

Your Town

search

GO

[< Back to front page](#)

Text size [-](#) [+](#)

ALLSTON BRIGHTON, BACK BAY, BEACON HILL, CHARLESTOWN, DORCHESTER, DOWNTOWN, EAST BOSTON, FENWAY-KENMORE, HYDE PARK, JAMAICA PLAIN, MATTAPAN, NORTH END, ROSLINDALE, ROXBURY, SOUTH BOSTON, SOUTH END, WEST ROXBURY

Boston aims to eliminate red tape around urban agriculture; meetings set to discuss proposed rezoning

Posted by Matt Rocheleau May 29, 2013 04:47 PM

Share

Comments ()

E-mail story

By Matt Rocheleau, Town Correspondent

Print story

Boston officials are preparing to present a draft version of new citywide zoning rules designed to expand opportunities for urban agriculture, which is largely prohibited under existing guidelines.

On Monday, city officials will kick-off the first of a series of [11 neighborhood meetings](#) that run through the end of July to discuss the proposed amendment known as [Article 89](#), which officials hope will be formally adopted into Boston's zoning code in the fall.

"Most agricultural activities are not allowed under the current zoning code," reads an [informational flyer](#) the city released about the rezoning effort. "By addressing a wide range of urban agriculture activities, Article 89 will increase access to healthy food, promote community building, create business opportunities and help beautify neighborhoods."

The proposed new rules were drafted over the past year-and-a-half by officials from the Boston Redevelopment Authority, the Mayor's Office of Food Initiatives and the Mayor's Urban Agriculture Rezoning Working Group, which

BostonShops »



Let the shopping begin. Get exclusive promotions and sales from your favorite retailers. And never miss a great deal again.

[SEE A SAMPLE](#)

[SIGN UP NOW](#)

JAMAICA PLAIN REAL ESTATE »

142

Homes for sale

40

Rentals available

27

Open houses this week

1

New listings this week

SPECIAL ADVERTISING DIRECTORY

CAMP GUIDE »

A camp for every kid!

Adventure, sports, theater, music, arts or technology—find the perfect camp for your child at boston.com/campguide.



consists of farming advocates, experts, and residents appointed by Mayor Thomas M. Menino.

Highlights of the proposed zoning changes include that ground-level farms no larger than one acre and roof-top farms no larger than 5,000 square feet would be allowed anywhere in the city. The process for starting one may require obtaining special permits, but it would not involve a public hearing.

Ground-level farms large than one acre would be allowed in areas zoned for industrial use. In all other areas, establishing one-acre plus ground-level farms would require notifying neighbors and holding a public hearing and review process.

Similarly, roof-top farms larger than 5,000 square feet as well as roof-top greenhouses of any size would be allowed in industrial, institutional and large-scale commercial districts. In all other areas, establishing roof-top farms larger than 5,000 square feet or roof-top greenhouses of any size would require going through a public review process.

Under the proposal, city officials would also conduct "Comprehensive Farm Reviews" in certain cases "to make sure farms are designed to be good neighbors." Ground-level farms larger than 10,000 square feet and roof-top farms larger than 5,000 square feet, with some exceptions in industrial and institutional districts, would be subject to the reviews, which would take up to 45 days and include a public comment process.

All farms would be required to meet certain soil standards.

The new rules would allow for composting on any urban farm as long as it doesn't occupy more than 5 percent of the lot. Where composting operations are located on a lot would be subject to city review.

The proposal also includes rules about: aquaculture, or farming fish and shellfish; hydroponics, or growing plants in nutrient-enriched water; and aquaponics, a combination of aquaculture and hydroponics.

Aquaculture and aquaponics facilities no larger than 750 square feet would be allowed in most zoning districts, including residential areas. Hydroponics facilities would be allowed in most zoning districts, including small-scale facilities in residential areas.

[Tweets](#)

[Follow @BostonDotCom](#)

facilities in residential areas.

Aquaculture and aquaponics facilities designed to be as the main activity of a property would be allowed in industrial districts and many waterfront districts. Establishing such facilities in commercial and institutional areas would require going through a public review process.

Farmers' markets and farm stands would be allowed in any area where retail is allowed. Markets and stands in other areas would require going through a public review process.

The amendment would not change existing rules for where hens and bees can be kept. Backyard hen and bee keeping is prohibited in most zoning districts in Boston under the existing zoning code.

Boston's restrictions on bees and hens have faced some criticism over the years, including by [some who had hoped](#) that Article 89 would ease those restrictions.

"Whether hens and bees may be kept is a decision left up to individual neighborhoods," the city's flyer says. "Use regulations for the keeping of hens and bees can be changed by petitioning the BRA."

In zoning areas where hens and bees are allowed, city rules require the establishment of such a site to go through a public review process. Article 89 does propose changing the current code for those areas to define how large beehives and coops can be, how many hens and beehives are allowed, along with other size and maintenance requirements.

Farms and gardens on the ground and atop roofs have become [increasingly popular](#) in recent years in urban settings, including in and around Boston.

City officials say expanding urban agriculture opportunities will be good for Boston because: it would improve access to affordable, fresh, healthy food; empower entrepreneurs and youth; unite neighbors; promote community building; and make the city more environmentally friendly.

The city's existing zoning code does not address many types of agriculture. Any activity that is not addressed in the code is considered to be a forbidden use that requires a sometimes lengthy, frustrating appeal process to navigate around.

Article 89 aims to eliminate some of the red tape by more clearly defining and simplifying the process around agricultural activity in Boston.

The effort to amend the city's zoning began about three years ago when Menino learned a local business owner's plans to start a lettuce farm were foiled because city rules would not allow it, according to city officials.

In the fall of 2010, the city launched a process to test out urban agriculture, establishing two [pilot farms](#) on city-owned property in South Dorchester. The farms planted their first crops in the spring of 2011, city officials said.

Last January, the city moved to draft Article 89. After a series of 17 public meetings since then, the city released a draft version of the amendment in early May.

To see a list of the upcoming neighborhood meetings about Article 89, [click here](#).

E-mail Matt Rocheleau at mjrochele@gmail.com.

--
For the latest updates about your community, follow some of our local neighborhood, city and town Twitter accounts, [here](#).

Share

Comments ()

E-mail story

Print story



PREVIOUS STORY

FRONT PAGE



Braintree's \$106 million budget, \$4.6 million capital plan for FY'14

NEXT STORY

Concord Currents, What's happening in town this week

[Home](#) | [Today's Globe](#) | [News](#) | [Business](#) | [Sports](#) | [Lifestyle](#) | [A&E](#) | [Things to Do](#) | [Travel](#) | [Cars](#) | [Jobs](#) | [Real Estate](#) | [Local Search](#)

[CONTACT BOSTON.COM](#) | [Help](#) | [Advertise](#) | [Work here](#) | [Privacy Policy](#) | [Your Ad Choices](#) | [Terms of Service](#) | [Newsletters](#) | [Mobile](#) | [RSS feeds](#) | [Sitemap](#)

[CONTACT THE BOSTON GLOBE](#) | [Subscribe](#) | [Manage your subscription](#) | [Advertise](#) | [Boston Globe Insiders](#) | [The Boston Globe Gallery](#) | © NY Times Co.

