

Citywide Urban Agriculture Rezoning Initiative

On January 30, 2012, the Boston Redevelopment Authority and Mayor's Office hosted a "Kickoff and Visioning Meeting" for the Urban Agriculture Rezoning Initiative at Suffolk University, 73 Tremont Street in downtown Boston. Over 270 members of the public attended this meeting, which featured a keynote address by Growing Power Executive Director Will Allen. After Mr. Allen's presentation, participants were invited to participate in breakout group discussions to envision the future of urban agriculture in Boston. This "visioning" exercise was designed to inform the ultimate recommendations of the Citywide Urban Agriculture Rezoning Initiative. Over 150 attendees participated in the breakout group discussion. Each breakout group was asked to respond to three questions, and each group wrote down its responses to the three questions. Individuals who did not wish to participate in the breakout group discussions were invited to write down responses to the three questions on questionnaires. Other participants were invited to offer open ended comments on index cards. What follows is a *direct transcription* of responses to the three questions from the breakout groups, questionnaires and index cards. Each breakout group was assigned a number; these numbers are reflected in the left hand margins.

**QUESTION 1: WHAT DO YOU IMAGINE WHEN YOU THINK OF THE FUTURE OF URBAN AGRICULTURE IN BOSTON?**

**Group Comments:**

1

- Chickens
- Locally produced, high quality veggies
- No food desserts
- Quality
- Youth working. Green jobs--everybody
- Education on what's in our food
- Economic benefit – back to community/self-sustaining (business, rather than just relying on grants)
- Changing culture/feel of area (food, flowers)
- Food equity; high standard
- Bring down price of organic by creating a market for it
- Schools/youth talking internationally
- Using available space, vacant lots better
- Bring kids to farms (maybe in place of phys ed). Schools and farms connect
- Rich history, renaissance

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**2**

- Cook and preserve (apples bred in Roxbury + Dot)
- The resources for organizers to scale up from community gardens and individual gardens  
Clearinghouse of info. Office of Urban Ag. Urban Ag extension
- Legally occupy vacant land
- Need laws to protect food production-urban good should not be dependent on property value
- Need land—zoning incentive requiring developers to grow food and set aside urban ag food land and set aside an urban ag land fund
- Use existing urban ag
- Vertical and roof gardening
- Identify space for growing
  - Roof
  - Vertical
- Leasing roofs
- Metrics/accounting for urban ag

**3**

- Use of large parcels, abandoned lots, and abandoned buildings in Boston. For small scale gardening
- Should be diverse, intensive
- Involve groups/community based non profit/for profit/progressive farmers
- Near shore aquaculture
- ?Organic
- Focus on production of quality compost/soil. Comprehensive, coordinated composting program. “Front of the store” bins
- “Normalizing” rats – don’t be naïve
- Need scale
- Veggies, chicken sheep – replicate GP [Growing Power] community. Obstacles: vacant lots/zoning/buy in/
- Pub/private partnerships – City/BRA could help
- Friendly investment environment
- Q: Why did Kohl’s invest in their campus?

**4**

- Urban blight – bringing beautify, community involvement
- Food stores are on the periphery—bringing into community—connecting markets and productions
- Integration of livestock into community gardens, especially chickens for education purposes—where food comes from.
- Community kitchens—connecting cooking and growing.
- Citywide compost – food waste pickup (like Seattle)

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4

- Return to native crops, awareness of invasiveness
- Learning about edible weeds.
- Supporting/promoting organic – composting conventionally grown crops?
- Compost: needs to be done well to get community support.
  - Soil testing: new soil on top.
  - Rigorous supervision and standards

5

- Soil testing is worth it.
- Educate gardeners:
  - Hazards of city gardening
  - Know the dangers
- Seed saving and seed sharing
- Net works
- Keeping chickens in the City.
  - City support, please
- Neighborhood policies, citywide policies
- Space constraints: more, please
- Garden access for more people!!!
- Lead contamination research!

