

URBAN AGRICULTURE COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES

May 10, 2017

Call to order

Meeting was called to order at 6:00 p.m.

Roll call

Present: Connie Bohatch, Amy DeVrou, Levi Gardner, Melissa Harrington, Rachel Hood, Joan Huyser-Honig, Alita Kelly, Steve Krogman, Jason Meyer, Jill Myer, Philip Wheeler, David Zimmerman

Absent: none

Others: Mayor Bliss, David Marquardt, Michelle Slykhouse, Catherine Zietse (City staff); members of Mayor's Millennial Advisory Board (4).

Approval of Agenda

Motion made by Jason Meyer, supported by Rachel Hood, to approve the May 10, 2017 agenda as presented. Motion carried.

Opening remarks from the Mayor

Mayor Bliss welcomed committee members and provided background information on the formation of the committee and the importance to the City of having a group of urban agriculture experts. Mayor Bliss thanked the committee members for serving.

David Marquardt, Director of Parks and Recreation, added context of urban agriculture initiatives in recent City planning efforts, both in the Green Grand Rapids Plan and the current Parks and Recreation Strategic Master Plan. He also stated the Mayor's emphasis for parks and public spaces to be known as 'learning labs' for cities.

Meeting Business

Chair and Vice Chair Elections:

Levi Gardner was nominated for Committee Chair by Jill Meyer, supported by Joan Huyser-Honig and Connie Bohatch. Motion carried.

Jill Myer was nominated for Committee Vice Chair by Levi Gardner, supported by Jason Meyer. Motion carried.

Purpose, duties, and responsibilities of Committee: Catherine Zietse distributed copies of Committee Duties and Responsibilities. (City Ordinance Title VI, Chapter 73, Sec. 6.51)

Levi Gardner inquired who the Committee reports to. Michelle Slykhouse answered that the committee should work with the Mayor's office on policy changes, with the Parks and Recreation Department offering support and coordination.

Bylaws: Catherine Zietse distributed a draft of committee bylaws and opened the floor for discussion. Rachel Hood asked to confirm the number needed for a quorum. Connie Bohatch responded that the

number needed is 7. Levi Gardener suggested to include the frequency of meetings. Jason Meyer suggested incorporating Duties & Responsibilities in the bylaws. The committee decided to leave the public comment section as is, with the option to amend later if a time limit is needed.

Meeting schedule: Levi Gardner proposed bimonthly meetings, supported by Joan Huyser-Honig. Motion carried.

Jason Meyer inquired on the number of absences allowed in committee bylaws with bimonthly meetings. Levi Gardner suggested 3 absences, and the committee agreed.

Discussion

Levi Gardner shared some background information regarding the formation of the committee, including a report detailing the need for comprehensive agriculture policy in Grand Rapids.

Rachel Hood suggested the committee review current City ordinances. Jill Meyer offered to share with the group a Kent County report including a grid of ordinances in the metropolitan area.

Rachel Hood stated a subsequent task is effectively educating the community of city codes and the feasibility of beginning a community garden or farmers market. A potential project for the committee would be the creation of a “How To” guide or publication. Melissa Harrington shared a feasibility checklist created by the Michigan Farmers Market Association.

Connie Bohatch shared that one role of this committee is to propose new language for codes, and to educate the public throughout the process of renewing code at public hearings and other opportunities.

Jill Meyer stated local priorities are food safety, food access, and coordination of efforts among all of the different parties in the City. Amy DeVrou added preserving the local honey bee population as a priority. Joan Huyser-Honig expressed concern for land preservation and increasing public land, possibly paired with policy for publically accessible food grown on public land.

Joan Huyser-Honig asked about additional applicants to this committee as it relates to diversity and ensuring true representation of the city. Connie Bohatch explained process of appointing boards and committees. Jason Meyer suggested that sub-committee work would be a good place to pull in other people from the community. Jason Meyer asked about the remaining vacancy (member representing Grand Rapids Public Schools), to which Connie explained the City’s process for filling Boards and Commissions. The GRPS Superintendent appoints the member.

