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SP25 [4.182] Resilient Urbanism: Green Commons in the City

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**4.182 Architectural Design Workshop**

**Resilient Urbanism: Green Commons in the City**

**Teaching Team**

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Kate Brown                Professor, MIT HASTS                                        kbrown@mit.edu

**Schedule                        Credits                        Location**

Tuesdays 10 - 1PM                3-0-9 G                              5-231

**Collaborators**

Kafi Dixon                *Founder*, Common Good Cooperatives

*Executive Director*, Women of Color Rural & Urban Farmer Cooperative

Kate Brown                *Professor*, MIT Program in Science, Science Technology, and Society

**Introduction**

Boston’s urban agriculture community has long been at the forefront of transforming vacant lots and gray areas into productive green spaces and nodes of urban civic exchange. Urban agriculture is an essential act of self-reliance, self-preservation, and resistance. Common Good Co-Operatives, who operate a quarter-acre farm in the Dorchester neighborhood of Boston, is dedicated to serving local BIPOC working class families. It was founded as a direct response to the present conditions of the City –”push[ing] back against the subtle politics of race, class and privilege… while establishing the capacity and competency of Black women's true resilience against marginalizing policies and practices” ([The Common Good Co-Op](https://www.google.com/url?q=https://www.commongoodcooperatives.com/&sa=D&source=editors&ust=1738948233454180&usg=AOvVaw1PSD3GJxAwmLkDfWXozzH-)).

Working with Common Good Co-Operatives, this course will engage History, Architecture and Planning students to envision expansive possibilities for the farm as a comprehensive farming system that can support, among others, essential workforce development and readiness programs, small-business incubation, co-op services, and community empowerment. These inquiries will envision the Farm’s future as an organization, its contribution to its Dorchester context, and its infrastructural capacity to facilitate community-based programming and economic development. The class will begin by establishing common grounds between processes in design and in planning, apply the theoretical and practical tools of its respective disciplines with a community partner, and finally, develop concrete proposals with progressive architecture and planning principles with feedback from our collaborators.

**Objectives**

Working with Common Good Co-Operatives, this course will engage Architecture and Planning students to envision expansive possibilities for the farm as a comprehensive farming system that can support, among others, essential workforce development and readiness programs, small-business incubation, co-op services, and community empowerment. Teams will develop design proposals for an existing building and new farm lands in conjunction with existing Boston planning directives (GrowBoston, Article 89), and craft new initiatives, zoning policies, and economic models to support such design proposals.

The class begins with establishing common grounds between processes in Architecture, Planning, and History. Students will jointly conduct research to understand context, including mapping, case studies, site analysis, and interviews with participatory and co-design methods. Utilizing this contextual base, students will jointly envision the future of urban agriculture applied to Common Good Co-Operatives. The tools of each discipline will be in dialogue with one another to develop feasible plans throughout design ideation and development. Historical considerations (ethnography, deep reading, contextual analysis), planning considerations (public policy, land use planning, project execution and evaluation, funding mechanisms), and architectural considerations (tectonic and constructive systems, visualization and representation styles, siting and climatic analysis) will inform joint outcomes.

**Class Format**

We will begin the first half of semester with understanding the setting, contexts, and histories of the Common Good Co-operative in Dorchester. Guest lectures, speakers, and community members will join us (and sometimes, we will visit the farm) to share perspectives, ideas, and feedback. Assignments are meant to be cumulative and can be directed towards workshop participants’ interests (including design, GIS and mapping, historical writing, image-making, etc).

In the second half of the class, the collective class will settle on a document to produce towards the goals of Common Good Co-op. During these weeks, we will focus on desk crits and share-outs, leading up to a tentative meeting with City of Boston officials.

**Output**

This class represents the beginning of joint commitment with a community partner to develop a feasible plan for transforming a real-world site. Common Good Co-Operatives currently occupies seven parcels of land (0.25 acres) in the heart of Dorchester. Five of the seven land parcels that constitute the site of the Farm are owned by the City of Boston and are currently in agreement with Common Good Co-Operatives to be used as an agricultural site. In order to combat increasing development pressures, Common Good Co-Operatives wants to stabilize and increase its infrastructural capacity to facilitate community-based programming and economic development for the neighborhood.

Working with Common Good Co-Operatives, this course will engage students to envision expansive possibilities for the farm as a comprehensive farming system that can support, among others, essential workforce development and readiness programs, small-business incubation, co-op services, and community empowerment.

