

At Work

Facilitated the legalization of urban agriculture through zoning

In many cities, chicken keeping is prohibited and gardening on a vacant lot may raise a red flag for the municipal government. In Indianapolis, city planners wanted to include these urban agricultural practices and others as specifically legal activity in zoning regulations. In order to do so, Indianapolis city planners needed assistance crafting the language around urban agriculture, and they needed help getting public feedback. Purdue Extension – Marion County staff led public engagement efforts regarding urban agriculture re-zoning and provided research-based input about urban agriculture for city planners.

To get public input, the Purdue Extension staff held two public comments sessions which drew more than 50 participants. In those sessions, two lead city planners attended and conversed with practitioners about how they had written the draft language to regulate urban agriculture. After the comment sessions, Purdue Extension – Marion County staff facilitated a process of written public feedback to city planners.

After the all-call public engagement effort, Indianapolis city planners revised their draft and submitted a new version to two review teams of stakeholders in the urban agriculture community convened by Purdue Extension – Marion County. The two teams focused on different sections of the zoning draft, one for backyard livestock and one for urban farming and gardening regulations. This is a common way to organize urban agriculture zoning conversations, one part focusing on keeping animals, the other on growing and selling practices. These two teams reviewed the language in their area of expertise and then met with the planners, which subsequently resulted in a further revised zoning draft.

In addition to public engagement, Purdue Extension – Marion County staff also provided research support to city planners. For example, when city planners needed information about urban livestock slaughter, Purdue Extension staff did an academic literature review, spoke with an attorney from the Indiana Board of Animal Health and then reported back.

Purdue Extension – Marion County staff also reached out



to other cities to learn about their efforts to update zoning as it relates to urban agriculture. Purdue Extension enabled an educator to travel to Detroit and learn from a city planner familiar with urban agriculture zoning. Another useful resource was the Ohio State Extension office in Cuyahoga County (Cleveland) who also assisted city planners in rewriting zoning to accommodate urban agriculture.

The result of these efforts was a draft of urban agriculture zoning ordinances (still under discussion by the city) that was heavily shaped by the public and Purdue Extension – Marion County. Many cities are beginning to legally enable their citizens to grow food and raise livestock in their neighborhoods. If you are trying to get beekeeping, backyard chickens, etc. on the books for your municipality, start by reading through zoning language in cities like Detroit, Cleveland, and, as soon as the draft passes, Indianapolis. Literature on this topic is growing and can be found in academic journals, independent reports, and law reviews.

For more information about this project, please contact:

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