



MEMORANDUM

To: The Honorable President and Members of the Baltimore City Council
c/o Natawna Austin, Executive Secretary

From: Alice Kennedy, Acting Housing Commissioner

Date: January 24, 2022

Re: City Council Resolution 21-0064R - Investigational Hearing - Urban Farming

City Council Resolution 21-0064R invites DHCD's Code Enforcement Division, among other agencies, to participate in an investigative hearing to discuss the standards, procedures, policies, and practices for regulating urban farms and to discuss possible revisions of current standards to allow urban farms to operate safely and successfully in Baltimore City. For the purpose of this informational hearing, we will describe DHCD's Code Enforcement Division's role in enforcing the city's codes as it pertains to urban farming.

DHCD supports efforts to bolster urban farming in the City of Baltimore which may improve living conditions and food security in our neighborhoods. DHCD's Code Enforcement Division Inspectors enforce the city's housing, zoning, building and related codes. When responding to complaints related to urban farms or community gardens, DHCD's Code enforcement inspectors must carefully balance the needs of urban gardeners and farmers along with the need to have these sites maintained in a clean, safe, and sanitary condition that adheres to the requirements of the code. They accomplish this through the issuance of notices and citations and work to maintain safe and attractive neighborhoods throughout the city by not only enforcing the code but also educating residents on code requirements for property sanitation and maintenance.

The Building, Fire and related Codes (BFRC) make no mention of "Urban Farming" or "Farms" in general but does include sanitary maintenance requirements for all exterior lots and premises. In May 2021, Code Enforcement Inspectors and Attorneys completed an Audubon Society training on identifying beneficial plants when evaluating potential code violations. Should additional policies and practices for regulating urban farms be enacted we would recommend ongoing education for Code Enforcement Inspectors and additional coordination and collaboration between agencies overseeing various codes which may apply to an urban farm.

Urban farming intersects with many of the City's Codes including the BFRC, the Health Code and Article 32 Zoning. For example, the Health Code has laws pertaining to the keeping of animals, which includes animals used for the purposes of agriculture such as chickens, rabbits, goats, and honeybees. Additionally, urban farms are not presently defined in Article 32 of the Zoning Code, the only type of farm described in the zoning code is Community-Managed Open-Space Farm. These different codes may not always be well-suited in enabling the establishment

Brandon M. Scott, Mayor | Alice Kennedy, Housing Commissioner

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and successful operation of urban farms. DHCD recommends ongoing discussions and collaboration with representatives from the Office of the City Administrator, the Health Department, the Environmental Control Board and the Department of Planning, to help support urban farms operate safely and successfully in Baltimore City.

DHCD serves Baltimore City's gardeners that are a part of the agency's Adopt-a-Lot program. While the program is not currently constructed to support urban farms, it adds significant value to the health and welfare of our communities and we have been working closely with the Office of Sustainability within the Department of Planning to identify parcels of City-owned land in neighborhoods where residents want to see more urban agriculture and are looking at the best ways to offer them for use.

DHCD is in support of the Council's efforts to discuss the standards, procedures, policies, and practices for regulating urban farms in Baltimore City. Increased opportunities for urban agriculture could play a significant role in attracting new residents, businesses, and raising property values.

DHCD **supports** City Council Resolution 21-0064R.

AK:sm

cc: Ms. Themelis, Nina, *Mayor's Office of Government Relations*