6

- We want compost we need to grow healthy food.
- We envision harnessing more resources to produce high quality compost (leaves collected, home + restaurant waste, spoiled produce).
- Implement municipal organics diversion and composting (like recycling, only for composting)
- Clean compost – test/PMP protocols in place to ensure quality contaminant free compost
- Vermi-composting
- City work with DEP to launch composting operations in the City.
- Incorporate/partner with gleaners
- Everyone who wants a community garden should be able to get a plot
- Urban orchards/edible landscape trees for improving air quality.
- Help/expand home gardening capacity.
- Encourage more larger scale farms within City.

ZONING + INFRASTRUCTURE

- Need zoning to accommodate the agriculture
- Smartly located zoning to permit apiculture, small animal husbandry, aquaculture, green roofs, season extending for 4 season production.

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6

- How do we expand amount of available land to accommodate agriculture uses—for example, parks, DCR owned land.
- Make developers pay a type of “impact fee” that would support more urban ag/farms and set aside land for that use
- Ways to support access (transportation and other infrastructure for distributing food)

TRANSPARENCY

- More public communication about the urban gardening/farming zoning process.

EDUCATION

- For health and job training!
- Year round growing/extended season allow for local food availability
- Capacity for schools to grow and use in cafes.
- Linking agriculture to economic generating for low income communities
- Group space, real accessibility through accessibility—lives in coop house
  - Re-defining “spaces” – shared use space & exchange
- Universities/hospitals/churches exploring land use that is not taxed
- Hub for international training
- Ethnic communities growing cultural ethnic crops
- Neighborhood chicken coops (group of neighbors caring for chicken coops together)
  - building relationships

7

- Zoning:
  - 1) Opening up agricultural potential
  - 2) Not losing current open space to new development
  - 3) Bartlett yard (perfect initial incubator for Boston composting)
- Proving that the activities are economically viable—can you send your kids to college with this?

-Social justice

-Passion

-Central location for information

-hotline

-website

-home starter kit for growers (home visits) or consultations

8

- Community gardens in all housing projects
- Small scale/local composting. Bags for composting that could be picked up
- Growing soil that has an assurance of quality
- Neighborhood CSA. Buy eggs from neighbors
- Be able to keep bees in the city. Bee-friendly landscape management (no pesticides)



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region)

8

- Regulation for types of pesticides in area
- Small see money fund information hotline or website. Especially for raised beds or soil
- Community education as top priority. Building connections between stakeholders in the community.

- Education/social justice approach to local, sustainable agriculture
- Get kids involved through schools or after-school programs

-Chickens

-Rooftop farming

-Growing soil (compost as part of trash collection)

-Chickens

-Much greener

-Community-based

-Preserving food for the non-growing season

-Bigger farms that make money and jobs

-Regional food system; not just all local food

-Greenhouses

9

-Partner with other communities

-Beautify/green the City/public art (grow your own flowers)

-Incorporate waste from coffee, breweries, restaurants

-Food hub – aggregate food, process and distribute

-Get restaurants to buy/promote local food

-Transportation of local food

-Business planning

-Transparency of supply/demand information

-School gardens (that can supply their cafeteria)

-Design school kitchens for cooking

-Prepare/light (?) process food for schools

-School/institutional involvement

-Consumer outreach ; getting people to buy the food

-How to scale Dorchester to whole City

-Youth power and opportunities

10

-College & university presence in Boston; linking education with gardens and farms

-Community garden at every housing project

-Food distribution to institutions

-How to get local food to schools?

-Who is the “middle man” (job creation)?



