

Fiscal Note

Title

Resolution to Create Policies for Food Production on City-Owned Land

Body

WHEREAS, the City of Madison has demonstrated its commitment to support residents to grow food on City-owned land in many ways over the course of more than 50 years:

- Since 1971 the Parks Department has been working with community organizations to facilitate community gardening on city land and has developed programs for shared land use. Demand for growing plots has always outpaced supply.
- The Community Gardens Committee was established in 2003
- The Madison Food Policy Council was established in 2012
- The Common Council adopted policies on [Edible Landscapes](#) and [Terrace Planting](#) in 2013 to expand opportunities for residents to grow food in the City.
- [2018 Comp Plan and 2023 update](#)
 - Neighborhoods & Housing: Strategy 8 - Ensure access to food that is affordable, nutritious, and culturally specific.
 - Economy & Opportunity: Strategy 7 - Support efforts for businesses and consumers to produce and buy local food, products, and services.
 - Green & Resilient: Strategy 9 - Support sustainable farming and gardening practices that protect the ecosystem and public health.
 - In the 2023 Update: adding community gardens and urban agriculture to the list of appropriate land uses in the Parks & Open Space category on page 25 and adding a definition of community gardens to the Glossary of Terms.
- In 2024 the Economic Development Division updated its [Land Banking policy](#) to state: “The City welcomes urban agriculture as a secondary use alongside the priorities noted above. Urban agriculture could take the form of community and market gardens, greenhouses and hoop houses, vertical farming, and similar urban agriculture initiatives”; and

WHEREAS, the May 2023 final report of the [Farmland Preservation Task Force](#) recommended making city-owned farmland available on a more equitable basis to historically disenfranchised communities, and included recommendations to:

- Develop and implement a transparent process for growers to become aware of and access city-owned land;
- Provide publicly accessible evaluation of the land involved in each lease that takes into consideration location, future use, soils, slopes, and timing;
- Adopt the USEPA Raised Bed Method as a best practice for urban farming on City-owned land. Recommend this Best Practice Method for all growing in potentially contaminated urban soils; and

WHEREAS, on November 10, 2025, the City of Madison posted a [press release](#) including a [survey](#) that seeks input from “entrepreneurs, market farmers, and organizations involved in

community or market gardening and interested in expanding food access and assisting Madison families with food affordability needs...to gauge interest in utilizing city-owned land for market and community garden spaces”; and

WHEREAS, existing policies for growing food on City-owned property are not sufficient to provide clear guidance to city staff for making decisions about appropriate use for food production on additional parcels of land under consideration in the proposed new program; and

WHEREAS, peer cities with strong urban agriculture programs have policies to create greatest possible access to land for food production, including:

- [Boston, MA](#)
- [Richmond, VA](#)
- [Rochester, NY](#)

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that, with research and support from the Madison Food Policy Council, the City of Madison develop and implement policies that allow for food production on City-owned “brownfield” land, provided that potentially contaminated soil is physically isolated from the growth medium, including but not limited to methods such as raised beds or capping with clean soil;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that these policies be communicated to the public and potential growers in clear, direct language with specific guidelines that are easy to follow and implement;

BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED, that these policies be adopted by March 2026 so that staff and potential growers are prepared for the 2026 growing season.