



**January 27, 2021**

**Committee on Parks & Recreation**

**Oversight: The State of Community Gardens and Urban Agriculture.**

Introduction By: Mitchell J. Silver, FAICP, Commissioner, NYC Parks

Good morning, Chair Koo & Parks Committee Members, my name is Mitchell Silver, Commissioner of NYC Parks. It is good to see you all once again, and to offer greetings to the new faces on the Committee as this new year begins. Joining me on today's panel are our Assistant Commissioner for Community Outreach and Partnership Development, Sam Biederman, and Bill LoSasso, our Director of GreenThumb. Additionally, we have staff from our agency watching this panel, as well as the public testimony that will follow on the Council's hearing livestream.

GreenThumb is an amazing division of NYC Parks, initiated in 1978, as New York City was in the midst of financial crisis and significant social upheaval. When GreenThumb was created, it was able to assist neighborhoods in revitalizing local spaces and creating new and important community resources. GreenThumb continues that mission today by providing programming and material support for over 550 community gardens in this city, including workshops that cover gardening basics as well as community organizing topics. These all-volunteer initiatives demonstrate the strength of community bonds and what can be achieved when local government works in close partnership with New Yorkers.

To help provide more detailed background about our GreenThumb division and the various efforts we undertake, alongside our community garden partner groups, to help maximize the potential of these special gardens throughout the City, I'll now introduce the director of our GreenThumb division, Bill LoSasso.



**January 27, 2021**  
**Committee on Parks & Recreation**  
**Oversight: The State of Community Gardens and Urban Agriculture.**

Testimony By: Bill LoSasso, Director, NYC Parks GreenThumb

Good afternoon, Chair Koo, and members of the Parks Committee. Thank you, Commissioner Silver, for your remarks. I am Bill LoSasso, and I serve as the Director of GreenThumb at NYC Parks. Accompanying me are Assistant Commissioner Sam Biederman, and Director of Government Relations Matt Drury. We are very pleased to be here today to discuss GreenThumb community gardens, as well as the efforts we have made at GreenThumb to support community gardening and urban agriculture in New York City.

As there has not been a recent hearing on GreenThumb specifically, and since there are new members joining both the Council and the Parks Committee, please allow me to quickly explain GreenThumb, our model, and our support of community gardening and urban agriculture in New York City.

As you know, GreenThumb is the community gardening program of NYC Parks, with a mission of helping to create a more sustainable, resilient, healthy and equitable New York City. Founded in 1978 to support the community gardening movement that had arisen during a time of disinvestment and abandonment of public and private property, we support a growing network of over 550 community gardens and tens of thousands of volunteer community gardeners through the provision of free access to public land, materials, technical assistance, operational support, public programming, and community engagement. We also serve thousands of New Yorkers who are interested in community-led environmental stewardship through public programming, as well as hundreds of thousands of annual visitors to GreenThumb gardens who enjoy these cherished public open spaces.

GreenThumb community gardens are unique public spaces that are stewarded by

volunteer New Yorkers, which help catalyze sustainable, resilient, healthy, and equitable communities across our city. Gardens thrive through a partnership between New York City government, community gardeners, and countless partners who collectively care for these spaces in a shared spirit of service. GreenThumb community gardens reflect the history and diversity of New York City's neighborhoods and serve as platforms for neighborhood beautification, social cohesion, teaching and learning, cultural and artistic expression, food production, health and wellness, environmental justice, sustainability, resilience, and more. Reflecting the unique personalities and needs of our city's neighborhoods, GreenThumb gardens range widely in size and nature, and host a variety of activities, from botanical horticulture and food gardening to passive recreation, special performances and programming, providing opportunities for New Yorkers to participate and collectively engage with their fellow neighbors. It is important to note that it is not GreenThumb who determines how each garden will be used, but rather each individual garden group. Our core philosophy is that the local community volunteers that make up the garden groups best understand the needs and wants of their community. Within this context, we best add value by helping these groups realize their unique vision for each garden. That means that whether gardeners plant ornamental gardens, food gardens, or both, we support them in that undertaking.

Thanks to increased support from City government in recent years - including the City Council's discretionary allocations, the Parks Equity Initiative, a Greener NYC, and most recently the PlayFair advocacy campaign - GreenThumb has experienced tremendous growth and an expanded ability to support gardens. Specifically, this has allowed us to provide new and higher quality materials, to increase the number of annual workshops, to develop new specialized trainings for gardeners, and to work with emerging garden groups to initiate approximately 20 new community gardens since 2016, with an additional 50 new gardens planned in the next three years through an innovative partnership with NYCHA.