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**10**

- How to handle the dense population of Boston?
- Creative growing
- Access of info about vacant lots
  - Structure?
- Land link (Growers to the land)
- Knowing zoning and regulations for areas
- More Staff people devoted to Ag Zoning
  - Interns
- Community support and buy-in
- Community training / workforce development
- Mandatory composting
- 3 primary topics:
  - How to get started in Urban Ag (lower ed, and college-aged kids)
  - Getting data to match farmers/programs to available land (biodiverse habitats that produce food)
  - Managing the waste stream – Municipal composting (and training about it, so it is approachable)

**11**

- Compost
- Interest in new farmers for new farmers markets
- Getting kids involved in gardening and becoming food entrepreneurs, hard-to-get grants and money, how to turn a profit, how to staff it, how to create a brand or identity
- Hope that Boston too can have access to information, access to space, a situation without food blocks...
- Neighborhoods able to feed themselves from the spaces
- Info in schools – that kids learn about good food and their parents learn too
- Seeing farmers paid what they deserve, affordable food
- Important for people to know that they need local food
- Small-scale community and neighborhood based growing and engagement
- Everyone who wants to grow food having access to materials, mentorship, flowers and vegetables grown in people's front yards, food as a commodity for neighborhood trading
- Food access as a civic responsibility
- Important to have a plaza/marketplace – a symbol of central responsibility
- Urban Agriculture as an understood, inherent part of living in the City

**12**

- Lots of greenhouses on roofs
- More farmers markets access in the winter time
- More food programs for low-income in the winter time
- Using courtyards for gardening

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**12**

- Large greenhouses for “vegetable picking”
- Chickens in backyards; rabbits
- Co-ops in the City; Commercial food growing – not just bins
- Mushrooms for detoxifying soils (exploratory committee to develop ways to clean and detoxify soil)
- Community composting places
- “Zoo-type” farms with composting
- School have gardens to include after-school programs (ALL schools)
- Use medians, strips, a long river above parking garages – plant them – raise awareness
- Improvement of vacant lots will improve the neighborhood
- Soil improvement required

**13**

- Many aspects to growing food = looking for more (word? / word?)
- Creative use of space, vertical gardening and good use of resources
- Model farm / City farm / education (need a large demonstration site or center)
- Education – use Boston’s brilliance
  - Neighborhood gardens – community driven = community engagement
  - Larger gardens – providing food
  - Both above are possible
- Long-term land trusts for vacant lots partnering with suburban town or a harbor island to make a “soil farm” of scale
- Central produce processing center to help prep food for BPS

**15**

- Places to grow food and fruit trees, raise animals, fish, bees in the City
- Soil Safety protocol and licensing procedures should emphasize rehabilitation rather than capping (require all soils to be tested rather than allow barrier and soil replacement on untested sites)
- Small animal husbandry should be allowed by right rather than as a conditional use
- Composting inputs should include access to off-site materials from city businesses
- Businesses or non-profits creating compost from city business’ waste materials should be allowed and encouraged

**Index Cards:**

- Boston has a lot of diversity but is still heavily segregated
- Extend year-round growing to allow for local food availability linking agriculture to economic generating activities for low-income communities
- Redefining “spaces”; looking at churches, universities/hospitals in sharing/exchanging space
- Boston can be a hub for international training
- Agriculture for ethnic communities to access popular crops (i.e., UMass Amherst – Ethnic Crop Program)
- Zoning: 1) Growing agricultural potential; 2) Not losing current open spaces to new



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- development; 3) Bartlett Yard could be used as an example of a pilot incubator
- A beautiful, productive green City with lots of food and buzzing bees
- Variety of fresh food options for lower-income communities
- Lots of green growing spaces and tips on how to grow tomatoes from seed
- How do you start agriculture?
- Make this a part of food policy
- Focusing on composting and getting it up to scale “value chain”, think of a City-wide scale “foodshed” - regional
- Public/private partnerships – model on corporations (incentivize corporate model sites, retail food places + label)
- More interaction between urban agriculture and public schools!
- Healthy food – Fresh and locally grown
- It is so great to see so many people attend an agriculture meeting. We have the Mayor’s support, so the future is that much brighter!
- Rooftop gardening. Citywide composting; release of vacant lots
- No more ugly empty lots

