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**BALTIMORE CITY COUNCIL
HEALTH COMMITTEE**

Mission Statement

On behalf of the Citizens of Baltimore City, the mission of the Health Committee is to study, examine and propose regulations concerning health and environmental issues; and to make recommendations and propose legislation for improving the overall health and welfare of all residents of Baltimore City.

**The Honorable Kristerfer Burnett
Chairman**

PUBLIC HEARING

**WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 5, 2020
5:00 PM**

VIRTUAL WEBEX MEETING

TO BE TELEVISED ON CHARM TV 25

Council Resolution #20-0231R
Informational Hearing - Bringing Back Victory Gardens

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Staff: Marguerite Currin

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Danielle McCray – Vice Chair
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BILL SYNOPSIS

Committee: Health

Council Resolution: 20-0231R

Informational Hearing – Bringing Back Victory Gardens

Sponsor: Councilmember Burnett, et al

Introduced: June 15, 2020

Purpose:

FOR the purpose of inviting the Health Commissioner, the Director of Recreation and Parks, the Director of Sustainability, and community leaders to discuss the efficacy of increasing community gardens within our neighborhoods in order to offset COVID-19 and its ancillary effects as well as generally making our City a greener, healthier, and cleaner place to live.

Effective: Upon enactment.

Agency Reports

Office of the Mayor	
Office of Sustainability	Favorable/Comments
Health Department	
Department of Recreation and Parks	Favorable/Comments

Analysis

Current Law

The Health Code of Baltimore City, outlines the rules, regulations and mandates for health related issues.

Background

1. **Victory gardens**, also called war gardens or food gardens for defense, were vegetable, fruit, and herb gardens planted at private residences and public parks in the United States, United Kingdom, Canada, Australia and Germany during World War I and World War II. In the war time governments encouraged people to plant victory gardens not only to supplement their rations but also to boost morale. George Washington Carver wrote an agricultural tract and promoted the idea of what he called a “Victory Garden.” They were used along with Rationing Stamps and Cards to reduce pressure on the public food supply. Besides indirectly aiding the war effort, these gardens were also considered a civil “morale booster” in that gardeners could feel empowered by their contribution of labor and rewarded by the produce grown. This made victory gardens a part of daily life on the home front.¹
2. Per the primary sponsor of the Resolution, the purpose of the hearing is to have a discussion with pertinent agency heads, representatives and community leaders to discuss the efficacy of increasing community gardens in neighborhoods.
3. **Councilmember Dorsey** also stated that he looks forward to talking with representatives from the Department of Recreation and Park to discuss the possibility of planting more fruit trees.

Additional Information

Fiscal Note: None

Information Source(s): City Code, Wikipedia, Council Resolution 20-0231R and all agency reports received as of this writing.

Marguerite M. Currin

Analysis by: Marguerite M. Currin
Direct Inquiries to: 443-984-3485


Analysis Date: July 30, 2020

¹ Wikipedia, Victory Gardens

Council Resolution 20-0231R

AGENCY REPORTS

Lisa McNeilly

FROM	NAME & TITLE	LISA MCNEILLY, SUSTAINABILITY DIRECTOR	CITY of BALTIMORE MEMO	
	AGENCY NAME & ADDRESS	DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING 8 TH FLOOR, 417 EAST FAYETTE STREET		
	SUBJECT	CITY COUNCIL BILL #20-0231R: Informational Hearing – Bringing Back Victory Gardens		

DATE:

TO

The Honorable President and
 Members of the City Council
 City Hall, Room 400
 100 North Holliday Street

July 21, 2020

The Office of Sustainability is in receipt of City Council Bill #20-0231R, which is for the purpose of inviting the Health Commissioner, the Director of Recreation and Parks, the Director of Sustainability, and community leaders to discuss the efficacy of increasing community gardens within our neighborhoods in order to offset COVID-19 and its ancillary effects as well as generally making our City a greener, healthier, and cleaner place to live.

The 2019 Baltimore Sustainability Plan promotes the use of urban agriculture and community and individual gardens to enhance local food production, increase people’s connections to the sources of their food, and to create jobs. In the Urban Agriculture chapter of the plan, the stated vision is to be “a city where communities that have been historically excluded from access to land and to fresh, healthy, culturally-appropriate foods are those that benefit most from urban agriculture opportunities.” Increasing community gardens can help address two of our three critical strategies in this chapter, including:

1. Create agriculture land-use policies that encourage urban farms and local food production; and,
2. Ensure farmers and gardeners can produce food, flowers, fiber, and fuel in ways that are safe, environmentally sustainable, and socially responsible – and educate residents on opportunities to support and engage with them.

