

City leaders pleased with rooftop greenhouse business coming to Brockton

Company to grow vegetables on roof of former factory

By Elaine Allegrini

Posted Nov 13, 2009

BROCKTON —

City leaders are “thrilled” that a Needham-based company plans to turn the roof of a former factory into a 44,000-square-foot greenhouse operation.

Sky Vegetables Inc. won unanimous approval from the Zoning Board of Appeals this week.

“They’ll grow lettuce, tomatoes and herbs,” said Ward 7 Councilor Christopher MacMillan, hailing the project as good for the city, the environment and the economy.

The Brockton operation is planned for the roof of the former Maxwell Shoes building at 560 Oak St. The building is vacant, but MacMillan said a prospective tenant is negotiating with the building owner.

The zoning board approval was for exceeding the building height of 40 feet and to allow operation of a greenhouse and wholesale distribution center with signs.

The company plans to hire 15 to 20 full-time employees and another 10 part-timers, said MacMillan, who presented the plan to neighbors at the nearby Chateau Westgate housing complex earlier this week. They welcomed the new business, according to MacMillan.

“We are thrilled that Sky Vegetables is exploring our community,” Mayor James E. Harrington said in a press release issued by the 21st Century Corp.

“We want green enterprises to know that Brockton is open for business and embraces their ideas, innovations and technologies,” Harrington said.

According to its Web site, Sky Vegetables Inc. builds and operates year-round “growing systems on urban rooftops.” When the ripe produce is picked, it’s distributed locally for sale, the Web site says.

An illustration on the Web site shows a greenhouse structure on the roof of a generic building. The technology used at such a site might include a wind turbine, solar panels, rain-water harvesters and composting containers, the Web site indicates.

There has been no mention of a wind turbine being part of the Brockton operation.

The press release said "Sky Vegetables' technology requires less water and fuel and generates fewer carbon emissions than conventional farming methods."

MacMillan, the city councilor, said Sky Vegetables plans to invest an estimated \$3 million in the venture and is hoping to get "green money" through state and federal grants.

"It's perfect, it fits in with the whole green-technology climate I'd like to see in the city," Mayor-elect Linda Balzotti said Thursday.

Sky Vegetables is located on Rosemary Street in Needham, and also has an office in California, its Web site says.