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KINGSTON URBAN AGRICULTURE COMMITTEE

URBAN AGRICULTURE PLANNING & ZONING STUDY

A Report to the Mayor of Kingston, Kingston Common Council, Conservation Advisory Council, and Comprehensive Plan Committee on the Potential of Urban Agriculture in Kingston and recommendations for comprehensive planning and zoning to support the implementation of urban agriculture practices in Kingston, New York.

Presented to the Kingston Conservation Advisory Council on February 6, 2014.

URBAN AGRICULTURE

PLANNING & ZONING STUDY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

An Opportune Moment for Urban Agriculture in Kingston

This is a time of unprecedented change in Kingston, New York. A new comprehensive plan is being drafted, grass roots organizing and community organizations are growing, new businesses and restaurants are opening, young families and artists are moving in, and there is a heightened environmental awareness in this small, historic river city of 24,000 people.

Like many North American cities, Kingston experienced growth in the 19th century and decline after World War II. The changes in transportation and commerce that have shaped our lives and the way cities function have also had profound impacts on the way we grow and consume our food. Cities dealing with poverty, joblessness, environmental injustices, and vacant and under-utilized spaces are seeking ways to revitalize. In the past decade, urban agriculture has been pursued by many cities as a strategy to address the relationship between vacant city land, food insecurity, and the need for entrepreneurship and jobs. In the case of every success story, the strength of the local institutional climate was the primary factor for the success of local ventures. The goal of this report is to provide recommendations that support the local institutions that could help urban agriculture succeed in Kingston.

Because Kingston is undertaking a new comprehensive plan, there is an opportunity to participate in the transformative urban agriculture movement that is rapidly growing across the United States. Every day brings news about cities revising their laws, new urban farming groups forming and sharing their experiences, and rooftop enterprises and community gardens changing the way people in urban areas are growing and eating. We can learn from their examples.

This report is intended to identify the specific barriers and propose changes in this small city that would allow its residents to engage in urban agriculture and become a part of “local food systems change.” The first step in this effort requires “removing barriers” by identifying land use regulations that could better support urban agriculture. The next step is to create “positive policies” that can support these beneficial changes. These two steps are the focus of this report.

A Growing Movement in Kingston

In the past decade, several organizations and individuals have coalesced around healthier eating in Kingston, and the interest in urban agriculture has resulted in several farming initiatives. Organizations have arisen to support all aspects of food systems change and a wide range of stakeholders is now involved, including the support of elected officials and government agencies (see Chapter 2). Two Kingston Common Council resolutions and a Mayoral proclamation show the executive and legislative intent and demonstration the commitment to systemic change (see Chapter 2 and Appendix C. In 2013, the Urban Agriculture Committee of Kingston came together to support these efforts and commissioned this report. Our vision is to create an environment in the City of Kingston that can increase

WHAT IS URBAN AGRICULTURE?

Simply defined as the growing of food within cities, urban agriculture may also be understood as a form of “systems change”: a movement of social empowerment that can reduce poverty and food insecurity, support public health, local economic development and community revitalization, reclaim vacant and under-utilized urban spaces, and address the imbalances of the food system.

WHY NOW?

We have the chance to support the update to Kingston’s Comprehensive Plan, which is currently underway, and recommend changes to the zoning ordinance and related city ordinances that would remove the current barriers to urban agriculture.

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the productivity, understanding, and economy of local food in a way that is healthy and beneficial to all its residents.

Although it sits in the midst of some of the most abundant farmland anywhere, the small city of Kingston in the Mid-Hudson Valley, New York, contains four large “food deserts”¹ (see Figure 1.1). At least one in every five children in Kingston at times lacks adequate food to meet basic nutritional needs and 17.4 percent of the population meets the definition of “low-income” and “low-access” (CRREO 2012). There are at least two “potential environmental justice areas” (areas of high minority population and federal poverty levels) in the city that overlap with these.² Although Kingston boasts a variety of recreational resources, including a nature center and riverfront beach, many of the city’s poorest residents live near only the smallest of its many parks, and many children cannot reach them without braving busy thoroughfares. With nearly a fifth of its population of 24,000 living in poverty and about 44 percent overweight or obese, Kingston may be seen as a case study of the inequities in American society.

Agents of Change

Some powerful agents of change have already arisen in this small, post-industrial city about two hours north of New York City. Numerous community groups have formed to combat the City’s economic decline and social repercussions and together have called for change on a number of fronts. Citizens and organizations in the city are now engaged in many urban agricultural activities from community gardens to beekeeping (see Urban Agriculture in Kingston’s Facebook page).

A few years ago, a related group of residents organized a government reform campaign and succeed in getting the municipality to commit funds to writing a new, widely inclusive new master plan (the “Comprehensive Plan” or “Kingston 2025”). The City’s previous Comprehensive Plan, last updated in 1961, and its zoning code do not currently contemplate agricultural activities and in some cases may even prohibit them. Led by a group of interested citizens, the Kingston Urban Agriculture Committee sought expert advice on how to proceed with amendments to these documents so that the City of Kingston can support local food production and allow it to flourish.