This intent of this resolution also aligns strongly with Homegrown Baltimore: Grow Local, Baltimore’s urban agriculture plan, adopted by the Baltimore City Planning Commission in 2013. The purpose of the Homegrown Baltimore plan is to advance the City’s efforts to support and expand urban agriculture in Baltimore by documenting current urban agricultural efforts; the successes and challenges of these efforts; and to provide policy and programmatic recommendations regarding what is needed to create a more robust urban agriculture sector. The Background section of the plan relates Baltimore’s history of Liberty Gardens (World War I) and Victory Gardens (World War II), noting that by 1944, there were nearly 20 million families with victory gardens in the United States that collectively provided 40% of the American vegetable supply. From this history, we clearly see the powerful potential of a widespread movement for local food production, especially in a time of crisis.

COVID-19 is such a time of crisis, and food insecurity in Baltimore is at an all-time high, with the Baltimore Food Policy Initiative estimating that up to a third of Baltimore's population could face hunger before the disease runs its course. Supporting urban agriculture is part of the city's Emergency Food Strategy, and for the last four months Office of Sustainability staff have been communicating regularly with local farmers and gardeners to assess their needs and help connect them to grants and other resources.

In April, the Office of Sustainability commissioned the Bon Secours Community Works Farm to grow thousands of additional seedlings to help farmers and gardeners sustain and expand their operations. We are supporting community and backyard gardeners who want to grow more and donate food to those who are food insecure. We are also looking at ways to help these gardeners with COVID-related labor shortages and limited availability of older volunteers and school-based volunteer groups.

The Office of Sustainability supports City Council Bill #20-0231R.

cc: Mr. Nicholas Blendy, Mayor's Office
Mr. Matthew Stegman, Mayor's Office
Ms. Nina Themelis, Mayor's Office
Mr. D'Paul Nibber, BCHD
Ms. Jenny Morgan, BCRP
Ms. Natawna Austin, Council Services
Mr. Dominic McAlily, Council Services
Mr. Chris Ryer, Department of Planning

<p>CITY OF BALTIMORE</p> <p>BERNARD C. "JACK" YOUNG, <i>Mayor</i></p>		<p>DEPARTMENT OF RECREATION AND PARKS</p> <p>REGINALD MOORE, <i>Executive Director</i> Dr. Ralph W. E. Jones, Jr. Building 3001 East Drive - Druid Hill Park Baltimore, Maryland 21217 410-396-7900</p>
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DATE: July 24, 2020

TO: Honorable President and Members of the City Council

FROM: Baltimore City Recreation & Parks

POSITION: Support

Re: CITY COUNCIL BILL #20-0231R: Informational Hearing – Bringing Back Victory Gardens

Dear President and City Council Members:

Baltimore City Recreation and Parks (BCRP) has reviewed City Council Bill 20-0231R, which is for the purpose of inviting the Health Commissioner, the Director of Recreation and Parks, the Director of Sustainability, and community leaders to discuss the efficacy of increasing community gardens within our neighborhoods in order to offset COVID-19 and its ancillary effects as well as generally making our City a greener, healthier, and cleaner place to live.

An increase in community gardening seeks to address in part the underlying structural inequities in having limited or no access to fresh foods in Healthy Food Priority Areas (fka food deserts) within the City of Baltimore. Cultivating good health and stabilizing food insecure neighborhoods by greening vacant lots can turn neglected properties into assets that increase a sense of community and strengthen neighborhoods.

In 1978, BCRP began the City Farms Program. This program is rooted in the tradition of establishing backyard gardens for city residents to grow and preserve their own food. The community gardens are located in eleven different parks and other community spaces providing over 800 garden plots to a diverse group of Baltimore City residents. The City Farms Program provides residents the opportunity to locally grow healthy produce while encouraging a healthier life style.

While City Farms is successful, it would not be possible to expand our existing program under current budgetary and personnel restraints, but BCRP has a wealth of knowledge and experience to share. Therefore, Baltimore City Recreation and Parks is happy to participate in this discussion and recommends approval of City Council Bill 20-0231R. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Jenny Morgan at jenny.morgan@baltimorecity.gov or at 410-396-7900.

