



CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS

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JOSEPH FAVALORO
JAMES KIRYLO
ELIZABETH MORONEY

June 29, 2012

The Honorable Board of Aldermen
City Hall
93 Highland Avenue
Somerville, MA 02143

Re: An ordinance amending the Somerville Zoning Ordinance (SZO) to encourage urban agriculture in Somerville adding definitions, and amending the Table of Uses and the Footnotes to the Table of Uses to allow farms as accessory residential uses, and to allow community gardens, community farms and farming on municipal land.

Dear Honorable Board of Aldermen:

In keeping with its lawful responsibilities, the Planning Board submits to your Honorable Board its recommendation on an ordinance encouraging urban agriculture in Somerville adding definitions, and amending the Table of Uses and the Footnotes to the Table of Uses to allow farms as accessory residential uses, and to allow community gardens, community farms and farming on municipal land.

On May 17, 2012, at 6:00 p.m. the Planning Board and Land Use Committee of the Board of Aldermen jointly held a duly advertised public hearing in the Aldermanic Chambers in City Hall. The purpose of the hearing was to solicit public comments on the proposed amendments and to evaluate the amendments in the context of testimony received and the findings and analysis of the Planning Staff. The Planning Board kept the record open for public comment until 12 noon on May 25, 2012, and also deliberated on the matter at their meeting on June 7, 2012. At their meeting on June 7, 2012, following due consideration, the Planning Board voted (3-1, with

Michael A. Capuano absent and James Kirylo in opposition), to recommend **APPROVAL** of the proposed amendment as recommended by Planning Staff.

FORMAT OF REPORTS

These amendments were addressed in an initial staff report provided to your honorable board on April 12, 2012 (see Attachment I). In May of 2012, Planning Staff also submitted this initial staff report to the Planning Board. The report provided a background of how local community groups have highlighted the need for and the interest in access to healthy and affordable food within the City's boundaries. The report also spoke to the popularity of the urban agriculture movement and some of the models that are being used in other communities. The report then moved on to discuss some of the benefits of urban agriculture, such as the food budget supplement these gardens allow for and their positive impact on the environment. The last two sections of the report cover some of the possible regulatory elements that could be used to control this accessory use and some of the specific changes of the proposed ordinance.

The remainder of this report from the Planning Board to the Board of Aldermen will focus on the discussion at the May 17, 2012 and June 7, 2012 meetings of the Planning Board and its final recommendation. For your reference, a copy of the proposed rezoning ordinance, as recommended by the Planning Board, is also attached to this report (see Attachment II). Written comments that were submitted by the public before the Board of Aldermen's closing of the written record on June 8, 2012 are also included as Attachment III.

PLANNING BOARD DISCUSSION

At the meeting on May 17, 2012, the Planning Board was given a presentation on the background and benefits of urban agriculture. The presentation indicated that some of the community benefits of urban agriculture are increased access to food, better food security, additional open space, educational components of urban agriculture, jobs, and increased social capital. The Board also discussed a number of issues related to urban agriculture including health impacts, rodents, the possibility of lead in the soil, consideration for grandfathered uses, the difference between a garden and a farm, and some of the potential health rules for the raising of chickens. It should be noted here that 20 members of the public spoke in support of this amendment at this particular meeting.

At the meeting on June 7, 2012 the Planning Board continued their discussion on urban agriculture.

Joe Favaloro stated that he is generally supportive of the Mayor's initiatives to promote healthy living, including this one. He raised the question that as urban agriculture in the City grows, and the layer of enforcement is not there, can this particular use be regulated appropriately? Mr. Favaloro went on to indicate that he supported this ordinance but he did have some concerns about the enforcement of the ordinance. Staff indicated that Health regulations would address these concerns.

James Kirylo indicated that he did not think there was a place for chickens or other livestock in the RA or RB zoning districts. He noted that he was comfortable with bee keeping as part of this

amendment, but not chickens or pigs. Mr. Kirylo noted that the City has always had vegetable gardens, but if someone wants to be a chicken farmer they should not be doing this in Somerville. He then stated that he could not go along with the livestock portion of the ordinance and that he too had concerns about how the inspection of this accessory use would take place.

Elizabeth Moroney stated that she thought the urban agriculture amendment was a great idea and pointed out that there are chickens and bees being kept in the City already, but there is no guidance on how to handle these items. She noted that urban farming is going on everywhere and felt that the items Mr. Kirylo was concerned about were not large issues because Somerville is so dense already. She pointed out that right now, if there is a call or complaint from a neighbor about urban farming, there are no guidelines for enforcement and this ordinance would help to set up those guidelines.

PLANNING BOARD RECOMMENDATION

Following discussion, Elizabeth Moroney made a motion to approve the proposed amendment as laid out in the Planning Staff Report of April 12, 2012. Joe Favaloro seconded the motion, which carried 3-1, with Michael A. Capuano absent and James Kirylo in opposition.

Sincerely,



Kevin Prior
Chairman