### **Questionnaires:**

- Unused land turned over for food production. Widespread free training to support residents around food production. Less red tape! Greg Murphy back running compost facility at American Legion. We need a good composter!
- Composting!
- More people having chickens and more farmers markets year round (not just seasonal). More options for gardening and composting.
- Chickens in backyards in neighborhoods where there is sufficient space. Seriously.
- Chickens, ducks, goats, rabbits, subsidized soil tests, and licensed site professionals. Food security, jobs, aquaculture.
- I imagine an interconnected food system that reaches all of Boston’s diverse neighborhoods. Urban agriculture in Boston will be multi-faceted and beneficial. Boston’s food system would provide fresh, local food to residents, would be built upon principles of permaculture and sustainability to enhance an emerging green city. It would open new opportunities for employment, investment, education and land use.
- I am concerned that City’s leaf composting project is being compromised with the trend of increasing lead levels. This is an exciting initiative when food production (of all kinds) could provide the City with tremendous resources.
- Green roofs. Vertical gardening. More community gardens. School gardening and gardening classes.





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- I picture rooftops full with farming. I also picture less corporate chains and more small businesses that support urban agriculture.
- I picture a Boston where sidewalks, vacant lots, rooftops and any open areas are vibrant, healthy ecosystems where people can freely participate in production and consumption of fresh veggies. The issues of access would be lessened or diminished, jobs would be created and Boston would be green beautiful and barriers of class, race educational level would be broken down and communities could focus on what they do best rather than what they need.
- All residents having easy access to materials (seeds, raised beds, quality soil) and classes to learn how to garden at home. BNAN's MUG program is awesome, but accessible for most of Boston.
- Lots more people growing food!
- I imagine urban gardens everywhere (mixed use space) run by communities, especially seniors and youth, feeding their very local neighborhoods. I imagine an efficient distribution system that gives everyone easy access in places they already go (like schools, gyms, hospitals, community centers). And I imagine a healthy local economy that benefits from all of this.
- A diversity of types/locations: rooftops, vacant lots, warehouses, freight cars, aquaculture. Providing a significant portion of the metro area's food.
- A garden plot and compost bin in every Bostonian's lawn.
- Relaxed restrictions on farmers' markets. Chickens in the City!
- Urban agriculture is a great learning potential for schools, youth groups and other members of the community. The types of programs that Will Allen showed would be a great asset to schools.
- I imagine a city where vacant and under used spaces become abundant resources for food and vegetation to improve quality of life.
- I imagine teaching /learning gardens lots of food production, fish, chickens and bees!
- Soil facility needs to be upgraded to produce good compost.

**QUESTION 2: HOW DO YOU SEE URBAN AGRICULTURE IMPACTING YOUR QUALITY OF LIFE?**

**Group Comments:**

**1**

- Healthy weight loss  
From gardening.  
Eating veggies.



URBAN AGRICULTURE

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1

- Great sense of community, building Connecting.  
Farmers' markets: walk, see people.  
Creates city core.
- Environment  
Not as much trucking cross our city/country/'hoods  
"Re-earthing" the earth!  
Clean the air of the City.
- School system, corner stores can provide for people.
- Great use of waste=composting.
- Secondary economic benefits.  
other supplies/jobs: tools, builders, etc.
- Cooking.

2

- Access to healthy food
- Waste management
- Infrastructure for urban ag
- Space for container composting.

3

- Ubiquitous food labeling—where from, how grown.
- Chelsea produce market/supermarket waste
- Q: How did GP [Growing Power] build composting to scale?
- Zoning – "Everything should be allowed".
- Ag/plot access should be central vision.
- Be strategic—site ag opportunities near labor/customers "low income".
- cluck cluck

4

- Working with kids – health + outlook  
Summer jobs, youth transition services
- Community tied to immediate neighbors
- Stress relief—observing, slowing down mental and physical health
- Cleaner air, water
- Quality of physical environment.
- Safety – looking out for each other, property.

5

- Integrated food system.
- Variety of scales.
- Include animals.
- Representation/task force(s).
- Public-private-common dialogue
- Bio-remediation





URBAN AGRICULTURE

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5

-Compost!

City policies to support.

-Visit WI (Milwaukee!)

-Aquaponics in Boston!

-Employment opportunities.

-Need to balance potential for gentrification

-Lots of benefits.

