

**Updated Hydrant Permit Policy — July 2022
Chicago Growers Guide**

In February 2020, the Department of Water Management (DWM) [released a memo outlining changes to the Hydrant Permit Policy](#). These changes were made without consulting Chicago’s agricultural community and created several significant financial and administrative barriers for growers who normally access water from the hydrant.

Over the last few months, AUA has worked in coalition with farmers, gardeners, and food system leaders throughout Chicago to advocate for a more just and equitable hydrant permit policy. As a result of those efforts, the City recently established an [updated Hydrant Permit Policy](#) (see page 2-3).

The updated water policy:

- Establishes a new rate of **\$120.72/year** that is applicable **to both farms and gardens**. That rate is applicable to operations under 3,000 square feet. It is an added **\$51.84** for each additional 3,000 square feet.
- Changes the RPZ certification requirement from every 6 months to once per year.
- Removes the non profit requirement for farms and gardens.
- Aligns zoning and water policy — community gardens using the hydrant can be up to 25,000 square feet and can make ‘incidental sales.’

The updated water policy does not:

- Provide funding support for the cost of RPZ acquisition, installation and certification, or the acquisition of a hydrant cap and key.
- Recognize that the new process puts additional financial and administrative burdens on farms/gardens (i.e. temporary hydrant use agreement, legal fees, insurance requirements, and a complex application process - see page 2).
- Acknowledge that several large gardens and farms normally use 2" RPZ valves to ensure adequate water pressure. The new policy requires the use of a ¾" RPZ valve.

At AUA, we recognize that this updated policy still presents significant financial and administrative barriers for growers looking to access water from the hydrant. That is why we are continuing to work in coalition with Chicago’s urban agricultural community to ensure a more equitable hydrant permit policy for the start of the 2023 growing season.

2022 Temporary Hydrant Permit Application Process

The following information serves as a guide for acquiring necessary equipment and navigating the City's updated hydrant permit policy. If your farm and garden is planning to apply, we encourage you to start the process as quickly as possible. Contact our Co-Operations Director, Viviana Okakpu, at viviana@auachicago.org so AUA can support you throughout the process.

AUA has secured funding to support growers with hydrant equipment costs. **If your farm/garden is in need of funding support for RPZ's or hydrant fittings and keys, please [fill out this form](#) immediately. Funds will be distributed on a first come first served basis.**

Step 1: RPZ Unit, Hydrant Fittings & Keys:

The total cost of acquiring, installing, and certifying an Reduced Pressure Zone (RPZ) unit is approximately \$1500.



Prior to 2019, vacuum breakers could be used for backflow prevention. The new policy requires the professional installation and certification of an RPZ unit by a licensed and bonded union plumber. RPZ units can be [purchased separately](#) or through the plumber installing and certifying the unit. Reach out to AUA if you'd like to provide or receive a plumber recommendation. After installation and certification of the unit, the plumber should provide you with a Test Sheet that notes the location of the hydrant and RPZ and indicates that the RPZ is certified. After getting your RPZ installed and certified, a DWM inspector will need to visit your site (see Step 5) to inspect the RPZ and place a seal on the Test Sheet. The Test Sheet is a required attachment for the online hydrant permit application (see Step 5).

Hydrant fittings and keys can cost up to \$300. In previous years, the Department of Water Management (DWM) provided hydrant fittings, also known as caps, and keys to community gardens but they are no longer being distributed. A standard City of Chicago hydrant has a 4 ½" opening. In order to connect a hose to a hydrant, you may need 2 fittings and an RPZ. The fittings pictured on the right provide the appropriate gauge to reduce the 4 ½" hydrant opening to a standard ¾" hose. The fittings featured are a 4 ½" to 2 ½" and a second fitting further reducing water flow from 2 ½" to ¾".



Hydrant keys are available for purchase online with varying shapes. If you do not already have the necessary hydrant fittings and key, [this list](#) offers some alternatives.

A custodian cap may need to be removed to access water from the hydrant. These caps are used to prevent illegal tapping of hydrants. As of 2022, the DWM requires a fee of \$1325 to remove a custodian cap.

Step 2: Temporary Hydrant Agreement

As part of the updated permitting process, the farm/garden and landowner will need to enter into a [Temporary Hydrant and Water Use Agreement](#). If you do not own your land, work with your landowner and Karen Bielarz, Director of Legal Services with the City of Chicago, to create and submit this document. Karen's email is karen.bielarz@cityofchicago.org. As part of this agreement, you will need to submit **proof of insurance** that is relevant to your operation (see page 4 of Temporary Use Hydrant Agreement).



Step 3: Create a statement on letterhead

Draft a statement on organizational letterhead “*acknowledging, agreeing to, and shall follow all the General Rules for Hydrant Use*” and acknowledging that “*water from hydrants is not potable water and shall be used for gardening only.*” Read the [updated Hydrant Permit Policy](#) from the Department of Water Management for reference to this language. The following information should be included in your organizational letterhead: Logo (if applicable), Farm/Garden Name, Mailing Address, Contact Name, Phone & Email, Date and a signature.

Here is a suggested language for the letter: ***[Farm/Garden Name]*** hereby requests a temporary hydrant permit to irrigate crops for the 2020 growing season. ***[Brief Description of Farm/Garden]***. The closest hydrant to our location is ***[address or cross streets of hydrant you wish to use]***. We acknowledge, agree to, and shall follow all the General Rules for Hydrant Use. We also acknowledge that water from hydrants is not potable water and shall be used to grow crops only.

Step 4: Submit Application

Visit [this site](#) to access the online application. As part of the application, you will need to submit: 1) Your official statement on letterhead, 2) RPZ certification documentation, also known as a Test Sheet, and 3) a Temporary Hydrant Agreement. For more support navigating the online application, [watch this video](#). Instructions on how to fill out the application begin at minute 13:00.

Step 5: DWM Site Visit:

After receiving your online application, a DWM plumbing inspector will conduct a site visit with you to calculate your farm or garden's square footage and inspect your RPZ unit. A member of AUA can be present with you at the site visit if you would like additional support. We have been led to believe that square footage is calculated based on "total square footage" not cultivation square footage. However, this is still yet to be confirmed by the City.

After conducting the site visit, the Plumbing inspector from DWM will notify Karen Bielarz, who will then work with you to ensure a completed submission of your application by finalizing the Temporary Hydrant Agreement, proof of insurance, and payment of permit fee (based on square footage).

Step 6: Stay Engaged!

Even with the updates to the policy, obtaining a hydrant permit from the City is a very challenging process. We encourage you to stay involved in our collective advocacy efforts to support urban agriculture in Chicago in 2022 and beyond. Our city government needs to hear your voice! It's only through collective action that we can advance policies that give space for urban agriculture to thrive. We will be sharing a sign-on letter in the coming week and encourage you to sign and circulate the letter.

Please be sure to [fill out this form](#) for tailored support. Do not hesitate to reach out to viviana@auachicago.org or call/text (708) 629-1425 if you have questions or encounter issues in the process of obtaining a hydrant permit.