Together, we will collect, analyze, and ideate on the past, present, and future of Common Good Co-op. These will be compiled into a document (book, website, zine, etc) that attempts to answer the following questions:

* **Why is an urban farm cooperative in Dorchester relevant and important based on the history of Boston?**
* **How can we stabilize the co-operative, while creating a structure for the program that enables its longevity and impact?**
* **What structures, visions, and designs can be developed that support a comprehensive farming system?**

Themes and topics for further investigation include, but are not limited to:

* Pathways towards land tenure and stability of the site and unification of the lots, including rezoning
* Commons and commoning
* Community Wealth Building and alternate economic development models
* Collective ownership models of the land and the cooperative
* Urban farming histories
* Histories of site and city
* Sustainable urban farming practices
* Design of the existing structure to support housing and internship programs
* Design of additional site elements to support farming initiatives
* Ethnography, interviews, and experience of farmers and producers

**Tentative Schedule**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Date / Milestones** | **#** | **Agenda** |
| **2/4/25**  **Introduction and Collaboration** | 1 | **Introduction to Common Good Co-Op**  **Syllabus Review, Student Introductions, Course Introduction**  **Watch**  [*A Reckoning In Boston*](https://www.google.com/url?q=https://www.amazon.com/gp/video/detail/amzn1.dv.gti.55927bdb-33b4-4204-955c-45dcb852daf2?autoplay%3D0%26ref_%3Datv_cf_strg_wb&sa=D&source=editors&ust=1738948233457565&usg=AOvVaw2vRv9Q-I9J1OZ0Q9RFVRrG) |
| **2/11/25**  **Urban Farming and the City** | 2 | **Assigned**  *Farm Case Studies*  **Guest Lecture**  *Kate Brown and Kafi Dixon*  **Required Readings:**  Silver, Christopher, “[The Racial Origins of Zoning](https://www.google.com/url?q=http://www.newhumanityinstitute.org/pdf-articles/Christopher-Silver-Racial-Origins-of-Zoning.pdf&sa=D&source=editors&ust=1738948233458752&usg=AOvVaw1gv2FJmuDSuoghYn0yDi0w).”  Matthew Delmont, “[The Lasting Legacy of the Busing Crisis,](https://www.google.com/url?q=https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2016/03/the-boston-busing-crisis-was-never-intended-to-work/474264/&sa=D&source=editors&ust=1738948233458964&usg=AOvVaw0fC2cWMbPXfdch8IJ4p-xv)” *The Atlantic,*March 26, 2016. |
| **2/18/25** | 3 | **NO CLASS**  *Potential Weekend Site Visit* |
| **2/25/25**  **The City of Boston** | 4 | **Assigned**  *Research, diagram, draw, summarize, wireframe the Development Review process, Zoning Change process, Squares and Streets. Identify key figures and offices in the BPDA and the City.*  **Due**  *Urban Farming Case Studies*  **Readings**  *Review Boston’s Article 80, Development Review Process, and the Boston Planning website.*  [https://www.bostonplans.org/projects/development-review](https://www.google.com/url?q=https://www.bostonplans.org/projects/development-review&sa=D&source=editors&ust=1738948233460749&usg=AOvVaw3WjQUkCprBYXbzq6x2Fb8x)  [https://www.bostonplans.org/getattachment/e6644505-ce9c-4e42-b591-40e6c6049d63](https://www.google.com/url?q=https://www.bostonplans.org/getattachment/e6644505-ce9c-4e42-b591-40e6c6049d63&sa=D&source=editors&ust=1738948233460921&usg=AOvVaw014_po2OV1V7EzFmVshTDh)  [https://www.bostonplans.org/getattachment/610ddaf1-a547-4eb9-bb22-4d0938f354f6](https://www.google.com/url?q=https://www.bostonplans.org/getattachment/610ddaf1-a547-4eb9-bb22-4d0938f354f6&sa=D&source=editors&ust=1738948233461049&usg=AOvVaw0hAurdFsIv65AVZFXmoQ5T)  [https://www.bostonplans.org/planning-zoning/planning-initiatives/squares-streets](https://www.google.com/url?q=https://www.bostonplans.org/planning-zoning/planning-initiatives/squares-streets&sa=D&source=editors&ust=1738948233461176&usg=AOvVaw3lmlxcs-lWi9b2DD0MUYK9)  Transformative Actions in the Boston Harbor: Lessons Learned from Past Projects Toward a Resilient and Sustainable Urban Future  Dalia Munenzon, Yair Titelboim |
| **3/4/25**  **Economic Development and Alternative Frameworks**  *Add Date* | 5 | **Assigned**  *TBD*  **Due**  *Boston Plans Review*  **Guest Lecture**  *Kate Brown and Kafi Dixon*  **Readings**  Suzanne Schindler, “Housing Beyond and Within the Market, Part 3: Cooperative in Boston” |
| **3/11/25**  **Cooperation, Mutual Aid, and Collectives** | 6 | **Assigned**  *TBD*  **Guest Lecture**  *Kate Brown and Kafi Dixon*  **Required Readings on Cooperation, Mutual Aid and Collectives**  Excerpts from Jessica Gordon Nembhard, *Collective Courage: A History of African American Cooperative Economic Thought and Practice*. State College: Penn State University Press, 2014: pages 79-84, 148-171.[https://doi.org/10.1515/9780271064260](https://www.google.com/url?q=https://doi.org/10.1515/9780271064260&sa=D&source=editors&ust=1738948233463946&usg=AOvVaw39RgC1CrYXnn9Wz84UvFah).  Kate Brown, excerpts from *Tiny Gardens Everywhere: The Past, Present and Future of Self-Provisioning*  USDA, “Black Farmers in America,” (Wash,DC, 2003) |
| **3/18/25** | 7 | *Working Session* |
| **3/25/25**  *Midterm* | 8 | *Midterm Review with External Critics* |
| **4/1/25** | 9 | **Spring Break** |
| **4/8/25** | 10 | **Final Project Development** |
| **4/15/25**  *Drop Date* | 11 | **Final Project Development** |
| **4/22/25** | 12 | **Final Project Development / Penultimate Review** |
| **4/29/25**  *CZ Traveling* | 13 | **Final Project Development** |
| **5/6/25**  *CZ Traveling* | 14 | **Final Project Development** |
| **5/13/25** | 15 | **Final Project Presentations**  Presentation to Internal & External Critics |
|  |  |  |