Public Comments

The Mayor’s Millennial Advisory Committee thanked the Committee for the opportunity to attend and learn how a City board or commission is formed.

Agenda Items for Next Meeting

Rachel Hood proposed further brainstorming for committee goals and tasks

Philip Wheeler suggested public education surrounding homeowner pesticide use.

Meeting was adjourned at 7:10 p.m.

URBAN AGRICULTURE COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES

July 12, 2017

Call to order

Meeting was called to order at 6:03 pm.

Roll call

Present: Connie Bohatch, Amy DeVrou, Levi Gardner (Committee Chair), Joan Huyser-Honig, Alita Kelly, Steve Kroogman, Jason Meyer, Jill Myer (Committee Vice-Chair), Philip Wheeler

Absent: Rachel Hood, Dave Zimmerman, Melissa Harrington, John Helmholdt

Others: Elizabeth White, Catherine Zietse (City staff)

Approval of Agenda

Motion made by Jason Meyer, supported by Alita Kelly, to approve the July 12 agenda as presented. Motion carried.

Preliminary Remarks from City Attorney

Elizabeth White, Deputy City Attorney, presented the committee with background information regarding proposed changes to the chicken ordinance. Earlier this summer, the City received a request for a chicken permit from Northpointe Christian School (K-8) to keep chickens on their property. Current ordinance permits chickens only on single- or two-family dwellings. A proposed amendment to the code would include schools as an exception to the code in addition to John Ball Zoo.

Jill Myer shared questions from the Kent County Health Department, prepared by Health Officer Adam London:

"Please express that KCHD is neither supportive nor opposed to this proposal. While recognizing the academic and health benefits of exposing children to nature and agriculture, this department also has concerns. KCHD would strongly encourage the City and school to consider:

- 1. How will waste from these chickens be managed? Odors and excrement can attract flies and other insects which could become a nuisance to the neighborhood.*
- 2. How will feed and water be controlled? Uncontrolled chicken feed could attract mice, rats, and other vermin which could become a nuisance to the neighborhood.*
- 3. How will the children and chickens be safeguarded against cats, dogs, and wild animals? The presence of these chickens will attract attention from other animals. Some of these other animals may be dangerous and could threaten the safety of the children (not to mention the chickens).*
- 4. How will the hygiene of the children be managed? Chickens are prolific carriers of microorganisms such as salmonella bacteria. A rigorous handwashing process should be put in place to mitigate the risk of illness (hand sanitizer, by itself, is insufficient).*
- 5. Will a veterinarian be retained in order to assure the health of the chickens? Chickens are prone to illness and some of those illnesses can be communicated to humans. The advance of novel forms of avian influenza is also a concern. Establishing a relationship with a veterinarian should be encouraged."*

Jill Myer asked about the number of chickens proposed by the school. Elizabeth White replied it had not been specified by the school.

Connie Bohatch suggested the committee look to Goodwillie Environmental School for best practices and information that will help strengthen the revised ordinance. Philip Wheeler added that most disease from chickens comes from the concentration and commercialization, which would most likely not be an issue in a school setting. He also suggested the ordinance be expanded to include other animals.

With no other pressing questions for the City attorney, further discussion regarding changes to the ordinance was tabled to the original position in agenda.

Approval of Minutes

Motion made by Jill Myer, supported by Joan Huyser-Honig, to approve the May 10 minutes as presented. Motion carried.

Comments from Public: None.

Old Business

Adoption of Committee Bylaws

Motion made by Connie Bohatch, seconded by Steve Krogman, to adopt updated Committee bylaws. Motion unanimously approved.

