


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		

TO

DATE:

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