**Evaluation Criteria**

Students will be graded according to the following criteria

Studio Criteria:

* Quality and depth of analysis and design research.
* Engagement in communal discussions and contribution to the studio’s shared learning.
* Ability to process criticism in a productive manner and to self-evaluate.
* Clarity and organization of oral presentations.
* Completion of assignments and deliverables by their deadlines.
* Individual growth over the growth of the semester.

Attendance:

Attendance for the full duration of each class is mandatory. Greater than three absences for the semester confirmed by school officials may result in a failing grade. If you miss four or more classes, you will be asked to drop the subject or receive a failing grade.

Weekend volunteer days with the Common Good Co-Operatives are encouraged and will provide hands-on opportunities for engaging the values of commoning, placemaking and placekeeping, and co-design and community participation.

Grading Definition

1. Exceptionally good performance demonstrating a superior understanding of the subject matter, a foundation of extensive knowledge, and a skillful use of concepts and/or materials.
2. Good performance demonstrating capacity to use the appropriate concepts, a good understanding of the subject matter, and an ability to handle the problems and materials encountered in the subject.
3. Adequate performance demonstrating an adequate understanding of the subject matter, an ability to handle relatively simple problems, and adequate preparation for moving on to more advanced work in the field.
4. Minimally acceptable performance demonstrating at least partial familiarity with the subject matter and some capacity to deal with relatively simple problems, but also demonstrating deficiencies serious enough to make it inadvisable to proceed further in the field without additional work.
5. Failed. This grade also signifies that the student must repeat the subject to receive credit.

Academic Integrity and Honesty

All work submitted will fall under the jurisdiction of the MIT Policy on Academic Integrity.

MIT's expectations and policies regarding academic integrity should be read carefully and

adhered to diligently: http://integrity.mit.edu .

Disabilities

A student who has a documented disability, or any concerns which he/she thinks may affect his/her ability to perform in class are invited to consult with the professors early in the semester so that suitable arrangements may be made. For MIT’s policy on accommodations for disabilities, please follow this link: http://mit.edu/uaap/sds/students/.

Diversity Statement

Massachusetts Institute of Technology values an inclusive environment. A sense of community in the classroom shall be fostered, while the classroom should be considered to be a place where students will be treated with respect. This class welcomes individuals of all backgrounds, beliefs, ethnicities, national origins, gender identities, sexual orientations, religious and political affiliations – and other visible and non-visible differences. All members of this class are expected to contribute to a respectful, welcoming, and inclusive environment for every other member of the class. If this standard is not being upheld, please feel free to speak with any instructors.