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# City of Detroit

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TO: Honorable City Council  
Honorable Mayor Michael E. Duggan  
City Planning Commission

FROM: David Whitaker, Interim Director   
Kathryn Lynch Underwood, City Planner   
Legislative Policy Division

DATE: June 18, 2014

RE: Advancing Urban Livestock in Detroit

The City of Detroit is recognized nationally and internationally for its leadership in urban agriculture. In light of recent controversy and misunderstanding regarding provision for goats in the City, the staff to the City Planning Commission submits the following as a synopsis of the challenge of introducing the keeping of livestock as a legitimate activity in the city of Detroit. This report speaks to the regulatory as well as community challenges being faced, as agriculture uses in general, and the keeping of livestock specifically, are being practiced and promoted in the City.

## Introduction

During the process of devising the urban agriculture ordinance, which became effective on April 16, 2013, the Urban Agriculture Workgroup had also considered revising City code to allow for certain farm animals. Currently, Sec. 6-1-3 (a) of the City Code states, in part:

*It shall be unlawful for a person to own, harbor, keep, or maintain, sell, or transfer any farm animal, or any wild animal, on their premises or at a public place with the City; provided, that farm animals or wild animals may be kept in circuses, zoos, or laboratories, subject to the approval of the City...*

However, due to the complexity of standards that may be necessary, concerns raised by City departments; and, concerns and resistance from many in the community at-large, it was decided to go forward with the an ordinance that dealt primarily with cultivation (but also fish farming) and tackle farm animals (and honey bees) following adoption of the urban agriculture ordinance.

The City code regulating farm animals no longer reflects current reality; especially with varying degrees of vacancy within neighborhoods, which more easily facilitates such activity, as well as with the growth of urban agriculture, in general. There are many who are keeping farm animals including (mostly) hens, but also other fowl, goats, other miscellaneous farm animals, as well as honey bees. And, there are increasing numbers of persons desiring to do so. There is, as well, interest in looking at the viability of utilizing sheep and/or goats to clear and maintain vacant land.

Also, it should be noted that as the City works toward translating the Detroit Future City framework into an amended Master Plan of Policies, allowing livestock is being considered for areas with high residential vacancy rates.

#### Benefits of Urban Livestock

There are a number of benefits to integrating keeping livestock as part of urban activity. Although some actually keep chickens, rabbits, and goats (for instance) as companion animals, many also keep them as a source of food (eggs, meat, milk/cheese). As well, there are increasing numbers of people keeping honey bees for honey products, and to add to the waning populations of bees necessary for plant pollination.

There are psychological and social benefits, as well. Livestock are used in many places as therapy animals providing a sense of peace and bringing out nurturing qualities in individuals with a variety of psychological and social challenges. Children and youth seem naturally drawn to farm animals and certainly benefit from learning the responsibilities of caring for such livestock.

There is growing interest in exploration of livestock being (humanely) raised for commercial purposes in more isolated and/or industrial settings. And then, of course, there is the interest in utilizing goats and/or sheep for clearing and maintaining vacant land.

#### Community Concerns

There is not much gray area or middle ground when it comes to how the community regards keeping farm animals in neighborhoods. On one end are the animal enthusiasts who feel they have a right to keep farm animals, and/or espouse the benefits as stated above. On the opposite end are those who feel that their rights to a traditional urban neighborhood setting are being violated; and/or are concerned about noise, odors, disease, and vermin. As well, there are many who feel that agriculture, broadly, and livestock specifically are not desirable uses in the city, and associate both with a negative rural south experience (or immigrant experience) best left in the past. The cultural/racial and historically based concerns are certainly not to be taken lightly.

A public education and engagement strategy will be implemented so that the broader community will have an opportunity to learn more about how livestock might be integrated into neighborhoods, as well to hear, acknowledge, and attempt to address community concerns. The broader community feedback will also help to inform how to approach policy.

### City Government Concerns

Those in city government that may be tasked with implementation and enforcement of codes and ordinances allowing livestock share some of the same concerns as the community related to possible nuisances such as odors, noise, vermin, and disease. But more specifically, City government concerns are related to the capacity to regulate livestock in the context of limited and taxed City resources, as well as the lack of knowledge regarding how livestock should be kept in a way that both protects the welfare of the animals and does not create a nuisance to the neighbors. One idea staff is introducing to the effort is that of an Urban Livestock Guild (attached), the purpose of which is to lift some of the regulatory burden from the City through peer accountability among those keeping livestock.

Other concerns include how livestock should be handled from a zoning perspective, such as:

- In which zoning districts should animals be allowed and at what intensity?
- Should an overlay be created that allows for more animals and intensive activities for neighborhoods that are less densely populated and have more vacant land?

