

City Planning Commission

Erie, Pennsylvania

August 16, 2016

-Minutes-

MEMBERS OF THE CITY PLANNING COMMISSION:

The regular meeting of the City Planning Commission was held on Tuesday, August 16, 2016 at **1:00 pm** in Room 500, Municipal Building, 626 State Street.

1. *Roll Call*

Members Present: Mark Kloecker, Don Marinelli and Richard Speicher

Members Absent: Gary Antalek and Thomas Dworzanski

2. On a motion by **Mr. Kloecker**, seconded by **Mr. Speicher**, the July 19, 2016, meeting minutes were approved unanimously as received.

3. *At the request of Council, the Planning Commission reviewed regulations, or the lack thereof, within the City concerning urban agriculture or crop farming, and to make a recommendation to the City Council for any appropriate amendments to the Zoning Ordinance to permit such land uses with proper safeguards and restrictions.*

Under the current zoning ordinance, agriculture, as a whole, is treated as ‘light manufacturing’ on a vacant lot. Gardens are considered an accessory use when there is a dwelling on the lot. The selling of crops on a lot that is in an ‘R’ district is not permitted in the zoning ordinance.

Scott Henry, executive director of the Erie Redevelopment Authority (ERA), was present for the discussion. Mr. Henry stated that the ERA currently has 150 vacant lots in the City of Erie. The ERA currently has an ‘adopt a lot’ program where neighboring property owners as well as other individuals are permitted to landscape the lots. Mr. Henry believes that permitting urban agriculture on the vacant lots would encourage a compatible repurposing of the properties. Mr. Henry also pointed out that the crops that are grown may be sold elsewhere but that there should be a distinction between urban agriculture and retail.

Mr. Henry added that the Erie City Comprehensive Plan is heavily focused on the removal of the abundant housing stock, which could result in upwards of 4,000 additional vacant lots. Urban agriculture would provide an alternative use for the potential vacant lots.

Sarah Galloway, the Erie City Arborist, was also present for the discussion. Ms. Galloway stated that the term ‘agriculture’ implies that the crops would be sold for profit. Ms. Galloway also added that there is a proposed ordinance that would permit alternative landscaping in the City of Erie. The proposed ordinance may address some of the concerns regarding urban agriculture.

Carrie Sachse, a City resident, also attended the meeting. She stated that she would like to possibly purchase some of the vacant lots in the City and repurpose the land for urban agriculture. The vacant lots would be used to grow crops. The idea would be to sell the produce off-site. This would help address ‘food deserts’ in the City.

The members of the Planning Commission had several concerns as well as comments. Soil contamination of the vacant lots was a concern. The Commission was also concerned about non-neighborhood residents using vacant lots for urban agriculture as well as the potential impact of certain crops, for instance corn. The Commission added that residents should be encouraged to grow and consume their own produce.

On a motion by **Mr. Speicher**, and seconded by **Mr. Kloecker**, the Planning Commission voted 3-0, to make the following recommendations to City Council:

1. Urban Agriculture should be encouraged.
 2. The current zoning ordinance does not adequately address Urban Agriculture.
 3. The City should conduct a study and research Urban Agriculture to amend the zoning ordinance.
 4. Urban Agriculture appears to be consistent with the Erie City Comprehensive Plan.
4. *With all business completed, the Commission adjourned at 2:20 PM.*