-Focus on community ownership of these projects. Recognize co-benefits: social safety, reduced crime

-Feeding the hungry

-Climate resilience

-Health, especially reducing obesity

-Improving school diets.

-Decentralize food supply , make food system more resilient

-Teach where food comes from.

-Environmental benefits

Water quality

Reduced urban heat island effect

Greenhouse gas reduction

-Training series/program—a group who knows how teaching education (do it yourself approach)

-Master gardeners

-Build partnerships (i.e. The Food Project)

-Planning and evaluation staying community based – address the equity question (who really gets involved)?

-Keeping prices of food for people to afford

-Being deliberate that agriculture and gardening are connected

-More people providing food – locally grown food

-Connecting a hybrid economic model

-A way to build soil

Residential composting pickup (bins?)

-Soil Delivery

Organic waste ban to encourage composting

8

-Put more value in local food

-Try to change buying practices at local stores

-Change labeling so it is clear that food is local

-Skills to grow your own food should be supported



Boston Redevelopment Authority

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**9**

- CSA help change process of shopping and storage of food
- Increase beauty (i.e., “flower explosion”)
- Slowing down pace of city life (quality of life)
- Cleaner air, healthier environment

**10**

- Easier to get healthy soil in City
- Change restrictions imposed by historic district (Beacon Hill)
- Involving youth/schools/colleges
- Making City more livable and sustainable
- Know where your food comes from
- More input into local decisions
  - Community input/empowerment
  - Communities to make/implement decisions
- More opportunities to buy local food
- Food \$\$ support local community
- More people to grow food
- Food growing in/on vertical spaces
- Open spaces for other uses too
- Design parks to look good year-round
- Attention to aesthetic quality of life
- Relaxing, quick, healthy access to food

**11**

- To make us healthy
- To make jobs
- Urban Agriculture creates beautiful environments
- Access to fresh, delicious vegetables
- Change attitude of the community – something to be a source
- Urban Agriculture as a violence prevention strategy, a space for conversation, dialog
- Power to build interesting, diverse communities

**12**

- Clean, organic quality food
- Health, local economy, neighborhood integration, education
- Life skills, youth development
- Meaning to life: growing food, deep experience
- Connecting you back to your own humanity
- Impact in the life of our children, how they understand the world and become more engaged

**13**

- Change negative perceptions
- Personal connection to agriculture improves community quality of life



**URBAN AGRICULTURE**

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**Index Cards:**

- Better food, better air, more beauty
- An opportunity to continue learning something I know very little about (agriculture)
- Better food accessibility is good for all
- What kind of grants are available?
- Involve experts and anticipate potential problems – communication challenge
- A more nutritious energetic life that will enable me to keep educating the youth of our City!
- Being healthy; fit; eating more green
- Improved health, improved air, happier communities
- Children will know what veggies look like and where they come from

**QUESTION 3:**

**HOW CAN THE BRA  
HELP YOU STAY INVOLVED?**

**Group Comments:**

**1**

- Zoning
  - Chickens
  - Vacant land
- BRA needs to be the ‘conduit’—not the stopping point
- Way to network: can BRA provide a way to do this?
  - Forum on the website
  - More events for us!
- Rezoning long term, for big ideas (like vertical farming)
- We need a messiah
  - Cohesion

**2**

- Involvement: hold events for conversation
- Clearinghouse to allow us to stay involved (web based)
- City-wide policy on food security – don’t limit discussion to zoning
- Live stream/video tape of working group meetings
- Make channels for us to observe/have input
- Involve Mattapan, Dorchester...strategic outreach for this initiative. Important to overcome resistance





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2

- Invest in the process; dedicate paid staff
- Consider using ag. revenue fund ag. Development \$ to BNAN staff/operations – to liaise to city & gardeners
- Neighborhood meetings earlier in the process
- Anticipate opposition:
  - Vermin
  - Noise
  - Smells
  - pests

4

- Change regulations – animals!
- Make green space available
- Continued, not just beginning support for projects
- Fewer obstacles to gaining rights to unused land
- When there are conflicting desires – transparency, good moderators
- Neighborhood centered meetings/conversations.

