

STAFF REPORT



To: PED Council Committee Date: January 27, 2016
From: Amber Weaver, Sustainability Officer
Via: Cathy Ball, ED of Planning & Multimodal Transportation
Subject: UPDATE: Resolution 13-17 City of Asheville's Food Action Plan and Resolution 12-153 Inaugural Bee City, USA

Summary Statement:

The Office of Sustainability continues to work towards implementing the City of Asheville's Food Policy Action Plan in support of the Asheville Buncombe County Food Policy Agenda. The purpose of this report is to provide updates and recommended action items to continue the work within the Food Policy Action Plan.

Unified Development Ordinance: Create Definition for Urban Agriculture

Review:

Ordinance No. 4233 (also known as the Agricultural Amendment), adopted on September 24, 2013, amended chapter 7 of the UDO to clarify and modify regulations addressing agriculture and increase flexibility for agricultural uses. Changes included:

- Allowing agricultural structures (i.e. small barns/storage buildings, greenhouses) on residentially zoned properties with no home structure
- Allowances for farm stands in residentially zoned areas

Existing City code allows fowl (§3-3-50) on urban lots with a permit and not less than 50 feet away from neighboring households. Livestock are permitted to be used for temporary ground clearing with a permit.

Updates:

Staff from the Planning and Urban Design Department, along with the Office of Sustainability are presently researching state statutes, best practices, and related documents and zoning regulations to determine the path for the City of Asheville's commitment to updating the UDO wording amendment that would define urban agriculture and remove barriers for food production and distribution.

Process:

Planning and Urban Design staff would present wording amendments at the March Planning and Zoning Committee meeting.

Agriculture Water Rate

Review:

A reduced agriculture water rate would ease the cost of irrigation for urban farmers; however, presently because the City has yet to define Urban Agriculture as well as identify and quantify who an agriculture rate structure would apply, further research is needed in this area. Per the Water Resources Director, it may be best to find a place within the present available rates than to create a new for agriculture purposes.

Process:

Next steps for keeping this measure moving forward include defining Urban Agriculture; identify users within this arena and quantify the amount of users, therefore helping to determine if a new rate is needed or if an already existing rate is acceptable for the purpose of providing water to agriculture users.

Agriculture Opportunities

Review:

Because City-owned land is programmed for existing and/or future municipal uses, and because agriculture requires specific conditions (such as a water source and amended soil), there are limited sites that are attractive for food production in the City's portfolio. The City's current lease portfolio supports the following leases of City-owned property to benefit food production and promote food access:

- Ongoing MOU for City real property at DSD/Public Works parking lot for City Market farmer's market
- Second year agreement in place for indoor City space at DSD/Public Works for City Market Indoor Winter market
- Ongoing lease of City real property at Hardesty Lane for 10 Acres organic Vegetable production, currently with Balsam Gardens.
- Ongoing lease of City real property at Hardesty Lane for Danny's Dumpster Industrial Compost

Update:

Economic Development's Real Estate Manager has identified the following areas for large scale food production for the purposes of growing food for distribution.

PIN	LOCATION	ACERAGE	PROPERTY DESCRIPTION
009641539942	Hwy 191, Mills River, Henderson County	+/- 9	Level, bottomland, adjacent to Mills River
965862492500000	501 – 572 Swannanoa River Road	Max. 1	Level, between River and Road
966831996600000	Hardesty Ln, Azalea Park	1	Level acreage between RR & Hardesty Ln

Process:

Next steps include reviewing best practices for a prequalification application for urban agriculture land leasing and identify which department would oversee the application. Another possibility is to offer a Request for Proposals (RFP); including qualifications and best practices.

Edible Landscaping

Review:

The City does not have an active landscaping program in City parks. Due to resource constraints, minimal maintenance occurs and minimum requirements are met with low-maintenance native plants. New plantings are mainly achieved through partnerships with community groups. Some of these partners include edibles in their landscape plans.

While species selection for new or replacement plantings is determined in large part by soil type and conditions, edible plant options such as service berry trees and blueberry bushes have been both considered and planted more often since the Food Action Plan was adopted.

