

**Project: Urban Agriculture Phase 2 – Hoop Houses and Farm Animals**  
**Focus Group on Hoop Houses**

October 17, 2013

4:00 – 5:00 p.m. at Conference Room A, 281 N College Avenue

Draft Meeting Notes

**Attendees:**

Lindsay Ex  
Sam Houghteling  
Mike Gebo  
Dennis Stenson  
Bailey Stenson  
Michael Baute  
Jeff Baumgartner  
Erich Stroheim

**Notes:**

**Background.** Lindsay Ex highlighted that in 2012 and 2013, staff worked with the community to allow the practice of urban agriculture as a principal use throughout the City, allowed farmers markets in mixed-use zone districts, and allowed additional types and increased numbers of farm animals to be raised (Phase One Changes). Each of these amendments was designed to further the City's goal of supporting local food production (City Plan Principle Safety and Wellness 3).

During public and City Council deliberation on the Phase One Changes, staff was asked to address two other issues related to urban agriculture:

1. Develop standards for the raising of farm animals in the zone districts where they are currently allowed (Urban Estate, Rural Lands , Residential Foothills, and River Conservation Districts); and
2. Begin to remove barriers to year-round food production by allowing hoop houses.

The focus of this discussion was to address issue #2.

**Introductions and Project Goal.** Each attendee introduced themselves. We then discussed the following goals for the effort:

- Promote year-round growing opportunities in a more cost-friendly manner than constructing a full greenhouse;
- Protect neighbors quality of life; and
- Provide information to new farmers for best practices on constructing hoop houses in our area.

Lindsay discussed that there needs to be a balance between ensuring the visual experience neighbors currently have with the desired goal of having year-round, locally grown food.

The group asked if City staff were aware of any complaints related to existing hoop houses. Staff was not aware of any.

As hoop houses have never presented an issue, the group discussed creating informational brochures for hoop houses, so folks can learn about best practices associated with year-round growing in this part of the state. The group also discussed and agreed that urban farmers are likely to have larger hoop houses, and included hoop houses within the urban agriculture licensing requirement makes sense.

For the best practices brochure, the group discussed the following:

- Working with CSU Extension to see if such a brochure has already been developed, and if not, see if Extension could develop and publish the brochure as our partner
- The brochure should illustrate best practices, ideally using “this, not this” illustrations.
- Consider if the brochure can be done as one, or if there should be separate brochures for residential vs. commercial scale hoop houses.
- Practices should include:
  - Orientation – local farmers have found an East-West orientation best deflects the wind
  - Anchoring – could discuss the use of hurricane straps on the hoop house to help protect the structure that can be anchored to concrete posts
  - Caterpillar tunnels – this is one type of a hoop house and is typically made with a single wall of plastic
  - Growing – the brochure could discuss what can be grown within these structures and timing for planting
  - Visual impacts – the brochure should address how to minimize visual impacts to neighbors through setbacks from property lines and how to not impact solar access
  - Other elements – other elements, such as wind loading, spacing between the ribs, and obtaining materials locally and from recycled sources could also be included.

**Next Steps:**

Staff is preparing an online survey to review these suggestions with a broader audience. Staff’s goal is to hold a public open house in mid-November or early December and have the proposed code changes heard before Council in February 2014.

## HOOP HOUSES FOCUS GROUP – Research Matrix

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Wheat Ridge	Seattle	Baltimore	Cleveland	Milwaukee	Boston	Asheville	Twin Cities	Boulder
<p>In addition to the zoning code amendments, the City also made updates to the building code that eased requirements for hoop houses.</p> <p>See <a href="#">Ordinance 1494</a> adopted by City Council in June 2011. Now, any hoop house that is 400 square feet or less in size is exempt from building permit. Hoop houses that are 400 to 1,000 square feet in size require a building permit, but they have less strict requirements for wind and snow load. Over 1,00 sqft – the full process is required.</p>	<p>No exemption for hoop houses. Longer growing season and higher urban density.</p>	<p>Permanent structures are prohibited. However, temporary greenhouses, including high tunnels/hoop-houses, cold-frames, and similar structures are permitted to extend the growing season. Accessory structures, such as sheds, gazebos and pergolas, are also permitted.</p>	<p>Cleveland’s Urban Garden District uses a broad definition for urban gardens. Community gardens and market gardens are the main permitted uses, and on-site sales are allowed, along with greenhouses and hoop houses. However, building height and lot coverage are limited (Cleveland Zoning Code Title 7, Chapter 336).</p>	<p>Most recently, in January of 2011, the city amended the code to permit hoop houses and to permit the construction of Growing Power’s vertical farm.</p>	<p>(a) <i>Setback</i>: Buildings shall be set back from property lines a distance of five (5) feet                      (b) <i>Height</i>: No building or other structure shall be greater than twenty five (25) feet in height                      (c) <i>Building Coverage</i>: The combined area of all buildings, excluding hoophouses, shall not exceed twenty five percent (25%) of site area.</p>	<p>Asheville, under rules passed by City Council in September, will no longer require building permits for temporary structures like hoop houses, greenhouse variations that help shield plants from extreme weather.</p> <p>Permitting regulations also were eased for larger, more permanent structures for growing food.</p>	<p>Original proposal allowed hoop houses to be 12 ft tall with a max. area of 1,000 sqft or 15% of the lot area, whichever is greater, could only stand for 180 days. Due to residential concerns surrounding visibility, caps at 6’6 are proposed (head room). Community gardens would be allowed to stay at the 12 ft height.</p>	<p>Agricultural policies and land use regulations are currently under review for changes to encourage agricultural uses of various types and sizes, including building code issues dealing with farm stands, worker housing and “hoop houses.”</p>

\*Boston Study: [http://www.bostonredevelopmentauthority.org/pdf/PlanningPublications/Urban%20Agriculture%20MEMO\\_Growing%20Produce%203.1.12.pdf](http://www.bostonredevelopmentauthority.org/pdf/PlanningPublications/Urban%20Agriculture%20MEMO_Growing%20Produce%203.1.12.pdf)

Generally farm structures are classified as accessory uses and must either comply with underlying zoning requirements for accessory buildings (Baltimore, Kansas City, Minneapolis) alternatively, the zoning establishes specific requirements for urban farm-related buildings with setback, height and area restrictions (Chicago, Cleveland, Seattle). A few cities, such as Baltimore, do not have dimensional requirements for farm structures. Minneapolis specifically states that outdoor growing associated with market gardens and urban farms shall be exempt from enclosed building requirements. **Lot Coverage**: Most cities restrict the total area of accessory buildings to 10 – 25% of the site. Cleveland excludes greenhouses and hoophouses from this combined areas percentage. On the other hand, Baltimore sets no limits on either the number or square footage of accessory structures. Chicago provides for either 10% of the site area or 100 square feet, whichever is greater. Minneapolis has a similar provision for 15% of lot area or 1,000 square feet, whichever is greater. **Height**: Baltimore and Cleveland have height restrictions of 25 feet. No other city sites a height restriction. **Setbacks**: Baltimore, Cleveland, Kansas City, and Minneapolis have setbacks ranging from 3 to 10 feet from the property line for accessory structures. **Other structures**: Cleveland explicitly enumerates the accessory uses and structures permitted in an Urban Garden District: greenhouses, hoophouses, etc...