

## Updated Hydrant Permit Policy — February 2024 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.

Since then, Advocates for Urban Agriculture (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). For further reading on Chicago's Municipal Code, please see section [11-12-070](#) on hydrant usage.

### The updated hydrant policy as of February:

- An annual increase in the seasonal rate 3%-5% depending on Consumer Price Index (up from \$126.72 in April 2023) that is applicable **to both farms and gardens**.
- Changes the RPZ certification requirement from every 6 months to once per year.
- Removes the non profit requirement for farms and gardens.
- Aligned 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. If you require financial assistance, AUA may be able to help.
- 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.
- Guarantee timely removal of any custodian cap that may be present on a hydrant prior to permit processing.

At AUA, we recognize that this updated policy still presents significant financial and administrative barriers for growers looking to access water via hydrants. That is why we are continuing to work in coalition with Chicago's urban agricultural community and Department of Water Management to ensure a more equitable hydrant permit policy for the start of the 2024 growing season.

## 2024 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 or garden is planning to apply, we encourage you to start the process as quickly as possible. Contact AUA's Water Access Steward, Tucker Kelly, at [water@auachicago.org](mailto:water@auachicago.org), and AUA can support you throughout the process. Additionally, fill out this [technical assistance form](#), and sign up for [office hours](#).

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 and equipment 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 likely the single largest expense in the process of getting hydrant access.



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 bonded Cross-Connection Control Device Inspector Plumbing Contractor. 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 testing and certification of the unit, the plumber should provide you with a test sheet that notes the location of the hydrant and RPZ, the serial number of the RPZ and indicates that the RPZ is certified. After getting your RPZ 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, AUA can offer assistance finding 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 2023, the DWM requires a fee of \$950.00 to remove a custodian cap. Similarly, if there is a collar on the top of the hydrant that prevents use, follow the same steps to remove as you would with a custodian cap. You can learn more about the process of removal [here](#).



AUA offers assistance in navigating the custodian cap removal process if you find that your closest hydrant has one.

### **Step 2: Temporary Hydrant Agreement**

As part of the updated permitting process, the farm or garden will need to enter into a [Temporary Hydrant and Water Use Agreement](#). If you do not own the land, work with the landowner to ensure you have permission to farm/garden on the land for the entire growing season. If you are operating a farm or garden on city-owned land a signed "right-of-entry" agreement with the City is needed.

As part of this agreement, proof of insurance that is relevant to your operation (see page 4 of Temporary Use Hydrant Agreement) is needed. Importantly, insurance does not have to be in effect when applying for the permit, but you will need to show proof of insurance that meets the Agreement's requirements before the permit can be issued.

### **Step 3: Create a statement on letterhead**

Draft a statement on organizational letterhead stating that you are *“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 or 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 (HUP) to irrigate crops for the 2024 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:

- Your official statement on letterhead
- RPZ certification documentation (test sheet)
- The Temporary Hydrant Agreement
- A photo of the hydrant

You will not need proof of insurance until after the application is submitted.

After your application is approved, you will receive an invoice from [BPermits@cityofchicago.org](mailto:BPermits@cityofchicago.org) that will need to be paid before a permit can be made only at City Hall Room #107 at 400 W Superior between 8:30AM and 4:30PM. You will need to bring two copies of your invoice.

**Importantly, a permit will not be issued if the entity or landowner has any unpaid taxes, fines, etc. to the city, county, or state.**

For more support navigating the online application, [watch this video](#). Instructions on how to fill out the application begin at minute 13:00. You can contact AUA's Water Access Steward Tucker Kelly at [water@auachicago.org](mailto:water@auachicago.org), and AUA can support you throughout the process. Additionally, you fill out this [technical assistance form](#), and sign up for [office hours](#).

#### **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. Importantly, when the total square footage is calculated, the DWM includes space between beds. A member of AUA can be present with you at the site visit if you would like additional support. You will only have to complete this step the first time you apply for an HUP. Following your first successful application, you only need to submit the requisite materials for application.

After conducting the site visit, the plumbing inspector from DWM will 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 2024 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.

Please be sure to [fill out this form](#) for tailored support. Do not hesitate to reach out to [water@auachicago.org](mailto:water@auachicago.org) if you have questions or encounter issues in the process of obtaining a hydrant permit.