Supporting Access to Healthy Food: URBAN AGRICULTURE IN FEDERAL WAY

Building Blocks for Sustainable Communities Technical Assistance

Prepared for the City of Federal Way based on Technical Assistance provided by Forterra and funded by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency’s Building Blocks for Sustainable Communities Program.

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URBAN AGRICULTURE IN FEDERAL WAY

In 2012, the City of Federal Way received technical assistance from Forterra, as part of the Environmental Protection Agency’s Building Blocks for Sustainable Communities Program to support local urban agriculture practices. Assistance from Forterra included engaging the community in conversations about urban agriculture, amending current policies and regulatory codes and developing a procedure for public land assessment.

This report presents what Forterra staff heard during two community meetings; recommended amendments to the Comprehensive Plan and Regulatory codes; next steps to support the new policies and codes as they move through the city process; and a land assessment protocol to determine which land in Federal Way could be used for urban agriculture practices. The initial review of both the Comprehensive Plan and the Regulatory Codes was done by planning consultant Kristina Cerise, and Plan and Code recommendations were prepared by Urban Food Link. This work took place in September through December 2012.

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Consultant staff: Kara Martin and Tammy Morales from Urban Food Link (http://www.urbanfoodlink.com/) and independent planning consultant Kristina Cerise.

Thanks to all of the community members who shared their time and ideas:

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Forterra and City staff hosted two community focus groups to create a vision of urban agriculture in Federal Way and worked with consultants and community ideas to develop policies and regulatory codes to support urban agriculture.

Key findings include:

- **Community gardens are thriving.** Federal Way has a thriving culture of community gardens, primarily led by the Federal Way Community Gardens Foundation. Additionally, gardens are used by schools to engage students in outdoor learning and Communities in Schools for violence prevention.

- **Residents want to increase local food access.** There is interest from individual farmers, especially with the new state Cottage Food Laws, to be able to grow and sell food from their residential homes. Additionally, increasing local food access will come with ensuring the Farmers Market is accessible to all. Proposed codes support both individual farmers, as well as the Farmers Market.

- **Policies and regulatory codes need revision.** An increasing number of Federal Way residents and organizations interested in gardening and farming have requested clarification of the current regulatory code in the past couple years. The Comprehensive Plan was completely silent on the issue of urban agriculture, neither opposing nor supporting. In contrast, the Regulatory Codes were in some cases silent, but frequently codes were in place that prevented the development of urban agriculture. Updated policies and codes will ensure that all Federal Way residents have the chance to grow or access healthy, local foods.

- **City leadership supports urban agriculture.** City staff are interested in having new policies and codes so there is clarity with regards to where the City stands in relation to the practices of urban agriculture. City Council members were present at the community focus groups, giving their input and helping to shape the final product.

The report that follows includes reports from each of the community meetings (p. 8 -9). Please contact us to review the suggested policy and regulatory code updates. As of the end of 2012, the policies have passed through Planning Commission, Land Use Transportation Committee and will be presented to the City Council on January 2nd 2013. The Regulatory Codes will be presented to the Planning Commission in a work session on January 16th 2013 and continue through the City process. Forterra staff has attended and will continue to attend these meetings, to present information and answer questions about the policies and codes.
BACKGROUND

What is Urban Agriculture?

“Urban agriculture” is an umbrella term encompassing a wide range of activities involving the raising, cultivation, processing, marketing, and distribution of food. Urban agriculture land uses include: home gardens, community gardens, urban farms, cottage food operations, farm stands, and farmers markets. Based on our discussion and visioning with community members we defined urban agriculture as including the following:

According to Urban Food Link:

Across the country many municipalities are adopting “urban agriculture” ordinances in response to their communities increasing interest to grow, raise, process and sell food within the city limits. Communities are growing food in backyards and vacant lots on private and public lands. In some instances, the food is not solely for personal or private use, but also for entrepreneurial enterprises started by individuals or organizations. Urban agriculture offers opportunities for building community, education, and creating safe places through community gardens where residents garden collectively. Cities such as Detroit, MI, Sommerville, MA, Cleveland, OH Portland, OR and Seattle, WA, have supported their community’s urban agriculture efforts through adopting and revising city regulatory codes to address potential barriers and clarify what is allowed in the city.

Federal Way Food Landscape Assessment

Before receiving the EPA’s Technical Assistance Grant, the City of Federal had a Food Landscape Assessment completed¹. These assessments provide an understanding of a community’s access to food through the retail environment, land use patterns and street network. They provide the necessary data for local officials to adopt healthy food policies that better serve residents. These assessments were made possible by funding from Public Health Seattle-King County and the US Department of Health and Human Services.

¹ Kara E. Martin, Urban Food Link with Branden Born and Eva Ringstrom, Northwest Center for Livable Communities and Amalia Leighton, SvR Design
Findings from the Federal Way’s Food Landscape Assessment included the following:

- According to Seattle and King County Public Health, Federal Way has the county’s third highest adult obesity rate.
- Over 87% of the cities land base is more than one half mile from a super market and there are nearly four times as many fast food restaurants and convenience stores to the number of supermarkets, small grocery stores and produce vendors combined.

Access to safe and nutritious food is considered a basic individual right by the World Health Organization and the United Nations, however many residents, including those in Federal Way, as the Food Landscape analysis indicates, have limited access to fresh produce and other healthful foods. Researchers have shown that a diet rich in fruits and vegetables is associated with positive growth and development, weight management, and a decreased risk for chronic disease. To ensure that all Federal Way residents have an opportunity for health, the City is developing new urban agriculture policies that would increase access fresh, local food.

