

Amanda Cunningham
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Re: 21-0064R - Investigational Hearing - Urban Farming

Dear Madam Chair & Members of the Health, Environment & Technology Committee,

My name is Amanda Cunningham. For \$35 a year, I rent a small garden plot measuring 10'x12' and located in the wonderful Clifton Park Community Garden. The food I grow is shared with family and friends. I also volunteer at my church's vegetable garden. The food from that garden is donated to the CARES Food Pantry in Govans, sponsored by GEDCO.

I've been a Baltimore City Master Gardener volunteer through the University of MD Extension, for over 25 years. One summer, Baltimore Master Gardeners hosted the northeast regional conference. Part of that conference was a presentation on vacant lot gardens in Baltimore. It included a field trip to show people the success of turning vacant parcels into productive community green spaces. The workshop was packed with people from up and down the coast.

We all got on a couple of buses and traveled across the city looking at gardens and meeting proud urban farmers. We ended up at Forest Park Community Garden – roughly a quarter acre of land on a residential street - bursting with neat rows of okra, spinach, tomatoes, melons, and squash.

After we toured with the gardeners and shared stories with other neighbors sitting in the shade of an old elm tree, we turned down the path to go and were stopped in our tracks by the sight of an unfamiliar plant growing near the garden gate. "What are those?", someone asked. "Those are peanuts," replied one gardener.

People were absolutely enchanted with the modest row of peanut plants. Men and women who had been gardening most of their adult lives had never seen the plant growing. They were delighted to be given permission to gently pull the peanut plant from the loose soil revealing the familiar-shaped legume growing beneath. The gardeners just smiled. It was the talk of the entire conference.

I think this peanut story illustrates how urban farming unites people. Growing food is of great social and nutritional benefit. Communities with urban farms have places where young and old gather to share seeds & crops, knowledge and encouragement and to witness what can be grown right here in Baltimore.

Our city needs a win. As a nurturing, non-violent social enterprise, urban farming is a bright green stem the city needs to support. Freeing up abandoned land from legacy owners, freeing up infrastructure improvement funds to assist urban farmers craft more suitable soil conditions and helping them obtain water access, are ways to focus on building community from its strengths.

Urban farms feed people, employ people and attract people. People hungry not just for the peanuts, but for proof of some place that is alive, growing and valuable who's rusty gate is open to everyone.

In conclusion, I request a favorable report on City Council Bill 21-0064R.

Sincerely,



Amanda Cunningham

February 9, 2022