6

- Continue to involve public in events like tonight's
- Have meetings in neighborhood – Codman Square
- The Urban Ag working group should be open and transparent
- Continued learning from other cities who have more experience with zoning
- Leverage our universities
- Regionalize/exchange info on policies – collaborate with Cambridge
- Involve MAPC in this process so we can think about how to connect what Boston is doing to what Lawrence is doing, etc.

8

- Increase number of opportunities for people to grow
  - Land
  - Building design/space
- Animal husbandry possibilities
- City hotline / website for information on starting own
- Starter kit for how to grown your own food
- Subsidizing composting
- Have growing spaces that are located within distance of homes
- Fruit trees in public spaces
- Holidays around farming
- Encourage new commercial buildings to have green roofs

9

- Blog posts
- Volunteer opportunities
- Models/sketches to look at

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9

- Garden tours
- Emails
- BRA representatives in each neighborhood

11

- Clear standards and guidelines
- Way to coordinate communications between organizations
- Point of sales applications
- Community garden supply (word?) store
- Organizing get-togethers
- Getting ISD to sponsor tastings
- Rezoning buildings for year-round production

12

- Funding for remediation
- Community workshops
- Meet with already established community gardens
- Get really powerful people and corporations to sponsor this effort
- Institutionalize composting (i.e., require it)
- Engage universities with this project

**Index Cards:**

- Contact me via email ([brooklyntommyboy@yahoo.com](mailto:brooklyntommyboy@yahoo.com))
- Keep website updated with meeting times to be aware of meetings/community gatherings
- Where do you start?
- Neighborhood meetings should be involved earlier
- Don't shy away from the negatives
- Web-based clearinghouse
- Video-taped meetings
- Facebook/Email/Blogging
- Increase the number of community gardens; urban farms for employment
- Paid and volunteer jobs publicized; keep stories in the media

**Questionnaires:**

- N/A
- Keep bringing great speakers like Will Allen. Run more educational, hands on workshops.
- E-mail. Have small lectures on how to do things such as composting and other urban agriculture activities.
- By working to changes City of Boston zoning to not prohibit chickens in back yards.
- Empty lots for farming. Make good rules and regulations so urban agriculture does not die still born. For example, 1) approve small animals in the zoning code not as a



## Citywide Urban Agriculture Rezoning Initiative

conditional uses but by right according to a set of standards to be met and numbers of animals; 2) composting activities should not be restructured to use matter generated on site—this means that farmers cannot use coffee grounds, spoiled vegetables from grocery stores and restaurants, or wood chips from arborists, etc. Listen to Will Allen—make new soil!

-Email reminders of meeting time. More opportunities to get involved at meeting.

-City can make a commitment to improving and enhancing its current garden, composting operations and expanding its reach and kinds of operations to be real leader as is started with the community gardens).

-E-mail. Classes on gardening.

-Make opportunities well marketed.

-More speakers, events, community forums—just keep us updated with listserve/Facebook updates etc. Also, follow-up and respond to concerns that get brought up by citizens—basically keep doing what you're doing!

-Help out organizations like the Food Project, BNAN, BCFF! I want to actually work for organizations like these, but if they aren't around, there won't be any jobs or volunteer positions. Support with money and with easing regulations so more people can get involved at home, too.

-You did a great job getting people together—speaker was really out of control, not useful.

-Let me know when meetings are happening. Tell me about relevant ordinances and changes (when they occur). Help me tell others what's going on. Show me where I can grow food!

-I am a roof agriculture entrepreneur so incentives, legislation to encourage/incentivized green roofs would be helpful. An urban agriculture website would be good. And include food security/urban ag in city planning using a variety of methods/locations/etc.

-Doing this and funding it.

-Keep in touch with residents. Help support groups. Could outreach through radio and local TV.

-I'm currently involved with the Urban Ag Working Group.

-Add more community voices to the table.

-Setting up community workshops to keep up with newer methods. Open up space for urban farms, community gardens and individual plots.

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