With the additional funding provided by PlayFair in Fiscal Year 2020, we were able to make unprecedented levels of investment in gardens. This includes addressing long-

needed infrastructure improvements, including the installation of new fencing, signage and sidewalks, new workshops and specialized trainings for gardeners, and expanded provision of materials, including lumber for raised beds and compost tumblers, as well as expanded operational support through the addition of new division staff.

GreenThumb has supported urban agriculture since its founding, providing tools, equipment, training and materials that support food production in gardens. Food production has occurred in GreenThumb gardens since the beginning, and this has been a growing trend in recent years. GreenThumb has adjusted its programming and support accordingly, to remain responsive to the needs of our network. We have developed new workshops and trainings on growing food, permitted garden groups to sell their own produce to support on-site efforts, and formed new partnerships to provide additional supplementary support for food producing gardens. Today, 83% of gardens on NYC Parks property grow food in some way, and we estimate that a significant amount of food is grown in community gardens each year, though the scale of production tends to be somewhat limited, given the relatively limited size and capacity of these garden spaces. Some gardens are able to distribute food to their community to support healthy food access through farm stands and local donations.

Navigating the COVID-19 pandemic has of course proven challenging for all New Yorkers, in so many ways, but we are proud to have been able to continue supporting gardens, including those growing and distributing food, during this difficult time. We adapted our annual distribution of free plants to gardeners and hand delivered 110,000 plants to hundreds of garden groups throughout the City in May of 2020, including 45,000 food producing plants and thousands of seed packets for food plants. This represents the largest plant distribution in the history of GreenThumb. Working with the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, we developed protocols to ensure that gardens could safely remain open to garden groups throughout the pandemic, and that allowed garden-managed farm stands to continue operating to support the safe distribution of healthy food during a time of need. In addition, while observing all applicable safety measures, we were able to work with garden groups and partners to

renovate 15 gardens, build 375 new raised planting beds to support increased food production, and deliver over 2,000 cubic yards of topsoil and compost to garden groups across the city.

Specific to the legislation being heard today, Intro. 1059, NYC Parks shares the Council's interest in transparency and providing information about the wonderful work being carried out by our partners and volunteers. We appreciate the intent of the legislation and look forward to discussing this bill further with the Council.

In closing, we thank the City Council for convening this hearing. We appreciate every opportunity to shine a spotlight on the tireless work of the volunteers that steward community gardens across New York City and showcase the work that we have been doing to support them. We look forward to answering Councilmembers' questions, and afterwards, our agency staff will be viewing the public's testimony via the Council's hearing livestream.



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**NY City Council Oversight Hearing  
On the State of Community Gardens and Urban Agriculture**

**TESTIMONY from Lynn Kelly, Executive Director  
New York Restoration Project  
January 27, 2021**

Good Afternoon, Chair Koo and members of the committee on Parks and Recreation. My name is Lynn Kelly, and I am the Executive Director of New York Restoration Project. Thank you for your leadership in advancing New York City, and thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

At NYRP we believe that nature is a fundamental right; NYRP stewards 80 acres of city parkland and operates 52 community gardens containing 20,000 square feet of food production space throughout the five boroughs. It is well documented that green spaces provide innumerable health benefits – both mental and physical and with the onset of COVID-19, community gardens and access to urban agriculture have also proven to be an essential part of our city's infrastructure.

According to The Food Bank of New York City, NYC residents make up half of all food insecure people living in New York State and that the city's food insecurity rate is 12% higher than the national rate. Given rising unemployment, access to fresh and healthy food is more important now than ever and we need to ensure that gardeners have the tools and support they need to continue to feed some of our hardest hit communities.

That is why NYRP took immediate action at the onset of COVID and transitioned many of its gardens to be urban agricultural oases for the surrounding neighborhoods. In the spring of 2020 NYRP provided community gardeners with plant starts, extra tools, seeds and of course PPE, to encourage increased growth of fresh, healthy vegetables. With this boost, garden members successfully grew over 90,000 lbs. or \$180,000 worth of produce in gardens across the city providing families fresh, organic fruits and vegetables at no cost.

