



City Hall
601 4th Avenue E.
Olympia, WA 98501
360-753-8244

Land Use & Environment Committee

Development Code Updates to Support Urban Agriculture Briefing

Agenda Date: 7/18/2024
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Title

Development Code Updates to Support Urban Agriculture Briefing

Recommended Action

Committee Recommendation:

The Olympia Farmland Work Group recommends referring the draft ordinance to the Planning Commission for review, public hearing and recommendation to the City Council.

City Manager Recommendation:

Move to refer the draft ordinance to the Planning Commission for review, public hearing and recommendation to the City Council.

Report

Issue:

Whether to refer the draft ordinance to the Planning Commission for review, public hearing and recommendation to the City Council.

Staff Contact:

Tim Smith, Interim Community Planning and Development Director, 360.570.3915

Presenter(s):

Tim Smith, Interim Community Planning and Development Director

Background and Analysis:

In 2020 the Olympia City Council approved a referral to the Land Use and Environment Committee (LUEC) to review the preservation or mitigation of the loss of farmland. To respond to this referral, the Committee approved convening the Olympia Farmland Work Group.

The Work Group initially focused on identifying existing agricultural land within Olympia and its urban growth area. Staff from the Thurston Conservation District completed an analysis combining several data sources. It identified parcels totaling approximately 450 acres of active and potential farmland. The Work Group reported to LUEC in 2021 and 2022, with recommendations for continued work to encourage urban farming in the city.

To carry out some of those recommendations, the City contracted with the Thurston Conservation District for three primary tasks: 1) expand community gardens, 2) incentivize urban agriculture and remove barriers in city codes, and 3) connect private vacant land with potential farmers. In addition, the Parks, Arts and Recreation Department has contracted with a consultant to examine the possibility of an agri-park in Olympia.

City staff conducted a review of potential barriers to urban agriculture in city codes and presented findings to LUEC. The draft ordinance has been prepared as a next step and includes code amendments that expand the list of uses to allow urban agriculture within downtown and other areas of the city zoned for high density residential uses. Agriculture would consist of small-scale growing and harvesting of food crops or non-food crops (e.g., flowers) for personal or group consumption, for donation, or for sale that is incidental in nature. This includes community gardens managed and maintained by a group of individuals or a public or not-for profit organization or association; rooftop gardens; vertical agriculture on exterior walls of a building; and hydroponics or other indoor growing methods that are small-scale.

Staff recommends LUEC refer the ordinance to the Olympia Planning Commission. The Planning Commission would conduct a review and provide a recommendation to the City Council (OMC 18.70.190).

Climate Analysis:

The Thurston Climate Action Plan includes a key strategy to support agricultural practices that sequester carbon. Appropriate land management practices have been shown to increase the rate of carbon stored in plants and soils. A goal of the draft ordinance is to encourage urban farming and potentially play a role in offsetting the community's greenhouse gas emissions. Additionally, growing food locally reduces the amount of transportation necessary to deliver it to local community members.

Equity Analysis:

The Olympia Urban Farmland Work Group's report included analysis of access to local food. It showed some areas of the city that do not have equitable opportunities to access local food. The draft ordinance encourages urban farming and potentially help increase access in these areas.

Neighborhood/Community Interests (if known):

There is significant interest in urban agriculture in the community. This is reflected in the City of Olympia Comprehensive Plan, Sustainable Thurston Plan and the Regional Climate Adaption and Mitigation Plans.

Financial Impact:

The City's contract with the Thurston Conservation District included staff time to conduct a review of potential barriers to urban agriculture as a matching contribution under the contract. Staff time to process the code amendments in the draft ordinance will be covered by the Department's annual budget.

Options:

1. Refer Ordinance to Planning Commission.
2. Refer Ordinance to Planning Commission with changes.

3. Do not refer Ordinance to Planning Commission.

Attachments:

Draft Ordinance
Olympia Farmland Workgroup Policy Recommendations