New Business

Discussion of Committee Vision, Guiding Principles, and Goals: Levi Gardner walked the committee through the summary document on emergent themes from the survey taken by committee members. The emergent themes were education, policy, access and equity, environment, resources, community, data and information, and committee process and structure.

Goals: The Chair recommended the committee spend time discussing measurable goals to accomplish, referencing the 40% tree cover goal set by the Urban Forestry Committee as a clear example. Alita Kelly suggested a 10% edible landscape. Connie Bohatch indicated that, as with urban forestry, this requires an assessment of the current status to use as a baseline data.

The committee discussed the importance of educating the public what urban agriculture is and is not, and the need to pair changes in policy with public education. It is easiest for residents to be fully informed when policy changes are comprehensive rather than bit by bit. It was also discussed whether a full urban agriculture policy update was reasonable for the committee to accomplish within one year. To begin to address public education, the committee will develop a FAQ sheet or similar document to distribute. Further discussion on committee goals was tabled until next meeting.

Vision: Using survey responses, the committee worked to create a draft vision statement:

Grand Rapids' Urban Agriculture Committee educates and empowers the community to grow and enhance our food system, quality of life and public health.

The Urban Agriculture Committee will accomplish this by providing an infrastructure for policy review, recommendations, and guidance on urban agriculture.

Action Items:

- Alita Kelly and Catherine Zietse will begin drafting a FAQ sheet on urban agriculture for next meeting.
- Jill Myer will begin drafting a press release.

Chicken ordinance and school properties

The committee resumed the discussion on proposed amendments to backyard chicken ordinance. It was decided to notify the city attorney's office that the committee is currently unprepared to respond in full to the school's request, and the item will be tabled to return to as part of a comprehensive urban agriculture ordinance review.

Agenda Items for Next Meeting: None

Meeting was adjourned 7:29pm

URBAN AGRICULTURE COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES

September 13, 2017

Call to order

Meeting was called to order at 6:09 p.m.

Moment of silence in memory of Melissa Harrington

Roll call

Present: Amy DeVrou, Levi Gardner (Committee Chair), Rachel Hood, Joan Huyser-Honig, Alita Kelly, Steve Kroogman, Jason Meyer, Dave Zimmerman

Absent: Connie Bohatch, Ryan Huppert, Jill Myer (Committee Vice-Chair)

Others: David Marquardt, Catherine Zietse (City staff), Brian Smith (resident, Grand Rapids Food Co-op Initiative)

Approval of Agenda

Motion made by Rachel Hood, seconded by Alita Kelly, to approve the September 13 agenda as presented. Motion carried.

Approval of Minutes

Motion made by Jason Meyer, seconded by Joan Huyser-Honig, to approve the July 12 minutes as presented. Motion carried.

Comments from Public: Brian Smith introduced himself (GR Food Coop and other local sustainability initiatives) and shared that he was there to observe. He is particularly interested in advancing composting in the City.

Committee Business

Racial Equity Workshop

Levi Gardner gave an update on the City's initiatives to increase on equity and inclusion on boards and committees. Rachel Hood stated the importance of intentional outreach for filling current committee vacancies, citing the WMEAC IDEAL (Inclusion and Development of Environmental Allies and Leaders) initiative as a potential place to start for community contacts. Catherine Zietse shared that the City's process of selecting new board members. Continued discussion of potential committee members was tabled to the end of the meeting.

Discussion of Committee Vision and Goals:

In the review of the committee vision statement from the July 12 meeting, Rachel Hood asked to include "local" in front of "food system". Motion made by Steve Krogman, seconded by Amy DeVrou, to adopt committee vision statement including language additions above. Motion carried.

Levi Gardner opened the floor for discussion on committee goals. Rachel Hood asked for clarification on the goal of creating 10% edible landscape and if there was a standardized number. Alita Kelly

responded that there was no such number she was aware of and the initial thought was to focus on City-owned land, however we currently do not have any data.

