



Mayor's Office of Sustainability
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City Council Committee on Public Property and Public Works Hearing
December 1, 2014

Testimony of Diane Cornman-Levy, Co-Chair of the Mayor's Food Policy Advisory Council
Resolution Number 140915

Thank you Chairman Henon and all members of the Committee for the opportunity to testify today. Many thanks, as well, to Councilwoman Quinones-Sanchez and your staff for your leadership on the land bank. My name is Diane Cornman-Levy. On behalf of the Mayor's Food Policy Advisory Council (FPAC), I strongly recommend that City Council approve the 2015 Proposed Strategic Plan and Disposition Policy of the Philadelphia Land Bank.

Our biggest concerns are that the Land Bank be fully resourced, so it may fulfill the promises of the Strategic Plan, and that the Land Disposition policies be implemented consistently across land holding agencies, to finally create the predictable and equitable process that we need. In order to facilitate implementation, we encourage the Mayor and City Council to consider appointing to the permanent land bank board an individual with expertise in open space uses like greening, gardening, and other forms of urban agriculture.

The FPAC was appointed by Mayor Nutter in 2011 and tasked with advising the City on how to be a productive partner in the regional food system and how to improve food access. In 2011, the FPAC Vacant Land Subcommittee worked with over 100 gardening and farming stakeholders who identified land insecurity as the major impediment to urban agriculture in the City of Philadelphia, citing the need for a more streamlined, uniform, transparent process for accessing city owned property and a need to increase opportunities for long term land tenure and preservation. Since that time, the Subcommittee has engaged with the City's land holding agencies and Philadelphia Department of Parks and Recreation to create policies and programs that support Philadelphia's vibrant urban agriculture sector.

We see the potential of the Land Bank to advance the goals of FPAC, the Philadelphia Food Charter, and *Greenworks*. In particular, FPAC values the commitment outlined in the legislation to ensure that public land is used to enhance and create benefits for the public. The Land Bank Ordinance and now the Strategic Plan recognize urban agriculture as one of a range of end uses essential to creating healthy and sustainable communities, building on the progress of Philadelphia's new zoning code to create a framework and enhance opportunities for local production of healthy, affordable, and culturally appropriate food.

We have appreciated the opportunity offered by the Land Bank board and staff to participate in the process of creating the Philadelphia Land Bank Strategic Plan (the "Plan") and associated Disposition Policies. The process has been extremely productive and urban agriculture and open space stakeholders have been ongoing participants.



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Strategic Plan:

The Land Bank Strategic Plan could do significant work to move urban agriculture and community-managed open space opportunities forward in the City of Philadelphia. The substance of the Plan itself signals a paradigm shift in the way that we, as a city, value and invest in urban agriculture and open spaces. The Strategic Plan changes the conversation from that of urban agriculture as an interim use to that of a community asset warranting investment and long term preservation, which is reflective of our city's generations-old gardening tradition.

The portions of the Plan that are critical to this work include the following:

- In Goals One and Five and throughout the document, the Plan recognizes Philadelphia residents as active land stewards and the investment put into community-tended spaces, as well as the fragility of spaces that are not legally secured.
- In Goal One, the Plan defines the objective to “preserve existing community gardens” and, in Goal Six, creates guiding criteria such that properties already in use as active and maintained community gardens and market farms will be protected. Many hundreds of residents will benefit from the preservation of spaces that represent Philadelphia's diverse cultural heritage and have, for decades, provided neighborhoods with fresh, local, and affordable food sources.
- In Goals One and Five, the Plan creates frameworks for new projects, including larger-scale market farms and destination gardens that could serve residents throughout the city. These goals respond to ongoing community need, interest, and capacity for growth. They also could certainly be used to leverage federal resources directed at increasing food access and community health.
- Finally, the Plan draws a connection between community-managed urban agriculture/open spaces, and green stormwater management projects, a connection that has the potential to expand opportunities for both.

FPAC's mission has been integrated into the Equity goal in *Greenworks*, the Mayor's Office of Sustainability's citywide, comprehensive plan to make Philadelphia the greenest city in the country. Several of the Goals in the Land Bank Strategic Plan align with *Greenworks* Target 10 to provide walkable access to affordable, healthy food for all Philadelphians.

Goal Five will contribute directly to Target 10 by supporting the creation of new gardens, farms, and farmers' markets on vacant land.

Goal Four highlights the issue of food deserts and the critical role supermarkets play in these areas, a role that represents the intersection of economic development and equity.

Finally, Goal Six emphasizes the importance of transparent, public discourse and participation regarding current and future Land Bank plans and operations. In keeping with the *Greenworks* Equity goal, FPAC



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- emphasizes the importance of public meetings, printed documents, onsite notices, and targeted outreach to the Registered Community Organizations serving Philadelphia neighborhoods to ensure that those with limited internet access continue to have a voice;
- encourages the Land Bank to work with the Office of Innovation and Technology to ensure to make Land Bank data sources open and accessible; and
- encourages the development of strategies to engage residents in neighborhoods that have not had the opportunity to develop a District, area, or community-based plan.

Land Disposition Policies:

As to the disposition policies, while the Land Bank strategic planning is a more recent effort, FPAC, as well as a larger universe of urban agriculture stakeholders, have been in discussion with the City land holding agencies about these policies over the past three years. We are encouraged by changes to the policies that clarify past ambiguities, increase transparency, and expand opportunities for land tenure. We appreciate your consideration of our recommendations and urge Council to pass this resolution.