

32. Urban Agriculture

Proposal

Add a goal supporting production of food and other agricultural products within the Urban Growth Area; specifically, Land Use and Urban Design Goal 25, *“Local Thurston County food production is encouraged and supported to increase self-sufficiency, reduce environmental impact, promote health, the humane treatment of animals, and to support our local economy.”*

Background

Olympia has permitted agricultural activities within the City. For example, gardening is common and “agricultural uses” are permitted in most residential zoning districts. However, the Comprehensive Plan is generally silent on this topic. Recently members of the public have expressed an interest in seeing the subject addressed in the Plan.

Options

Option 1. Goal as quoted above, plus the eleven associated policies.

Option 2. Adopt a more succinct policy: *“Support local food production including urban agriculture, and provide for a food store with a transit stop within one-half mile of all residents.”*

Option 3. No action: Do not expressly address the topic.

Analysis

Production of food, fiber, feed, and other agricultural products in urban areas is a complex topic raising issues such as pollution, land use conflicts, access to healthy food, sustainability and economic efficiency. This topic was not included in the scope of this Plan update. The proposed policy would establish a basic policy consistent with past practices and development regulations. The City may elect to pursue this topic in more detail.

The related half-mile food store element of this policy is drawn from the neighborhood centers and ten-minute neighborhood variation of the existing plan. Many studies indicate that one-quarter mile is a ‘reasonable’ walking distance from housing to transit stops, neighborhoods businesses, parks and similar destinations. Other studies suggest that a minimum of 1,000 to 1,500 nearby households is needed to support a ‘corner grocery.’ (See, for example, *Creating Walkable Neighborhood Districts*, Gregory Easton and John Owen, June 2009.) Given Olympia’s relatively low residential densities ranging from five to ten unit households per acre, few locations will achieve these minimums within one-quarter mile in the near-term. Thus the policy proposes to disperse food stores throughout the City consistent

with business needs, and if not always within walking distance, at least within comfortable bicycling and short bus-ride and driving distances.

Original Staff Proposal

Option 2. Approve proposed policy or a variation consistent with existing practices of the City and community.

Planning Commission Recommendation

Option 1. A more expansive and detailed version of Option 2.