Sincerely,

Reginald Moore, Executive Director

Reginald Moore

Executive Director

City of Baltimore, Department of Recreation & Parks

**CITY OF BALTIMORE
COUNCIL BILL 20-0231R
(Resolution)**

Introduced by: Councilmembers Burnett, Bullock, President Scott, Councilmembers McCray,
Henry, Dorsey, Middleton, Reisinger, Cohen, Pinkett, Clarke

Introduced and read first time: June 15, 2020

Assigned to: Health Committee

REFERRED TO THE FOLLOWING AGENCIES: Office of the Mayor, Office of Sustainability, Health
Department, Department of Recreation and Parks

A RESOLUTION ENTITLED

1 A COUNCIL RESOLUTION concerning

2 **Informational Hearing – Bringing Back Victory Gardens**

3 FOR the purpose of inviting the Health Commissioner, the Director of Recreation and Parks, the
4 Director of Sustainability, and community leaders to discuss the efficacy of increasing
5 community gardens within our neighborhoods in order to offset COVID-19 and its ancillary
6 effects as well as generally making our City a greener, healthier, and cleaner place to live.

7 **Recitals**

8 During World War II, amid rationing for the war effort, the federal government encouraged
9 the establishment of community “victory gardens” to grow fruits and vegetables for subsistence.
10 By May 1943, there were 18 million community gardens across the United States and they
11 accounted for approximately one-third of our food.

12 Today, we are in a similar state of crisis. This time, instead of global war, we are in the midst
13 of a global pandemic. Along with this crisis, there are continuing concerns about potential
14 interruptions in the transportation and labor markets for fresh fruits and vegetables. As such, it is
15 incumbent on us to bridge the gap for Baltimoreans to access fresh fruits and vegetables. Indeed,
16 this is made all the more critical given the interdependence that we as a country have with our
17 trading partners and their own interruptions in food supply.

18 The combination of COVID-19 and certain underlying health conditions can cause severe
19 illness and death. Thus, an effective way to combat the disease is to get blood pressure and
20 blood sugars under control. Fresh fruits and vegetables, along with a nutritious diet, can go a
21 long way towards reducing the effects of COVID-19.

22 Furthermore, plants that are not exposed to pesticides can also decrease the incidence of
23 asthma and other environmental harms caused by the consumption of toxins meant to manage
24 weeds and other pests in industrial applications.

25 High capacity urban farming does not have to follow a typical industrialized model – nor
26 should it. Preferably, a decentralized model where many participants grow on smaller plots of
27 land and container gardens lends itself to long term sustainability, cleaner air, access to quality
28 produce, and fosters community cohesiveness.

EXPLANATION: Underlining indicates matter added by amendment.
~~Strike out~~ indicates matter deleted by amendment.

Council Bill 20-0231R

1 The outlet for distribution of the produce could occur within the neighborhood; retail sales
2 could occur at already established farmer’s markets. Direct sales could be appropriate for
3 restaurants, grocery stores, and small convenience stores.

4 The City owns many vacant lots and other lands that could and should be utilized for growing
5 food, rather than large fields of mowed and treated lawn, which serve no real purpose.
6 Even after COVID-19 is resolved, having local produce would translate into less gas used and
7 higher quality organic fruits and vegetables available for all Baltimoreans. Moreover, this
8 program could integrate with gardens and sustainable food programs already operating within
9 Baltimore.

10 This community garden concept should be supported financially by the City, specifically the
11 City should provide funds for seed distribution as well as grants for communities that would like
12 to start a neighborhood garden. In addition, the City should make available starter plants, mulch,
13 and compost for gardeners to utilize for free or low cost.

14 To support this endeavor, the City should marshal its own resources and those at the State
15 level to ensure that Baltimoreans have access to the best ways to grow and sustain their gardens.
16 Indeed, the city could coordinate with local nurseries to provide reduced cost or free gardening
17 materials. The City could actively work with master gardeners and local agriculture programs to
18 offer free courses on how to plant a garden and to point potential gardeners to online resources
19 that have useful information in gardening.

20 Food deserts have long been an issue in certain areas of Baltimore. We’ve made great strides
21 in incentivizing the in-fill of these areas for markets, but more needs to be done, especially
22 during the COVID-19 pandemic. In short, now is the time to support community gardening
23 efforts.

24 **NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE CITY COUNCIL OF BALTIMORE,** That the
25 Council invites the Health Commissioner, the Director of Recreation and Parks, the Director of
26 Sustainability, and community leaders to discuss the efficacy of increasing community gardens
27 within our neighborhoods in order to offset COVID-19 and its ancillary effects as well as
28 generally making our City a greener, healthier, and cleaner place to live.

29 **AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED,** That a copy of this Resolution be sent to the Mayor, the
30 Director of the Office of Sustainability, the Baltimore City Health Commissioner, the Director of
31 the Department of Recreation and Parks, and the Mayor’s Legislative Liaison to the City
32 Council.