



Urban Agriculture Update

City Council

January 13, 2026



Urban Farming in Olympia Comprehensive Plan

Goal GL29. In collaboration with community partners, local Thurston County food production is encouraged and supported to increase self-sufficiency, reduce environmental impact, adapt to future climate conditions, promote health and the humane treatment of animals, and support the local economy.





Thurston Conservation District Contract

Task 1: Expand Community
Gardens

Task 2: Incentivize Urban
Agriculture and Remove Barriers in
City Code

Task 3: Connect Private Vacant
Land with Potential Farmers





Potential Barriers or Disincentives to Farming

Zoning – Is urban farming allowed outright?

- Row crops, grazing, animals, beekeeping, hydroponics, rooftops and side-of-buildings
- Greenhouses, nurseries
- Produce sales on-site

Water – Availability and cost of irrigation

- Existing wells, municipal water rates for irrigation, hydrants or other public sources

Farming support structures – Flexibility

- Converting existing structures, building new structures
- Permitted outright or streamlined process; few infrastructure requirements



First Proposed Draft – April 23, 2024

Proposed a new “Agriculture” definition in OMC Chapter 18.04

- Emphasized small scale uses; small scale was not well defined
- As written, created a new small scale urban agricultural use as a secondary use

Directives from Land Use & Environment Committee:

- Animal husbandry – where to allow animals? Tumwater approach?
- Investigate whether to expand irrigation water rates program to include accounts with lesser land cover and/or not producing for sales or donation. Potential grant or loan program to assist with cost of installing water meters for irrigation.
- Explore use of hydrant meters for agriculture under certain circumstances.
- Find opportunities for the City to actively engage in urban agriculture.



Recommended Code Changes & Clarifications

- Apply existing agriculture definition of OMC Chapter 18.02
- Expand to allow in residential and commercial zoning districts with some limitations (*not allowed in Auto Services district*)
- Allow agricultural use as primary and/or accessory use
- Updates “traditional pet” sections found in OMC Residential and Commercial Chapters
- Clarify that changes from other uses to agriculture as not triggering frontage or other improvements – not a code change
- Clarify that structure changes from non-agriculture to agricultural use are permitted without land use permit – not a code change



Agriculture Allowed as a Permissible Use

Existing OMC Definition - Agriculture. The use of land for farming, dairying, pasturing and grazing, horticulture, floriculture, viticulture, apiaries, animal and poultry husbandry, and accessory activities, including, but not limited to, storage, harvesting, feeding or maintenance of equipment and onsite sales of agricultural products, but excluding stockyards, slaughtering or commercial food processing.

DISTRICT	R1/5	R-4	R-4CB	RLI	R 4-8	R 6-12	MR 7-13	MR 10-18	RM 18	RM 24	RMH	RMU	MHP	UR	APPLICABLE REGULATIONS
6. AGRICULTURAL USES															
Agricultural Uses	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	18.04.060.KK

COMMERCIAL DISTRICT	NR	PO/RM	GC	MS	UW	UW-H	DB	AS	CSH	HDC-1	HDC-2	HDC-3	HDC-4	APPLICABLE REGULATIONS
Agriculture	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	I	P	P	P	P	P	18.04.060.KK



OMC 18.04.060 Subsection KK – Agriculture

- Lots 2 acres or greater – allows 1 USDA Animal Unit per acre (i.e. cows, sheep, horses)
- Lots 2 acres or less – largely follows previous animal allowances for ducks, chickens, rabbits, goats. Adds turkeys and quail, but pigs are now counted under USDA for over lots over 2 acres
- Specifies beekeeping outright as a permissible use
- Adds fencing and enclosure rules
- Includes two nuisance clauses – one for preservation of water resources, the other for “community peace, health and welfare”
- Allowances and updates largely modeled from City of Tumwater and Thurston County Olympia Urban Growth Area urban agriculture ordinances





Revised Draft – OPC & LUEC Recommendations

Topic	March 25, 2025 Staff revisions in response to LUEC feedback	May 5, 2025 OPC Public Hearing Draft	May 12, 2025 OPC Revisions recommended to Council
Beekeeping Rules (per request of community feedback)	Allowed outright with no registration or limit on number of hives.	Allowed only if registered with State (RCW 15.60.021).	Register with state, specifies only Apis mellifera (honeybees) as permitted.
Hive Limits	No specified limit.	Max 4 hives on lots under 10,000 sq. ft.	No Change.
Hive Setbacks	No specific setback; general zoning setbacks apply.	Must be 10 feet from lot lines; not allowed in setback areas.	Minimum 25 feet from lot lines; can be reduced to 10 feet with fencing or elevation measures.
Enclosure Setbacks	Must adhere to zoning districts minimum setbacks.	All enclosures must be 10 feet from property lines; not in setback areas.	No Change.
Nuisance Clause for Animals	None	None	Includes clause prohibiting nuisances such as noise, odors, pests, and aesthetic impacts.



Update to Traditional Pets Sections

- Residential and Commercial chapters had slightly different requirements for traditional pets
- Updates both chapters with same, consistent requirements for traditional pets (dogs, cats, small animals)
- Other animals specified under new subsection KK – Agriculture
- Traditional pets are in addition to those as outlined in subsection KK.



JAS Feedback for Traditional Pets Sections

- Joint Animal Services discussion and requested amendments
 - Concern for otherwise suitable adoptions being prohibited; enforcement
- Increase from six to ten
 - Staff recommends eight
- Remove “no more than three of any species”
- No more than ~~six~~ eight/ten pet animals, ~~and no more than three of any species,~~ are permitted per dwelling unit.
 - “Small pet” animals do NOT count toward this total



Proposed Motion

Move to adopt the urban agriculture code updates with proposed amendments as discussed.



Questions?

Community Planning & Economic Development

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USDA Animal Units

Table 1. Animal unit equivalents (AUE) guide¹.

Kinds/Classes of Animals	Animal Unit Equivalent (AUE)	Forage Consumed in Pounds (air-dried ²)	
		Day	Month
1,000-lb. cow, dry	0.92	28	851
1,000-lb. cow, with calf	1.00	30	913
1,100-lb. cow, with calf	1.07	32.5	988
1,200-lb. cow, with calf	1.15	35	1,064
1,300-lb. cow, with calf	1.22	37	1,125
1,400-lb. cow, with calf	1.29	39	1,186
1,500-lb. cow, with calf	1.35	41	1,247
Cattle bull, mature	1.40	42.5	1,295
Weaned calves to yearling	0.60	18	547
Yearling cattle (600-800 lb.)	0.70	21	638
Two-year-old cattle (800-1,000 lb.)	0.90	27	832
Bison cow, mature	1.00	30	913
Bison bull, mature	1.50	45	1,368
Horse, mature	1.25	38	1,155
Sheep, dry	0.15	4.5	135
Sheep, mature with lamb	0.20	6	182
Sheep ram	0.25	7.5	228
Goat, mature	0.15	5	152
Deer, white-tailed, mature	0.15	5	152
Deer, mule, mature	0.20	6	182
Elk, mature	0.60	18	547
Antelope, mature	0.20	6	182
Sheep, bighorn, mature	0.20	6	182
Jackrabbit, white-tailed	0.02	0.6	18
Prairie dog	0.004	0.1	3

The standard animal unit is a 1,000-pound cow with a 6-month-old or younger calf by her side. The kind, class and size of livestock will need to be adjusted based on this standard.