### A Way Forward...

Clearly, the introduction of livestock into urban neighborhoods; the standards for properly keeping certain animals (and in specific numbers) in an urban setting; and the regulatory and policy framework to support urban livestock are more complex issues than most anticipate. Even though there are a variety of regulations across the State and the country, the Detroit experience is different than most other places because of the intensity of activity already taking place; the variety of neighborhood densities and conditions; the opportunities for varying (appropriate) scales of agricultural activity; and the desire from keeping backyard chickens “recreationally” to keeping chickens (and possibly other animals) as food sources for commercial purposes.

Staff would advocate that the setting of standards and policies be accomplished in a very deliberate manner, but with timetables so that a consensus among stakeholders can be achieved by the end of the calendar year. The urban livestock workgroup presently consist of: at least 10 members who currently keep livestock and are connected to the urban agriculture community in the city; Animal Control, the Law Department, Buildings Safety Engineering and Environmental Department, Planning and Development Department, Department of Public Works, Recreation Department, General Services, and Detroit Future City are represented, as well. Staff is consulting with the Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development; several departments within Michigan State University including, but not limited to the Animal Science Department and Extension; and the Michigan Humane Society. Staff is also in conversation with MSU with regard to possibly doing research on urban livestock, with Detroit as the model subject. The possibility of hosting a (first of its kind) forum on urban livestock (especially in view of recent statewide concern over Right-to-Farm issues) is also being considered.

To date, one meeting has been convened with the community stakeholders and several with the City government stakeholders and others. Staff will be convening the work group as a whole as this effort continues to move forward.

In summary, moving forward with urban livestock includes, but is not limited to determining:

- what animals are appropriate, under what circumstances and intensity in a variety of neighborhoods;
- standards so that animals are healthy and properly kept;
- standards to mitigate nuisances;
- the suitability of commercial livestock production in certain settings;
- how the City government can best implement and enforce policy;
- what medical/veterinary and other support services are needed for animals and how will the Detroit livestock keepers gain access; and as well:
  
- Devising an education and engagement process to both inform policy and to address community concerns; and
- Having open dialogue and dealing with the cultural/racial/historical perspectives and perceptions that may hinder the growth of urban agriculture and keeping livestock in urban settings

Detroit's urban agriculture ordinance was recently cited as #1 of ten being recognized in the country (see attachment). There is the opportunity to demonstrate the same innovation and leadership with regard to urban livestock.

Please contact Kathryn Lynch Underwood of the Legislative Policy Division/City Planning Commission staff at 313.224.6378 if you have questions or for additional information.

#### Attachments

cc: Trisha Stein, Planning and Development Department  
Melvin Holowell, Corporation Counsel  
Geni Giannotti, Director, BSEED  
Alicia Minter, Director, Recreation Department  
Brad Dick, Director, Recreation  
Kenneth Cockrel, Jr., Executive Director, Detroit Future City  
Urban Livestock Workgroup

## **PROPOSAL FOR AN URBAN LIVESTOCK GUILD In the city of Detroit**

**Concept developed by Kathryn Lynch Underwood  
City of Detroit City Planning Commission/Legislative Policy Division**

### **Overview:**

Currently, the City of Detroit prohibits the owning, harboring, keeping, maintaining, selling or transferring of farm animals. This prohibition is specified in Sec. 6-1-3 and Sec. 61-12-326 (1) of the Detroit City Code. Certain agricultural uses are now allowed, as provided for in Ordinance No. 10-13, effective April 16, 2013, including but not limited to urban gardens and urban farms. There are many persons also keeping livestock in Detroit. Even though it is an illegal activity, the interest and number of persons keeping livestock continues to increase.

Legalizing the keeping of certain livestock was discussed during the formulation of the urban agriculture ordinance. However, due to the myriad of concerns raised by both City departments and the general public, it was decided to move the provisions related to cultivation (and aquaculture/aquaponics) forward and deal with livestock separately and more deliberately.

### **Challenges/Issues:**

Concerns expressed with regard to urban livestock basically fall into four major areas:

- Possible nuisance (vermin, odors, noise)
- Animal welfare (kept properly, disease-free)
- Capacity of the City (lack of knowledge and/or resources to inspect or enforce)
- Community acceptance (effectively dealing with resistance and the need for education and engagement)

### **Proposed Solution:**

Creation of an **Urban Livestock Guild** consisting of those who keep livestock in the city, in partnership with the City of Detroit; and possibly the Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (MDARD), Michigan State University (MSU), United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and/or other agencies and entities with knowledge about and/or with the responsibility to regulate certain livestock and related activities.