GOAL #1:

Conduct a baseline study to establish indicators and track growth of urban agriculture activities in Grand Rapids

The committee discussed the desired number of residents to engage on policy revisions. Rachel Hood inquired who will do the work of engagement, and if there is a budget. David Marquardt replied that currently the only dedicated resources for the committee is the staff time of Catherine Zietse, but that shouldn't prevent the committee from asking for additional support if needed. Levi Gardner separated the items discussed into two goals:

GOAL #2:

Complete a comprehensive review of current city ordinances related to urban agriculture and develop recommendations.

GOAL #3:

Commit to intentional and meaningful public engagement for public review of proposed ordinance changes.

Levi Gardner referred to the draft goal to “establish a food growing guide” as an example of a project where the committee could ask for additional funding or support to accomplish. Rachel Hood added that this goal to make City ordinances more accessible is a natural outcome of ordinance revisions. David Marquardt offered that funding options could include a formal ask to City Commission, support from an organization working within a specific geography (e.g. DGRI), or working within existing publications like We Are GR, depending on the scope and reach of the project.

GOAL #4:

Create and implement communication plan to share baseline findings and ordinance revisions with the community.

In discussion of goal(s) concerning edible landscapes on public or institutional land, parks, cemeteries, libraries, hospitals, and schools were mentioned. Steve Krogman shared that operationally-wise, this goal to comes down to a position rather than a formal policy, and the City is willing to try new methods to do business and operations without needing a policy. Rachel Hood noted that the committee goal to review ordinance changes structure of urban agriculture in the City, whereas this goal focuses on changing the practice.

GOAL #5:

Advocate for more edible plants to be incorporated into the landscaping on public land.

Urban Ag. FAQ

Suggested edits to the current draft of the FAQ flyers were as follows:

- Add a webpage url for more information (Joan Huyser-Honig)
- Include one picture of a senior participating in urban agriculture (Rachel Hood)
- Input from community partners on language for food justice (Alita Kelly)
- Addition of season extension techniques (greenhouses, high tunnels, etc.) to "What is Urban Agriculture?" (Levi Gardner)
- Replace "workers" with "growers" (Rachel Hood)
- Eliminate small livestock to correspond with current ordinance (Dave Zimmerman)
- Note the list of community organizations is not comprehensive (Levi Gardner)

Pekich Park Discussion

David Marquardt shared that the City is currently facing challenges around Pekich Park (located at corner of Division and Cherry), brought up by neighbors and business owners. Unwanted activities are taking place from people both in and outside of the neighborhood, and police and residents are at wits end. The City administered a survey to residents, employees and service providers in July and August, and will continue with community listening sessions in October for solutions. One of the proposed solutions is an urban garden. Mr. Marquardt referenced Triangle Park in Denver, which had a similar situation of drug use. The City redeveloped the park with garden plots, a perimeter fence with key code and lock. Triangle Park is programmed with grant funding while the City maintains the infrastructure and pays for water. It is difficult to think of a garden as the only solution that will change behavior in the park and neighborhood, and Mr. Marquardt shared he has major hesitations about controlled access to a public space with a fence, however there are large quality-of-life issues and action needs to be taken. He brings this all to the attention of the committee so that they can participate in conversation, and suggest new variations of the project or different programming that have not yet been thought of.

Joan Huyser-Honing inquired if park users asked specifically about the garden idea, to which David Marquardt responded the survey was very basic in asking what people do/don't like about how the park currently is and what they would want to see changed; and hard questions still need to be asked directly about what the problem is and how it can get better. Levi Gardner added that survey comments received were not always solution-oriented and downright nasty, and that finding a solution will not be simple.

Alita Kelly offered that produce grown in the garden could be served at God's Kitchen.

