

Memorandum



CITY OF DALLAS

DATE January 12, 2023

TO Honorable Chair Blackmon and Members of the Environment and Sustainability Committee

SUBJECT **Comprehensive Urban Agriculture Plan: Responses to ENVS Comments**

Background

The Office of Environmental Quality and Sustainability (OEQS) has developed a Comprehensive Urban Agriculture Plan (CUAP) to lay the groundwork for a more sustainable and resilient food system in Dallas. This plan supports Goal Number 7 of the Comprehensive Environmental and Climate Action Plan (CECAP) that all Dallas communities have access to healthy, local food. The CUAP prioritizes this goal through actions to provide feasible, impactful increases in urban agriculture production.

Please view the final plan here: <https://www.dallasclimateaction.com/foodaccess>

OEQS most recently briefed the Environmental Commission (EVC) and the Environment and Sustainability Committee (ENVS) on November 9, 2022 and December 5, 2022, respectively, before bringing the plan to the full Council for consideration on February 22, 2023. This memorandum provides clarifying responses to questions received during these briefings.

Council Comments and Questions concerning the CUAP:

- Suggestion to partner with national philanthropic organizations for funding and resources. Propose partnering with Downtown Dallas to use underground tunnels as a space for urban agriculture, including artificial lighting (Councilmember Schultz).
 - Staff included Funding Opportunities in more detail starting on page 72 of the CUAP. OEQS can certainly consider building these and other partnerships as appropriate to support plan implementation.
 - Staff can explore partnering with Downtown Dallas to consider the use of underground tunnels for urban agriculture, above ground locations for infrastructure such as vegetation plant walls, and other growing opportunities. Understanding condition of the tunnels, food safety concerns of tunnel growing environment, and management structure will be crucial.
- Suggestion to utilize water bill inserts as a public education component; seek additional partners to outsource management of this program (Vice Chair Ridley).
 - OEQS is partnering with Dallas Water Utility to engage the public on the CUAP via the water bill inserts as part of comprehensive outreach and engagement efforts beginning in the Spring 2023.

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- Request for further working knowledge of Recommendation 2: Support Land Access (Councilmember West).
 - CUAP Manager and consultants to host a workshop on Recommendation 2 and provide a demonstration of the Urban Agriculture and Community Health Explorer tool with Councilmember West. Additional effort includes evaluation of vacant City-owned parcels for potential Urban Agriculture uses.
- Request for explanation of economics and funding regarding Recommendations 4 and 5 (Councilmember West). As is the case with overall CUAP implementation, the primary City costs associated with implementing Recommendations 4 and 5 relate to staff engagement. There are, however, opportunities to improve the speed and breadth of these and other CUAP recommendations. Staff will utilize funding as appropriated by City Council to maximize return on investment and leverage other funding sources.
 - *Solution 4.1: Formalize and maintain an Urban Agriculture Advisory Council that represents a range of UA stakeholders in the City of Dallas.*
This effort is intended to encourage programmatic transparency and to ensure ongoing engagement with multiple stakeholders to the urban agriculture program in Dallas. Best practices suggest it may be worthwhile to formalize the recruitment and onboarding process to ensure organizational transparency and longevity.
 - *Solution 4.2: Showcase and organize UA events focused on knowledge sharing, resource support and partnerships for UA stakeholders.*
This solution is about the City leveraging its name and network to develop partnerships with existing UA-related organizations that can shoulder the cost and complexity of organizing educational and community events, rather than the City implementing events themselves. We received strong stakeholder feedback that the City should be promoting existing stakeholder events, rather than developing their own. That said, the plan also includes actions around convening opportunities for the stakeholders in UA to share knowledge and work better together.
 - *Solution 5.1: Reduce barriers to operating farmers' markets.*
This is a policy change strongly advocated for by stakeholders. There is very little cost to the City to implement this policy change that could result in additional local economic development and growth around UA.
 - *Solution 5.2: Seek funding for nutrition assistance programs to increase purchasing power of low-income consumers.*
This solution primarily involves grant seeking and writing, which is an existing function of COD; staff are well suited to utilize additional financial or programmatic resources as they become available. Studies repeatedly show that investing in healthy and affordable nutrition is one of the most cost-effective public health interventions, lowering personal and institutional healthcare costs, increasing life spans, and reducing the demand on our over-burdened healthcare practitioners. We will use available funding as it is appropriated to leverage grants and other partnerships to assist in food access.

- *Solution 5.3: Initiate or Partner with a “Buy Local” campaign with consumer-facing, business-facing, and internal COD Agency-facing elements.*
This would require budget for staff time to develop relationships with successful existing campaigns and coordinate a partnership between the City, the local Chamber of Commerce, and others like growers, brokers, and hotel and restaurant associations. This solution overlaps with the separate CECAP goal related to local food procurement and could utilize those COD resources as appropriated. This is not slated for implementation until requisite milestones related to production have been met. The plan focusses on increasing production prior to increasing the available market opportunities.
- *Solution 5.4: Facilitate connections between Dallas area producers and interested wholesale buyers such as restaurants, retailers, and institutions.*
This solution succeeds implementation of prior solutions and action items that establish the foundation for 5.4. This partnership and networking development has been created to meet the CECAP goal of increasing local commercial food sourcing. This recommendation reflects the role that the City can and should play in facilitating market opportunities between farmers and buyers. There is little direct budget required for this effort – however, the solution will likely involve robust stakeholder engagement with the potential for a focused media advertising campaign. This solution also states that the City will seek or provide funding to subsidize food aggregation and distribution by third party entities, especially for historically disadvantaged producers or those located in UAPAs.
- Request to place more emphasis between urban farming vs. urban gardening; ensure appropriate code amendments for both. Request for consistent messaging through education (Councilmember Bazaldua).
- The section of the CUAP providing an *Overview of Urban Agriculture in Dallas Today* (page 22) discusses the different pros and cons of various UA production strategies in more detail, including both urban farming and community gardening; both serve a purpose in community development and food access.
- CUAP Appendix B (page 81) provides details for an updated Urban Agriculture Land Use definition and code recommendations. This was identified by the CUAP team as the most relevant opportunity to distinguish between urban gardening and farming, as it carries legal and programmatic implications.
- Consistent messaging is a priority and OEQS is currently undertaking a department wide outreach and engagement strategy plan.

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Next Steps

The plan is currently being translated into Spanish and OEQS will distribute a hard copy of the CUAP to City Council Members within the next month. OEQS is scheduled to brief the City Council on February 1, 2023 before bringing the plan to City Council for adoption on February 22, 2023. Should you have any questions, please reach out to Carlos Evans, Director, Office of Environmental Quality & Sustainability at carlos.evans@dallas.gov; 469-617-1925.



Carlos Evans
Director, Office Environmental Quality and Sustainability

c: T.C. Broadnax, City Manager
Chris Caso, City Attorney
Mark Swann, City Auditor
Billieae Johnson, City Secretary
Preston Robinson, Administrative Judge
Kimberly Bizer Tolbert, Deputy City Manager
Jon Fortune, Deputy City Manager

Majed A. Al-Ghafry, Assistant City Manager
M. Elizabeth (Liz) Cedillo-Pereira, Assistant City Manager
Dr. Robert Perez, Assistant City Manager
Carl Simpson, Assistant City Manager
Jack Ireland, Chief Financial Officer
Genesis D. Gavino, Chief of Staff to the City Manager
Directors and Assistant Directors