

Growing Food on City-Owned Brownfields



**Presentation to Madison Food Policy Council
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Goal:

To make more land available in the City of Madison for people to produce food for themselves (and others) using brownfields.

Task:

To show ways that this can be done easily, from both policy and practical perspectives.

(The City of Madison has no policy related to gardening/farming on brownfields)

What do we mean by urban gardening/farming?

- **City of Madison Comprehensive Plan definition of urban agriculture:** *“The production of food for personal consumption, market sale, donation, or educational purposes within cities and suburbs.”*
- **Farmland Preservation Task Force Report definitions:**
 - **Community Garden:** *“[A]n area of land or space managed and maintained by a group of individuals to grow and harvest food crops and/or non-food, ornamental crops, such as flowers, for personal or group use, consumption or donation.*
 - **Market Garden:** *“An area of land managed and maintained by an individual or group of individuals to grow and harvest food crops and/or non-food, ornamental crops, such as flowers, to be sold for profit.”*

What do we mean by “brownfield”?

- Definition is set by US EPA: “A brownfield is a property, the expansion, redevelopment, or reuse of which may be complicated by the presence or potential presence of a hazardous substance, pollutant, or contaminant.”
- WI DNR sets cleanup policies and standards for the state

Farmland Preservation Task Force report (May 2023) recommended adopting US EPA guidelines for gardening on contaminated soils

- Adopt a “from the ground up” best practice method as a policy for dealing with potential soil contamination on City-owned land (based on USEPA’s Best Practice Methods)
- Other best practices used by cities around the around the country should also be considered, but come with costs and/or liabilities

Issues Under Discussion

- Why testing of soils for possible contamination is not a pragmatic best practice
 - Requirements of Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation and Liability Act (CERCLA or Superfund), as amended in 2001 place burden for clean-up on landowner
- Need for policy related to gardening/farming on city-owned land not currently zoned for agriculture
- Policy should be forward-looking rather than retroactive, applying to new gardening/farming sites

Timeline for Resolution Process

Jul—Aug '25	RAFS and Steering Team began discussions
Aug 20	Fey introduced topic to MFPC as New Business
Oct 15	Informational presentation to MFPC
Nov 5	Discussion by RAFS
November	Draft resolution for review by MFPC
Dec 3	Final 2025 meeting for MFPC – recommend advancing resolution (if ready) to Common Council
Dec 9	Introduction and referral by Common Council
Jan/Feb '26	Discussions in referral to relevant boards, committees, commissions Back to MFPC for final recommendations to Common Council