Concerns were raised about relocating the problem elsewhere. Levi Gardner responded that while activity will inevitably move to Heartside Park, the current public health and safety issues that occur at Pekich Park are more manageable at Heartside from a policing perspective. Grand Rapids Police Department, who responds to 2-3 calls per day at Pekich Park, have been involved in discussions from the beginning. Levi added that models of similar gardens from around the country show great opportunity for policemen on duty to interact with residents and park users in a positive way that minimizes escalation, as opposed to interaction that is only confrontational (as it is now).

Rachel contributed that she has seen urban gardens with a fence but no lock (near Book Cadillac in Detroit). Additionally, a formal or informal food prep space could be interesting in that space to improve quality of life for residents.

David Marquardt extended invitation for committee members to be engaged in upcoming conversations and meetings. Levi Gardner concluded the discussion by stating that this situation is an opportunity for urban agriculture to be seen in the community as something with potential for lasting social change, rather than a 'cool' sustainability trend.

Discussion of Potential Committee Members:

The committee briefly discussed an intentional approach to filling vacancies. Rachel Hood suggested the committee generate a broader list of people to engage in filling vacancies – people can self-identify, but time should also be given to get through personal networks.

Agenda Items for Next Meeting:

- Revisit committee goals
- Continued discussion of filling committee vacancies

Meeting was adjourned at 7:26 pm.

URBAN AGRICULTURE COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES

November 8, 2017

Call to order

Meeting was called to order at 6:03 pm.

Roll call

Present: Connie Bohatch, Amy DeVrou, Levi Gardner, Joan Huyser-Honig, Ryan Huppert, Steve Krogman, Jason Meyer, Jill Myer, Dave Zimmerman

Absent: Alita Kelly, Rachel Hood

Others: Suzanne Schulz, Catherine Zietse (City staff), John Everett, Brian Harris, Joshua Lunger

Approval of Agenda

Motion made by Joan Huyser-Honig, supported by Dave Zimmerman to approve the agenda as presented. Motion carried.

Approval of Minutes

Motion made by Jason Meyer, supported by Amy DeVrou to approve the minutes as presented. Motion carried.

New Business

Proposed Amendments to Title VI, Chapter 73 of City Code

Brian Harris of Green Collar Farms presented his work to the committee. He is currently doing a controlled environment agriculture (CEA) 2-year pilot project in a shipping container. If successful, Brian hopes to move the operation into a 10,000 square foot brick and mortar facility and provide full time employment opportunities. The practice of CEA has a very minimum carbon footprint. Brian brought this project to the committee to encourage them to consider the positive implications of CEA and similar hyper-local growing opportunities, and to create an ordinance that considers growing food outside of the typical soil/community garden space. Brian has been in conversation with Commissioner Shaffer about changes to the current ordinance because his current agriculture facility – shipping container – is not spoken to in the urban zoning code.

Levi Gardner asked Mr. Harris if the current CEA shipping container was permitted because there is no ordinance. Brian Harris responded that the current shipping container at Seward and Bridge (an active Rockford Construction site) is temporarily allowable by City ordinance for two years because it can be considered a tool crib. This timeframe is in line with his personal goals to have a more permanent facility with full time employment opportunities in two years.

Ryan Huppert inquired what Brian is currently growing, to which Brian responded he is growing leafy greens like kale, shards and arugula for farm to fork restaurants and specialty grocery stores. Other possibilities in similar CEA operations or a second container include a broad assortment of herbs or flowering plants like peppers and tomatoes. Joan Huyser-Honig asked Brian if he is already selling his produce. Brian said no, but he is hoping to begin selling next week. There is interest locally, and there is huge potential for CEA to be a large part of solving food issues locally and worldwide.

Suzanne Schulz introduced herself as Planning Director for the City, and offered to provide clarity to the committee on questions about the zoning ordinance. She shared that there are ways to facilitate this type of agriculture, such as the mushroom vendor at the Fulton Street Farmers Market who has a facility on Butterworth. In working with Brian Harris, the Planning Department interpreted the zoning code to allow shipping containers to be equivalent to greenhouses in the Open Space Zone Districts. Suzanne made the distinction between the land use/zoning and the type of structure the agriculture occurs in – they are two separate questions. The committee should consider where and how this land use would be allowed in different zoning types, such as residential or transitional city center. Does a box contribute vibrancy to a neighborhood?

