Urban Agriculture In Process:
Developing a Comprehensive Policy for the City of Cambridge
Presentation to the Health & Environment Committee - August 23, 2016
What is Urban Agriculture?

Urban agriculture is the practice of cultivating and processing food in and around the city.
Urban Ag Task Force

The Cambridge Public Health and Community Development Departments have been working in partnership with the Urban Ag Task Force, a subcommittee of the Food and Fitness Policy Council, to develop a comprehensive urban ag policy for the city.

Goals of Regulations

• Allow limited agricultural activities in Cambridge
• Establish a clear permitting and enforcement process
• Support of best practices, and being good neighbors
Cambridge Outreach & Partners

Stakeholder Engagement

• City agencies and programs (CPHD, CDD, ISD, DPW, Animal Control, Conservation Commission)
• Focus Groups with local experts (beekeepers, chicken keepers, gardeners, entrepreneurs, academics, epidemiologists, veterinarians, clinicians)
• Nonprofits and Community Organizations, e.g. Cambridge Community Center, City Sprouts, Shady Hill School
• Residents
• Neighborhood organizations, Tenants Association
• State agencies (MDAR, MDPH)
• Local municipal experts (Boston, Somerville, Arlington)
Urban Agriculture in Cambridge

• *What works in Cambridge?* Examined nearby cities’ policies (Boston, Somerville, Arlington) and learned from national leaders (San Francisco, NYC, Austin, TX)

• Policy advising and research support from the Conservation Law Foundation
Drafting a policy that includes:

1. A **zoning** ordinance that explicitly allows agricultural activities

2. **Public health regulations** that support and limit activities to mitigate potential health risks and exposures
Comprehensive City Policy

Public Health Regulations
• Keeping chickens (hens only)
• Beekeeping
• Soil safety for produce grown for sale

Zoning Ordinance
• Establish what types of agriculture are “accessory” (e.g. home-based activities) and what are “principal uses” (e.g. commercial farms)
• Establish allowed districts, criteria and/or review processes for principal agricultural uses

Guidance Documents
• Best management practices
• Easy guide for community members to navigate permit process

Permit Applications and Forms
Public Health Regulations

• Three separate regulations (hens, bees, soil)
• Regulatory authority defined
• Logical argument for regulatory need and purpose
• Definitions
• CPHD permit required to keep hens or bees
• Operation and maintenance requirements
  • Covers nuisance, odor, noise, pest prevention, sanitary waste management, and disease prevention
  • Refers to other state/local regulations where applicable
• Establishes inspection frequency
• Clear enforcement mechanisms for violations and due process considerations for compliance
Public Health Opportunities & Considerations

• Permit application plan review phase enables CPHD to flag design or operational plans that can be modified to prevent later complaints or concerns (e.g. bee sting allergies)

• Best Management Practices and guidance documents available to educate applicants on protective measures to prevent disease transmission and assure adequate biosecurity measures (e.g., avian influenza)

• Soil safety guidelines and testing requirements to prevent heavy metal exposure (e.g., lead, arsenic)
Task Force Next Steps

- Draft soil safety regulations and regulatory review by Cambridge Public Health Subcommittee to vote to promulgate public health regulations on chickens, bees, and soil
- Develop criteria, and review processes for principal agricultural uses for staff review (Zoning, ISD, Law, CPHD)
- Host large public meeting to get input on draft
Agriculture Activities Under Consideration

- Farms – ground level
- Farms – roof level
- Commercial & Institutional (nonprofit) farms & gardens
- Animals (hens, honey bees)
- Hydroponics (roots in water)
- Aquaponics (fish & plants in tanks)
- Aquaculture (cultivation of aquatic animals)
- Aeroponics (roots in air, sprayed with water)
- Freight containers
- Vertical Agriculture
- Expanding opportunities for farmers markets & Community Supported Agriculture; CSAs covered by Federal/State SNAP Match financing in Spring 2017
City Council Zoning Petition

• Intent is the same as Urban Ag Task Force draft policy

• Implementation is key – need to ensure a clear, effective permitting and enforcement process

• Planning Board is not the recommended permitting agency – bulk of oversight for some activities would be by CPHD

• Zoning should state what agricultural uses (principal and accessory) are allowed / not allowed in Article 4.000 (Use Regulations), subject to compliance with CPHD regulations

• City Council petition can provide guidance for the final phase of Task Force work