What’s already happening in Federal Way?
Federal Way has a wealth of urban agriculture already in place, and with the support of new policies and codes urban agriculture will become an even more common sight. One of the post prominent set of gardens is run by the Federal Way Community Gardens Foundation and Mike Stanley. This organization has gardens at the Senior Center, Truman High School and several elementary schools. Many of these gardens produce fruits and vegetables that are distributed to low-income seniors and families.

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The gardens at schools are often used by teachers such as Darcy Borg at Camelot Elementary to support in-classroom studies. Additionally, Franciscan Health Services recently received a grant to use gardens in their program for youth violence prevention.

Outside of the schools and the Foundation, there is community interest in residential gardens and farms to grow food for personal use, but also to sell. With the recently passed Cottage Food Laws that allow residents to make low-risk food products in their own home kitchens and sell directly to consumers, there is growing interest in home sales.

Finally, Federal Way is lucky to have an active Farmers Market that offers fresh, local produce to its customers. The Farmers Market offers produce and goods during the summer and is open throughout the winter at The Commons Mall offering a Bazaar of goods. Currently the Farmers Market struggles without a permanent location and the ability to have signs posted throughout the season to make more residents aware of their location and offerings.

The recommendations for both policies and codes will support the urban agriculture practices that are already in place and create the opportunity for more urban agriculture to flourish.

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5 http://agr.wa.gov/FoodAnimal/CottageFoodOperation/
6 http://www.federalwayfarmersmarket.com/
OVERVIEW OF EVENTS

Forterra staff met with City staff and consultants Kristina Cerise and Kara Martin and Tammy Morales of Urban Food Link in August 2012 to discuss the scope and timeline for the project.

Based on our discussion we developed a timeline that included Kristina Cerise reviewing Comprehensive Plan and Regulatory Codes to determine where there were obstacles to urban agriculture and where amendments would best fit; Forterra, City staff and Urban Food Link meeting with the community to discuss the policies and the codes; and Urban Food Link developing recommendations for amendments to the City’s Comprehensive Plan and Regulatory Codes.

*Tammy Morales presents at the second public meeting.*
Community Meetings

Focus groups with community members were held on September 17th and October 15th, 2012. The first meeting was focused on the development of a vision of urban agriculture for Federal Way, and the second meeting was an opportunity for participants to review the draft urban agriculture definitions and regulatory code updates.

Focus Group #1: Vision for Urban Agriculture

On September 17th 2012, 17 community members, City staff and City Council members came together at the Federal Way Community Center to discuss the vision of urban agriculture in Federal Way. After a round of introductions to learn who was in the room, we began to discuss what urban agriculture means in Federal Way.

Key Findings

- The vision for urban agriculture in Federal Way included community gardens, pea-patches, food forests, CSA drop-off sites, year-round farmer’s market, urban farms, home gardens, and school gardens.
- Community members saw urban agriculture as a way to enhance education, build community, and make fresh fruit and vegetables available to those who may not be able to afford it in the store.
- Residents hope that City government will not only support urban agriculture, but encourage it.
- With regards to current policy, community perspective suggested that the City seemed supportive, but mostly silent on urban agriculture, and more clarity and direct support would be greatly appreciated.
- Making urban agriculture available to all residents was a common theme. Specific ideas included City-run pea-patches, classes or informational materials, and vacant City land offered to urban farmers for use or lease.
Focus Group #2: Regulations and Codes
On October 17th 2012, 18 community members and staff came together to review proposed urban agriculture definitions and updates to the Regulatory Codes. We began by reviewing the vision for urban agriculture that the previous group of community members had developed, and then turned our focus to definitions. The group reviewed definitions for Farmers Market, urban Farm, Community Garden, home garden and farm stand. Finally we reviewed the proposed updates to the Regulatory Codes.

Key Findings

- While reviewing the vision for urban agriculture the group added economic development – community members see urban agriculture as an economic opportunity for the City and its residents.
- The Farmers Market was represented and we heard a few highlights: they are going into their 10th year, they are currently leasing space at the mall, and while the mall likes having them there because they bring in business, the Farmers Market staff would like to find a permanent space for stability and sustainability.
- Differentiating home and community gardens and urban farms was a key point of the definition conversation.
- With regards to regulations, community members were wary about requiring ADA accessibility at community gardens or urban farms.
- There was no consensus as to whether planting should be allowed in parking strips or other public planting areas.

Second focus group discusses Regulatory Code recommendations.
CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEPS

The City of Federal Way is working to improve the health of its residents by supporting urban agriculture. The proposed updates to the Comprehensive Plan and Regulatory codes would support more community gardens, individual farmers and the Farmers Market to ensure access to fresh, local foods for all residents. Encouraging even more urban agriculture opportunities such as City-run Pea-Patches, CSA drop-off sites, urban farms and food forests would only add to the health, and economic viability in Federal Way.

With Technical Assistance from Forterra, the City was able to meet with community members to get valuable input and perspective and with the consultants develop the recommended policies and codes to clarify the City’s stance on urban agriculture. The policies have already been forwarded by the Planning Commission and the Land Use Planning Commission and will be reviewed by the City Council in January 2013. The regulations will be reviewed by the Planning Commission on January 16th 2013 in a working session and follow the process to the Land Use Transportation Committee and then to City Council. If the project stays on timeline, both policies and regulations will be adopted by April 2013.

Forterra would like to thank the City of Federal Way for their efforts making this project a success and the U.S. EPA’s Office of Sustainable Communities Building Blocks for Sustainable Communities Program for funding the work.

Please contact Forterra if there are any questions about this report:

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Farmers Market peppers for sale.