Update:

The City is currently in the design phase of the last segment of the French Broad River Greenway West, the Duke property, and the French Broad River Greenway East, the greenways of the RADTIP. City staff have met with several food policy stakeholders about the possibility of planting edibles along greenways. Our consultants have agreed to identify the most feasible locations for edible planting projects. These areas will be offered to the groups interested in funding and maintaining the edible gardens with a formal agreement to the City.

Additionally, there is interest in reevaluating the Recommended Species List, including more edibles, that can be applied to city parks, city right of way, and greenways approved by the City's Law Department; therefore, eliminating the concern of the type of plant material being used.

Process:

Next steps include identifying best practices used from other cities, identifying obstacles related to planting edibles on City and public property, incorporating pollinator plants that support edibles in areas that are identified as areas not suitable for edible plantings. Additional work within this area should also identify typical tree and plant maintenance, resources needed for maintenance and what a formal agreement with the City on funding and maintenance may look like.

Community Gardening

Review:

Because City-owned land is programmed for existing and/or future municipal uses, and because agriculture requires specific conditions (such as a water source and amended soil), there are limited sites that are attractive for food production in the City's portfolio.

Update:

The City of Asheville's Parks and Recreation Department along with the Office of Sustainability have identified a pilot project site along the Town Branch Greenway as a suitable location for a community garden. Designated fruit trees and pollinator plants will also have a place within the community garden. The goal is to have the community garden available for planting for the 2016 growing season.

Process:

Parks Department and the Sustainability Office are researching and reviewing best practices from other cities to help identify a process to bring back to PED for approval. The goal is to have a successful pilot to expand community gardens into other public parks and greenways.

Bee City USA and Pesticides

Review:

Asheville, Buncombe County has one of the nation's largest bee clubs, filled with volunteers who are willing to educate the public about honey bees. Asheville City Council has taken measures to make Asheville a "green city" and being pollinator-friendly respects the City's values of environmental stewardship. Ideal pollinator friendly habitat provides diverse and abundant pollinator food sources; provides water for drinking, nest building and cooling. Additionally, pollinator habitats are pesticide free or pesticide use is carried out with the least ill effects on pollinators, and is comprised of mostly, if not all, native species of grasses, perennials, shrubs and trees.

Update:

While reviewing the City of Asheville's Food Policy Action Plan and meeting with the Asheville Buncombe Food Policy Council overlap was identified in the area of edibles, pollinator plants and pesticides. The Office of Sustainability has reviewed the measures within the Food Policy Action Plan and has determined that where edibles are not realistic to be planted in public places; such as a brownfield for instance, pollinator plants can be incorporated into the plans to help support the City's Bee City, USA resolution and commitments. Pollinator plants help support the biodiversity of fauna and flora from our region and protects our public lands in that native pollinator plants do not require use of pesticides. Economically, the support of folding in Bee City, USA's objectives supports increased agriculture crop yields due to bee pollination and increased demand for pollinator friendly plant materials at local nurseries.

Process:

When focusing on community gardens and edibles in the City's public parks, greenways and right-of-ways, it will be standard practice to incorporate pollinator friendly plants that help support healthy ecosystems that clean our air and soils. While staff identifies locations for edibles to be planted and determines the location of the community garden's pilot location; pollinator plants and beds will also be examined, and determine, where appropriate, they should be installed. Examples include areas that are identified to be brownfields and unable to support edibles as well as areas along the right-of-way that may not be safe for edibles, but can provide beautiful pollinator gardens.

Climate Adaptation Planning

Review:

The basis of the City of Asheville's long term goals related to the City's Food Policy Action Plan is to address the need of food access for people who experience food insecurity as well as plan for short-term food emergencies and long-term food security. The work surrounding climate change and climate adaptation can help the city identify and prepare for such food emergencies.

Process:

The Office of Sustainability has been working with UNC Asheville's National Environmental Modeling and Analysis Center (NEMAC) to identify climate stressors effecting Asheville's climate. Once climate stressors are identified Asheville can build a climate resilience framework. Climate stressors known to Asheville include drought, flood, and landslides. The goal is to incorporate food assets, vulnerabilities, emergencies and resiliency into the study to better prepare for climate emergencies.

Attachments

- (1) Resolution 13-17 Asheville Food Policy Action Plan
- (2) Staff Report 02.10.2015