not. Earlier, the summary statement says, "This study has no effect on backyard home gardens, but could allow residents to sell produce grown from their yard on a limited basis." But "agricultural use of any size" sounds as though it means my tomatoes, cabbages, and green beans. Does it?

I am in total support of as many people growing food in the City as possible. But I'm not paying the City - or anyone else - \$30 to tell me whether or not I can plant eggplant next to peppers.

Marian Kramer inside Ward 3

October 17, 2013, 12:21 PM

This seems like a reasonable amendment. I would caution people looking to establish urban gardens to do some research on previous land uses of the area/parcel they are looking to develop and possible contamination issues. For example, it would not be advisable to establish a garden on a parcel that has contaminated soil due to previous land uses without collecting soil samples first. Just

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a suggestion from a local geologist!
