

Responses of Meg Tuthill, 10th Ward City Council Member

Minneapolis Urban Farmers Collaborative
Candidate Questionnaire: 2013

Urban agriculture city code amendments passed Minneapolis city council in spring of 2012 and laid the groundwork for urban farms to take root. In the year since these new rules have been in place many small businesses have endeavored to grow, sell, prepare, and compost hundreds of thousands of pounds of Minneapolis produced fruits and vegetables. This spring, the urban farmers and residents that rely on their food would like to enhance the growing environment for urban farms in Minneapolis. The following initiatives and rule changes would nourish and enrich this growing movement.

Do you as a candidate for -Mayor, City Hall- support the following initiatives and rule changes in order to promote urban farming in Minneapolis?

- The current MPLS chicken ordinance only allows chickens in residential back yards. Many urban residents would like to purchase eggs and chicken from urban farms, and urban farmers could use the proceeds from chicken farming to support their urban farms in the winter months. **Do you as a candidate support allowing chickens as livestock at urban farms?**

I am more than willing to look at this expansion of use at market gardens and urban farms (not just as accessory to residences) to allow access to fresh, locally raised eggs. Urban farm advocates could work with the City to decide what constitutes a workable number of chickens for an urban farm. City staff would also have to be included in developing humane care standards for the chickens in this arrangement. I support the egg production this would create, but I am concerned about having a slaughter operation at urban farms. The current residential chicken policy asks citizens to get sign off from their immediate neighbors and I hope we could have a similar policy for livestock chickens when the urban farm or garden is close to residential. I would like to include manure from these sites in our incubator composting programs too.

- Urban farm sites often don't have water spigots and in most cases urban farmers purchase water from neighbors to water their plots. **Will you as a candidate work to build affordable access to city water hydrants and support city cost assistance for water for urban farmers and community gardens?**

The city currently provides water for community gardens and I think we can expand this to market gardens and urban farmers as well. Community gardens pay a flat rate for the season and that seems to be what we should look at. I would want to see farmers markets included in this, since most of them don't have access to potable water for their markets. I think there would have to be some type of fee structure (perhaps reduced or a flat fee) for the water used since we are charging citizens for the water they use.

- Urban land is priced too high for urban farming to be financially sustainable. Most urban farms are leasing land without any guarantee that they'll be able to continue leasing year to year. Urban farm sites need years of fertility building before they become highly productive. **Do you as a candidate support creating a city pilot program for leasing public lands for urban farming?**

I would be in favor of creating a program like this, particularly for land that isn't developable for single family homes and duplexes because of market conditions, lot size, and zoning.

- Urban farmers and family owned businesses rely on their work vehicles to run their local businesses. It is currently illegal by city code to park work vehicles on the street in Minneapolis, resulting in hundreds of family owned businesses being fined for parking in front of their homes. **Will you as a candidate support small businesses by removing barriers to on street and off street parking of contractor work vehicles and trailers?**

Many neighborhoods are concerned about large commercial and industrial vehicles parked in their neighborhoods, particularly when the zoning is residential. In neighborhoods like the Wedge, ECCO, CARAG and parts of Whittier, this is a particular concern, especially in the winter and where parking is scarce. I would be willing to look at allowing pick-ups and vans for urban farm use in the neighborhoods with a preference for parking off-street first and then street parking.

- Urban gardeners and farmers who wish to sell produce to neighbors now have to apply for a costly permit to sell vegetables. This permit only allows for 15 days of on-site sales per year, and when seeking a permit, farmers must pre-schedule their sales days. Since weather, climate, and variations in growing seasons affect production of vegetables it is almost impossible to predict when will be the best days to sell vegetables. Additionally if one farmer runs multiple sites, that farmer must apply for multiple permits to have sales from each site. These restrictions mean that valuable produce is going to waste even while there is a high demand for purchasing it within the neighborhoods.
- **Will you as a candidate support the local food system by easing the permitting process for on-site vegetable sales, by reducing permit fees, increasing the amount of days farmers can sell, and allowing produce sales from multiple farm sites?**

I would be willing to look again at the permit process to see about increasing the days, letting growers choose the days based on when produce can be harvested, and looking at the fee structure. I see that many market gardens and urban farmers are located in neighborhoods without access to fresh produce and that these stands could help provide that for our citizens. Now that our farmers markets are increasing in the city, I would really like to see urban farmers who have enough produce use our farmers markets as a venue for selling produce, so we can make these markets successful.

Broad vision question:

As a candidate for public office, what would you like the food economy of Minneapolis to look like in 2017?

I would like to see land that is currently underutilized and not suitable for housing or commercial be made available for urban farmers and hydroponic operations. Hydroponic operations are a year round source of food and we should work to create more of these opportunities.

I think we should have more farmers markets in neighborhoods that are low-income to help these folks have access to fresh, reasonably-priced food and I would like those markets to have access to potable water and electricity in order to have both fresh food and food trucks and prepared food vendors in each market.

I want to see the city expand to a city-wide composting program, collecting organic waste from residential households and to have the finished compost available to urban farmers.

The city should support and expand programs like the Gardening Hub program (which distributes seeds and plants) and Gardening Matters (which has classes and forums) that are working on building a thriving local food community.