The Urban Livestock Guild would serve the purpose of:

- Peer accountability with respect to keeping animals properly and so as not to create a nuisance;
- Providing and/or facilitating training and/or certification for those who want to keep livestock;
- Helping to devise best management practices and technical support for keepers of livestock;

- Working with and making recommendations to inspection and enforcement departments and agencies; and
- Devising and implementing community engagement and education strategies.

Any of these functions (and possibly others) would be in partnership with the City and other relevant agencies and entities. The Guild could be an independent body or housed as a function within an existing organization within the Detroit agriculture community. Funding would be sought to support basic functioning and responsibilities.

Membership in the Urban Livestock Guild would be mandatory to obtain a permit from the City of Detroit to keep livestock. A permit would be issued upon completing basic training and/or obtaining some type of certification related to the specific livestock to be kept. Permits would be renewable on an annual or bi-annual basis. Training need only occur once, but would have to occur per type of livestock.

**Goal:**

To facilitate the keeping of livestock in the city of Detroit where:

- those keeping livestock support and are accountable to each other;
- livestock are kept properly and do not create a nuisance;
- the broader community is engaged and educated; and
- the administrative and regulatory burden is lessened for the impacted departments of the City of Detroit.

Please send comments to:  
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## 10 American Cities Lead the Way With Urban Agriculture Ordinances

May 27, 2014 | Trish Popovitch

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Small growers and urban farms are springing up across the nation, but many cities lack the infrastructure, zoning laws and foresight to truly leverage this transition.

Over the past several years, however, city governments, often working with local stakeholder groups and food policy councils, are changing that. Urban agriculture ordinances help light the way for would-be urban farmers, providing guidance and a sense of legitimacy.

Here is Seedstock's list of ten cities leading the way with innovative urban agriculture ordinances that provide a blueprint for a new economic future grounded in sustainable food production in urban centers.

### 1. Detroit, Michigan

The City of Detroit, once the wealthiest city in the United States, saw its population peak in 1950 at 1.8 million. In the sixty years since, population declined by 60 percent to approximately 713,000 in 2010. As a result, the city's once bustling 139-square miles contain an estimated 200,000 vacant parcels comprising a quarter of the city's land area, according to the Wall Street Journal. The vacant land stretches for miles, forming vistas across urban prairies interspersed with abandoned structures. In 2009, the city of Detroit created a Food Policy Council to study how to implement local food systems and urban agriculture in the city, and in 2013, through the work of the council, the city adopted a comprehensive urban agriculture ordinance. With detailed zoning that focuses on the production of local food, the city is now home to 1350 community gardens, as well as farmer's markets, food trucks, small urban growers and local businesses



Residents of Boston's Dudley neighborhood participate in a raised bed community garden build day at the DNI Community Land Trust. Photo courtesy of Dudley Neighborhood Inc.

focused on neighborhood stabilization.

## 2. Portland, Oregon

With 26 farmer's markets, 22 acres of community gardens and over 170 food cart businesses, Portland is a haven for urban agriculture. Supplemental businesses such as bee keeping supply shops and farming supply stores have sprung up across the city in the last few years. Small farms just outside the city provide a local food economy and CSAs abound. Portland adopted an urban growth boundary in 1981, a community gardening program in 1975 and passed an Urban Food Zoning Code in June of 2012. The Food Zoning Code has a new chapter on food production and distribution within the city limits providing detailed guidelines for market and community gardens, CSAs and farmer's markets. Community and respect for neighbors is part and parcel of Portland's plan forward.

## 3. Austin, Texas

Community gardens in Austin provide over 100,000 pounds of local fresh food annually. With a YWCA Community garden project dating back to 1975 and the founding of Austin's Sustainable Food Center in 1993, this fast growing Texas city is no stranger to sustainable thinking. The city of Austin adopted the Sustainable Urban Agriculture and Community Garden Program (SUACG) in 2009 providing a framework of guidelines for an established local food system. The ordinance addresses not only community gardens and urban farms but storm water collection as well as waste and energy reduction. The ordinance is brief in comparison to many, but supported by an active Sustainable Food Policy Board created in 2009.

## 4. Boston, Massachusetts

With over 40 food truck companies, a pilot residential composting program, 200 community gardens, 100 school gardens and 28 farmer's markets, Boston was in need of a framework for its growing sustainability efforts. In December of 2013, the City of Boston adopted Article 89 into their zoning code focused on providing structure for developing urban agriculture while also helping to promote it's growth. Before the zoning amendment, there was nothing in city code that expressly allowed or discouraged urban agriculture in the city. Article 89 permits ground-level and roof-top farming, bee-keeping, chicken-keeping, aquaponics, and hydroponics as well as farm stands and farmer's markets.

