



Legislation Text

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Introductory*

City of Baltimore Council Bill R (Resolution)

Introduced by: Councilmember Burnett

A Resolution Entitled

A Council Resolution concerning **Informational Hearing - Bringing Back Victory Gardens**

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.

Recitals

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

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

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

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

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

cohesiveness.

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

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

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

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

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

Now, therefore, be it resolved by the City Council of Baltimore, That the Council invites 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.

And be it further resolved, That a copy of this Resolution be sent to the Mayor, the Director of the Office of Sustainability, the Baltimore City Health Commissioner, the Director of the Department of Recreation and Parks, and the Mayor's Legislative Liaison to the City Council.