

CITY OF ROCK ISLAND
CITY COUNCIL STUDY SESSION
City Council Chambers, City Hall, 3rd Floor,
1528 Third Avenue, Rock Island, IL

5/19/2025 - Minutes

1. Call to Order

Mayor Harris called the meeting to order at 5:30 p.m. and welcomed everyone.

2. Roll Call

Mayor Harris asked Deputy Clerk Amanda Torres to call the roll.

Present: Alderpersons Evans, Hurt, Barnes, Swanson, Parker, Poulos, Healy, and Mayor Harris.

Absent:

Staff: City Manager Todd Thompson, Attorney Leslie Day, Deputy Clerk Amanda Torres, and other City Staff.

3. Presentations

a. Urban Ag Ordinance Presentation.

Planning and Zoning Manager Tanner Osing explained that the urban agriculture ordinance includes a wide range of topics including gardening, beekeeping, livestock and chickens, among other things in an urban setting. Currently, the City has no regulations on gardening, beekeeping, raising livestock, or other agricultural activities other than chickens. He explained that urban agriculture is growing in popularity and is already present in Rock Island. The benefits of regulating urban agriculture activities include food access, community engagement, sustainable land management strategies and learning and entrepreneurial opportunities. The ordinance provides general rules that ensure compatibility and promote health, safety and welfare.

Mr. Osing discussed the details of the ordinance, including prohibiting activity on lots with foreclosed vacant or abandoned structures. He displayed a graphic to depict what a vacant lot would look like with a 5-foot lawn buffer where no crops would be allowed to be planted. The 20-foot setback would be for vegetables 4-feet and higher. More and more residents are interested in urban agriculture and simple rules should be implemented to reduce compatibility issues and be a selling point for the City.

Community Development Director Brainard clarified that although the First Ward has a higher concentration of gardens, they are not community gardens and are for private use. He noted that the City has several vacant lots on the tax roll and much of the interest in purchasing these was from residents wanting gardens. He noted that the City Council can restrict this, but it comes at a cost as the City will be responsible for the maintenance and taxes of the lots. Some Council members expressed concern over the abundance of lots being purchased for gardens.

Director Brainard explained the state garden law that states the right to garden on property that you own. However, the law allows municipalities to put in place reasonable regulations. He said one acre was used for code consistency but not set in stone. He clarified that residents indicate what the intended use of the property is when completing the application to purchase City-owned property. He noted staff are working on a map that would depict exactly what the properties are being purchased for and whether they are in a

concentrated area.

Director Brainard clarified that hydroponic farming is a form of urban agriculture, but there are no negative consequences of having one. He discussed native plants and pollinators and the code allows people to have them, but it is vague.

b. Rental Registration Ordinance Presentation.

Community Development Director Miles Brainard discussed the history of the rental registration program and noted the program started in 2004 and that 37% of the housing stock in the City is rental properties. He said inspections and rental registrations have been on the increase and are anticipated to continue to trend upward. Director Brainard explained the changes to the ordinance, including short-term rentals, rent-to-own properties, clarification and framework for applications, fees, fines and violations. It was noted that the proposed fees align with neighboring cities. Additional changes to the rental registration ordinance include requiring the rental license to be displayed in a common area as well as clearly defining the revocation process and appeals process.

Director Brainard explained the changes to the ordinance help provide a level playing field for owners by requiring a minimum housing standard, help to maintain and stabilize property values, strengthen the enforcement structure to encourage compliance and the ability to adjust the inspection schedule to a more achievable standard.

Director Brainard clarified that the owner or an appointed designated property manager must live or maintain an office within 50 miles of the City boundary. He explained that each unit would need to be inspected at a minimum of 5 years, but staff could show up at any time with any level of frequency to address problems. The language allows for the inspections team to take a holistic approach to enforcement.

City Attorney Day explained the eviction process and said rent can be withheld until the property becomes habitable. The City would not get directly involved, but the tenant would be made aware of their defense.

Aldersperson Parker suggested that the City should partner with organizations regarding tenant education to bring awareness of the regulations.

Director Brainard clarified that each property gets a separate license, which is issued to the person as a business license and is non-transferable. It was noted that the staff would explore adding language to the ordinance that ensures the landlord is licensed by the state.

Aldersperson Parker suggested adding a tenant to the commission.

Director Brainard explained that if a property is found to be code deficient, then the property owner is responsible for addressing those deficiencies. Attorney Day explained the liability of the condition of the building is on the property owner.

4. Public Comment

No one was signed up for public comment.

5. Adjourn

- a. Motion: Motion to adjourn.
VV Voice Vote is needed.

MOTION:

Aldersperson Poulos moved to adjourn; Aldersperson Healy seconded.

VOTE:

Motion PASSED on a 7-0-0 voice vote. Aye: Evans, Hurt, Barnes, Swanson, Parker, Poulos and Healy. Nay: None. Absent: None.

The Study Session concluded at 6:37 p.m.

[MIN_SIGNATURES]