## 5. Cleveland, Ohio

Cleveland's urban agriculture movement has steadily gained momentum in recent years. The city began adopting green space policies in 2005. In 2007, they created garden and farmer's market polices and established a Food Policy Council. In 2009 came the chickens and the bees and finally, in 2010, they provided guidelines for urban agriculture. Today, with 20 farmer's markets, 30 CSAs, more than 200 community gardens and a recent study showing 1108 potential sites for urban agriculture, Cleveland is tackling its "rust belt" status head on. The city's Office of Sustainability promotes the "Sustainable Cleveland 2019" initiative bringing together various institutions, nonprofits, businesses and residents to build a Cleveland that is green, resilient and thriving.

## 6. Chicago, Illinois

In 2011, Chicago adopted a revision to its zoning code to allow urban agriculture as a permitted use within the city limits. This includes the creation of rooftop farms, apiaries, community gardens and farmer's markets and the transformation of vacant lots into urban farms, all in an effort to make Chicago a healthier place to live and work. Sustainable businesses are moving into Chicago and community outreach efforts and sustainable education programming abounds. With 64 food truck vendors, 24 seasonal markets



and one year round market, 62 urban farms and community gardens, 54 businesses and organizations actively promoting urban agriculture, not to mention an ever growing bounty of restaurant rooftop gardens, Special attention to utilizing urban agriculture to revitalize urban neighborhoods on Chicago's south side is paying dividends.

#### 7. Seattle, Washington

Always a leader in urban agriculture, Seattle adopted its first sustainability plan back in 1994. Revisions to the city's zoning code in 2010 clarified land use requirements and limits of urban agriculture. The city's P-Patch community garden program began in 1973 and today, 85 community gardens are housed on 31 acres of city land. The Neighborhood Farmer's Market Alliance manages seven farmer's markets in the city. There are over 160 food trucks in operation, over 30 CSAs and dozens of urban farms in town and in the outlying region creating a vibrant local food culture. The city's latest urban agriculture addition is the Urban Garden Share program matching experienced gardeners that live in condos and apartment with local gardens with growing space to share.

#### 8. Baltimore, Maryland

In 2013, Baltimore created an urban agriculture plan detailing the many ways in which urban agriculture can take place in the city as well as educational and funding opportunities for residents and business owners. In 2010, a rewrite of the city's zoning code began and is expected to pass into law this year. The new code changes community gardens from a temporary to permitted use in all zoning districts. Some of the gardens have already been in existence for over two decades. Urban farms will go from temporary to conditional use in all districts except those zoned industrial. The code clarifies the keeping of bees, chickens, rabbits and even miniature goats in the city. The city created Homegrown Baltimore and a Food Policy Initiative to encourage urban agriculture and promote the use of vacant city lots for green space and food production. With 20 farmer's markets, six public markets, over 30 food trucks and dozens of urban farms and CSAs, Baltimore is encouraging a vibrant local economy while creating a better educated and healthier populace.

#### 9. Milwaukee, Wisconsin

Registering 2,700 vacant lots and 12,000 foreclosed homes in 2013 and the loss of 70,000 manufacturing jobs since 1970, the city of Milwaukee had to reassess its collective future. In April 2012, a zoning code audit for the city supported the idea of promoting urban agriculture to build a new economy. Zoning for agriculture, bees and greenhouses already existed. Through the Office of Sustainability's HOME GR/OWN program, vacant lots are being transformed into green spaces, urban farms, community gardens and city orchards. A plan to refresh the city's infrastructure, ReFresh Mike, promotes sustainable manufacturing, an increase in local food production and a reduction in waste and energy use. With community garden grants, chicken and bee ordinances, vacant lot leases, tax breaks for Brownfield cleanup and funding for sustainable manufacturing, Milwaukee sets the bar high in terms of post industrial city evolution.

#### 10. Minneapolis, Minnesota

The Minneapolis City Council adopted an Urban Agriculture Policy Plan in 2011 with recommendations to improve conditions for urban growers and gardeners. An urban agriculture ordinance passed in March of 2012 to implement the plan's recommendations, providing detailed guidelines and use requirements for current and emerging urban farmers and growers. The Minneapolis Food Council collaborating with Homegrown Minneapolis initiative makes urban agriculture policy recommendations to the city. With 200 community gardens, 80 food trucks and 32 farmer's markets, Minneapolis continues to promote urban agriculture and increase access to local fresh food for its residents.