Connie Bohatch asked Brian Harris for clarity on the proposed ordinance, which does not specifically refer to structures like shipping containers. Levi Gardner explained that the ordinance Commissioner Shaffer proposed is an example from Detroit, and will not go to commission. Brian Harris added that his project of using a shipping container for agriculture is separate from ordinance amendments

Levi Gardner commented that the ordinance language from Detroit will not be directly applicable to Grand Rapids, as the two cities have very different urban context. Connie Bohatch added that much of Detroit's ordinance conflicts with current Grand Rapids code, such as pile composting.

Suzanne Schulz shared the approach taken by the Urban Forestry Committee in amending the zoning ordinance in a way that tied it to data tracking in order to reach their ultimate goal of a 40% tree canopy. The committee has seen the difference in the survivability of trees because of this approach.

Comments from Public

Josh Lunger from the Chamber of Commerce introduced himself and shared that he has been in conversation with Brian Harris and Dave Shaffer, and is excited the committee is moving forward with work that have a large impact on quality of life, employment, among other things.

2018 Committee Meeting Calendar

Motion to accept the 2018 committee meeting as proposed was made by Connie Bohatch, supported by Jason Meyer. Motion passed.

Old Business

Committee Goals

Jill Myer opened discussion to the committee for any comments or changes to the goals created at the September meeting.

Ryan Huppert replied the goals are ambitious with current meeting structure, and asked if the goals listed here were prioritized. Jill Myer replied that they have not been prioritized, and that the timeline and resources should be discussed at the committee's next meeting.

FAQ flyer

Connie Bohatch asked Suzanne Schulz to comment on information on the flyer that conflicts with current City policy. Suzanne's main concerns were with language of location. She suggested to rephrase, or add an asterisk to check with local ordinance. Ryan Huppert added the flyer is a great start, but we don't want to set people up for failure by letting them think they can do something that is actually not allowed. The location could instead say "inside or outside in compliance with City

ordinance.” Jill Myer clarified that the initial discussion for the flyer was to have a general education piece about what urban agriculture is and how it can happen.

Joan Huyser-Honing asked about the details of the ordinance that prohibits food to be grown in a front yard. Connie Bohatch explained it is to prevent obstructed views on streets and around corners with plants like corn or native species.

Committee members discussed the level of detail of organizations to include on the flyer. Future training will be needed with these groups to ensure they have the correct information on resources and ordinances.

Additional details for the flyer and larger educational strategy will be discussed next meeting.

Committee Vacancies

Catherine Zietse summarized the process for new committee members and what the committee discussed last meeting. Joan Huyser-Honig suggested the committee have representation from the southwest side of the city, and asked who runs the garden near Caesar Chavez School. Dave Zimmerman replied that it is Habitat for Humanity, and he will reach out to see interest in the Roosevelt Park and Black Hills neighborhood. Ryan Huppert suggested the committee look for a member with experience in business with hydroponics or greenhouses.

Jill Myer asked about the requirements for the committee member representing a farmers market. Catherine Zietse replied the member should have experience running a market and with vendors. Anyone with interest should submit at Personal Information Form.

Updates on Pekich Park

Suzanne Schulz shared that the community meeting in October was successful, and the City continues to work with community to determine what they want to do moving forward. 20+ listening sessions have taken place as part of a larger Quality of Life plan for the Heartside neighborhood. Ultimately, whatever happens in Pekich needs to come from the community rather than from City staff.

Agenda Items for Next Meeting:

- Presentation / best practices from Urban Forestry Committee representative
- Timeline and prioritization of goals

Meeting was adjourned at 7:08 pm.