Phase 1: Removing Barriers to Urban Agriculture

As the first step in this process, the Urban Agriculture Committee is working with individuals from the Kingston Land Trust, the Kingston YMCA Farm Project³, the South Pine Street City Farm⁴, City’s Conservation Advisory Council, Pace Law School’s Land Use Law Center, and Hone Strategic, a local urban planning firm, to generate this report and pursue its implementation. ***The primary goal of this report is to support the update to the Comprehensive Plan, which is currently underway, and recommend changes to the zoning ordinance and related city ordinances that would remove the current barriers to urban agriculture.***

Phase 2: Positive Policies for Local Food Systems Change

After working to incorporate local food production into the Comprehensive Plan, zoning and related city policies in this “Phase 1” report, the Urban Agriculture Committee will then begin the pursue support for urban agricultural activities on both municipally-owned and private property by encouraging partnerships, capacity-building, communication, outreach and education among the many individuals, community organizations, government agencies and private enterprises currently involved in some aspect of food production in our area. “Phase 2” will also involve further research into government and institutional policy changes and successful program approaches. The Urban Agriculture Committee will pursue grants to support the study, as well as initiatives outlined in this report in education, land access, joint use agreements, farm incubation, procurement rule changes, and contract farming, among others.

Food systems change in our region is already under way, supported by increased public interest, consumer orientation, and investments by organizations. Kingston can be a leader among small cities in the Hudson

¹ Food deserts are defined by the U.S. Department of Agriculture as “low income Census tracts where a substantial number or share of residents have low access to a supermarket or large grocery store.”

² For more on Potential Environmental Justice Areas (PEJAs), see <http://www.dec.ny.gov/public/899.html> and for a map of Kingston’s PEJAs, see http://www.dec.ny.gov/docs/permits_ej_operations_pdf/ulsterej.pdf

³ www.facebook.com/KingstonYMCAFarmProject

⁴ <http://southpinestreetcityfarm.org/>

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Valley by articulating its goals to improve its environment, local economy, and public health by articulating support for urban agriculture in its comprehensive plan and ordinances. The City's role of connecting people with information, resources, and its ability to change the way we use our land is a powerful catalyst for improving the quality of life for its residents.

Findings and Recommendations

According to our review of practices across the country, the strength of the **local institutional climate** was the primary factor for the success of local urban agriculture efforts.

Immediate Steps: Integration with Comprehensive Planning and Zoning, Capacity Building and Partnerships.

The Kingston Urban Agriculture Committee formed as a result of these changes and is committed to supporting the goals and recommendations of this report, including integrating these goals into the City's comprehensive plan, revisions to the zoning code, revisions to the general ordinance, outreach on urban agriculture policies, education on urban agriculture resources, encouraging communities of practice, adopting a mediation mechanism, coordinating with organizations and government agencies, incorporating food and agriculture into local planning efforts, participating in the Food Policy Advisory Council of Ulster County, and supporting access to land. Given the overlapping goals of revitalizing Kingston's Midtown in the Comprehensive Plan and the needs and benefits associated with this urban agriculture initiative, integration of these recommendations would be highly beneficial to the Kingston 2025 vision.

Not all of these recommendations require funds for implementation. Some require coordination and commitment by city departments and organizational partners. The success of an urban agriculture program requires the following short-term actions:

- 1) **Commitment:** A commitment by the City of Kingston, either by the support of the Comprehensive Plan Committee and Planning Department or via Common Council resolution to adopt and integrate the proposed recommendations into comprehensive planning, zoning and related ordinances, and City programs.
- 2) **Comprehensive Plan Integration:** Addition of recommended urban agriculture objectives in this report. Consultation with stakeholders, including Comprehensive Plan Committee and potentially affected groups (see UA Stakeholders, above). Review and integration of recommendations (with or by consultant, if possible). Approval by Comprehensive Plan committee. Adoption by Common Council.
- 3) **Zoning and Related Ordinance Changes:** Revisions to ordinances should be coordinated with the Kingston 2025 Comprehensive Plan and zoning update. Specific recommendations in this report address: use definitions; appearance standards; signage; secondary/accessory agricultural uses; fences and screening; market farms; Right-to-Farm allowances; parking requirements; loading requirements; composting; garbage (solid waste) weeds; municipal water; prescribed burning; and gardening in municipal parks.
- 4) **Capacity Building:** Within the City of Kingston government departments to implement the coordination and organizational support proposed in this report; strengthening of the Conservation Advisory Council with a committee that can support these recommendations; strengthening of the Kingston Urban Agriculture Committee to provide coordination and support for this effort for
 - a. The production and dissemination of educational materials with the help of organizational partners
 - b. Its work with local agencies and organizations on both urban agriculture and other local food system issues.
- 5) **Partnerships with Supportive Organizations:** Partnerships among the City, the Kingston Urban Agriculture Committee, supportive organizations, and local experts to leverage resources and expertise in support of policy implementation and project coordination.
- 6) **Coordination of Information, Education, and Outreach:** A coordinated effort on the part of city offices, departments, leaders to work with organizational partners in the community that support urban agriculture. Working with partners, use the information referenced in this report and best practices resources for information, education and outreach to support a UA program.

