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Land Reutilization Authority Passes Urban Agriculture Pilot Program

St. Louis, MO - The Land Reutilization Authority (LRA), the land bank in the City of St. Louis, passed a resolution yesterday allowing eligible residents in the 26th Ward to purchase LRA land for the purpose of producing food. The program is called "Urban Agriculture Pilot Program." To be eligible, residents must gain support from Alderwoman Shameem Clark-Hubbard, at least one community organization in the Ward, and Missouri Coalition for the Environment (MCE). MCE is the backbone organization for the St. Louis Food Policy Coalition, a coalition of over 30 organizations working to support a thriving local food system in the greater St. Louis area.

STLFPC, with MCE Food & Farm Director Melissa Vatterott leading the charge, surveyed residents in nearly every neighborhood of the city in 2016 to learn what types of urban agriculture opportunities they'd like to see in their neighborhood. In 2017, MCE used those results to successfully advocate for an ordinance change to increase in the number of backyard chickens allowed in the City of St. Louis and for the establishment of an internal policy from Building Commissioner Frank Oswald, allowing for the on-site sale of eggs, honey, and produce from gardens and farms. One more thing remained of great interest from residents: being able to *own* land for growing food.

Prior to the passage of this resolution, residents have mostly grown produce and raised chickens in their backyards or been a part of a community garden with other residents on LRA *leased* land through the LRA Garden Lease Program. For the residents greatly interested in agricultural enterprises and growing for others at a larger scale, owning land is really important to ensure investments in the infrastructure will not be disrupted by the sale of the land underneath.

Missouri Coalition for the Environment approached Alderwoman Shameem Clark-Hubbard of the 26th Ward about the possibility of launching a pilot program of selling parcels for urban agriculture given that the 26th ward had the fourth highest number of participants in the 2016 survey and the residents indicated great interest in urban agriculture in the ward. Ninety-five

percent of survey respondents from the 26th ward supported using vacant lots in their neighborhood for urban agriculture and 75% of respondents wanted to see the city make it easier to own land for food production. In addition, over the last year, MCE's Food Justice Organizer, Tosha Phonix, has been talking with residents in the 26th Ward about this possibility and found that interest still persisted, provided community members were engaged in the project concept development prior to the sale of LRA land to a resident seeking to grow food. Through the Urban Agriculture Pilot Program, interested buyers of LRA land must demonstrate their commitment to the community, to good land stewardship, and to long term production on the property before they can proceed with the normal application processes of LRA. MCE will be responsible for screening interested buyers first and will recommend to LRA that an interested buyer be able to proceed with purchasing a parcel if they meet the community, environment, and public health requirements set out by MCE from resident and aldermanic input. As a result of this resolution passing, ownership for agriculture purposes will become a reality in the 26th Ward.

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