What is the Promise of Urban Agriculture in Kingston?

As we detail in the report, the food and agriculture movement in Kingston is growing stronger daily as community organizations and individuals recognize its potential. For this study, we considered the economic development, environmental and public health development potential for urban agriculture in Kingston. Our land use inventory found that the City of Kingston owns at least 35 acres of vacant land (and more than 800 acres of land classified as “vacant” in the city). Based on figures provided by successful practices in other cities, our research shows that placing 35 acres of Kingston’s urban land in agricultural production would:

- Create between two and five direct, on-farm jobs per acre, or approximately 150 jobs;
- Create additional jobs in the agricultural services sector (equipment sales, composting and soil inputs, and food processing);
- Sequester about 77 tons of CO2 in well-maintained soil per year;
- Support the development of compost markets that would yield an additional 3,330 tons of avoided CO2 emissions annually while helping Kingston reduce the overall waste generated in the city of Kingston by 20%; and
- Generate over 1 million pounds of fresh produce for sale into local markets, providing local communities with a nearby source of healthy food.⁵
- Provide over 4 million servings of fresh produce to Kingstonites annually. For a population of 24,000 people, this is about 175 servings per person in the City each year.⁶

These benefits are summarized in the figure below. While based on a 35-acre scenario, these results are scalable.



⁵ Estimates of crop yields from urban farming average about 0.5 pounds per square foot based on an acre of production (for further details, see Appendix F). If all vacant City-owned lots in Kingston (a total of 36.87 acres, or 1.6 million square feet) were cultivated, they would yield 802,944 pounds of food per year.

⁶ The World Health Organization’s recommends 1.1 pounds of vegetables and fruit in a daily diet.

Report Contents

Note: Chapters 1 – 3 and Appendices A – F are included in the Phase 1 Draft Report to support immediate and short-term recommendations. Chapters 4 and 5 and additional appendices will be generated with a full final report.

- 1. Introduction: Urban Agriculture and Planning for Food Systems Change.** How do the national urban agriculture movement and the efforts toward regional and local food systems change support Kingston’s potential for urban agriculture?
- 2. Urban Agriculture in Kingston Today:** A brief history of community gardening and urban agriculture in Kingston; the policy context; identification of stakeholders
 - **Kingston’s Agricultural Context:** A historic market town; farming context; a “food desert”; the urban agriculture movement to date.
 - **Organizational Framework:** The presence of organizational support for urban agriculture, in grass-roots community groups, non-profits, education and government; a listing of stakeholder groups.
 - **The Policy Context for Urban Agriculture:** A review of local, county, state and federal policies affecting urban ag potential in Kingston.
- 3. Phase 1 Analysis and Recommendations: Local Policy Barriers to Urban Agriculture.**
 - **Zoning Analysis and Recommendations:** A review of zoning barriers to urban agriculture in local policy.
 - **Immediate Steps:** Approval; commitment; Integration with Comprehensive Planning and Zoning
 - **Next Steps:** Institutional Supports; Capacity Building and Partnerships
- 4. Phase 2 Focus Areas:** An analysis of the potential for Kingston to implement various elements of food systems change, including:
 - social empowerment opportunities
 - organizational capacity building
 - improved health
 - economic development through jobs , improved property values, import substitution through changes to public and institutional procurement, contract growing, and retail sales;
 - making direct links with urban consumers via farm markets, farm stands, schools restaurants, and retail operations
 - environmental remediation, including soil contamination and mitigation, green infrastructure and stormwater mitigation, and other general environmental hazards and benefits associated with urban agriculture
 - use of resources, such as water, organic waste, vacant City-owned parcels space, and services
- 5. Phase 2 Recommendations:** Medium- and longer-term organizational and policy actions to support urban agriculture in Kingston and create Positive Policies for Local Food Systems Change

Appendices:

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Sources and Further Reading

Appendix A: Detailed Analysis of Zoning Ordinance Provisions and Recommendations for Action.

Appendix B: Recommended Standard Urban Agriculture Zoning Definitions

Appendix C: Supporting Resolutions and Mayoral Proclamation in Kingston:

- Kingston Community Gardens Resolution of 2011 (#138)
- Live Well Resolution of 2013 (#162)
- Mayor Gallo’s Live Well Proclamation

Appendix D: Best Practices in Urban Agriculture

Appendix E: Model Resolutions

Appendix F: Typical Urban agriculture yields

This report was researched and written by Jennifer Schwartz Berky, principal of Hone Strategic, LLC, an urban planning, historic preservation, and development advising firm located in Kingston New York with legal research support from Jeffrey LeJava, Managing Director of Land Use Law Center for Sustainable Development at Pace Law School. The Kingston Urban Agriculture Zoning Project is a program of the Kingston Urban Agriculture Committee in partnership with Family of Woodstock and Larrecca Music, Inc. It was made possible by generous public support, including a donation from Kevin McEvoy and Barbara Epstein.