The City can support the work of NYRP and our partners in the gardening community by making connections between gardens and food suppliers like local food banks and farmers markets. Programs that allow NYC residents to grow their own food need to be funded and expanded to meet the growing demand in our city.

We applaud the City Council's efforts to advocate for a future of New York City with expanded urban agriculture and support for community gardens. As New York City begins the long process of rebuilding, community gardens and urban agriculture will be a vital part of that recovery, ensuring communities are safer, healthier, and happier. Thank you.



# **HUNTER COLLEGE NEW YORK CITY FOOD POLICY CENTER**

## **Testimony to the New York City Council: The Committee on Parks and Recreation**

**Testimony of Charles Platkin, Ph.D., J.D., M.P.H., Distinguished Lecturer, Hunter College, CUNY;  
Executive Director, Hunter College New York City Food Policy Center**

**Title of hearing: The State of Community Gardens and Urban Agriculture and Intro No. 1059 A Local Law in relation to a report on community garden food processing and agriculture.**

January 27, 2021

Thank you to Chairperson Koo and the members of the Committee on Parks and Recreation for the opportunity to submit written testimony regarding “The State of Community Gardens and Urban Agriculture and Intro No. 1059: A Local Law in relation to a report on community garden food processing and agriculture.”

I am providing this testimony on behalf of the Hunter College New York City Food Policy Center, of which I am the executive director. The Center was created in 2012 to develop collaborative, innovative and evidence-based solutions to prevent diet-related diseases, promote healthy eating and reduce food insecurity in New York City and other urban centers. The Center works with policy makers, community organizations, advocates and the public to create healthier, more sustainable food environments. We thank the City Council and the Speaker’s office for their support of our Center.

### **Community Food Gardens**

The benefits of community gardens extend far beyond providing food to urban dwellers. Community gardens are a source of valuable open space and provide important shared green sites to grow food, serve as dynamic classrooms for New York City schoolchildren, create a sense of community, and encourage connection among community members.

The benefits of community gardens are extensive and include the following:

- Improved Health Benefits

- Research has demonstrated that community and home gardens can reduce diet-related chronic disease,<sup>1</sup> increase the consumption of fruit and vegetable,<sup>2,3</sup> make improvements in body mass index<sup>4</sup> and foster physical activity.<sup>5</sup>
- Reduce Food Insecurity
  - A growing body of research suggests that urban agriculture, including community gardens harvest nutritionally and economically meaningful amounts of nutritious food,<sup>6,7</sup> which is especially valuable in areas where access to fresh fruits and vegetables are limited.
- Social Capital
  - Numerous studies have reported that community gardens enhance the social capital of communities by increasing the social bonds and networks among neighbors. Community gardens can reduce tensions, foster integration and bring people from diverse backgrounds, different positions of power, ages, cultures, religions, socioeconomic classes, genders, and educational backgrounds together with a shared sense of purpose.<sup>8,9,10,11,12,13,14,15</sup>
  - Community gardens can serve as “third spaces”--those beyond the home or work that function as safe, gathering spaces for community members to interact. One case study in a Latinx community in New York City showed the power of community gardens to serve more as cultural and social neighborhood centers than as agricultural production sites.<sup>16</sup> Another case study in Detroit noted the satisfaction and healing community members felt cleaning up vacant lots.<sup>17</sup>
- Social Change

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<sup>1</sup> Porter, C. (2019). What Gardens Grow: Outcomes From Home And Community Gardens Supported By Community-based Food Justice Organizations. *J Agric Food Syst Community Dev.*

<sup>2</sup> Soga, M., Gaston, K. & Yamaura, Y. (2017). Gardening Is Beneficial For Health: A Meta-analysis. *Prev Med Rep.* 92-99.

<sup>3</sup> Alaimo, K., Packnett, E., Miles, R., & Kruger, D. (2008). Fruit and Vegetable Intake among Urban Community Gardeners. *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior.* 40(2), 94-101.

<sup>4</sup> Utter, J., Denny, S., Dyson, B. (2016). School Gardens And Adolescent Nutrition And Bmi: Results From A National, Multilevel Study. *Preventive Medicine.* 83, 1-4.

<sup>5</sup> Armstrong, D. (2000). A Survey Of Community Gardens In Upstate New York: Implications For Health Promotion And Community Development. *Health and Place.* 6(4), 319-327.

<sup>6</sup> Porter, C. (2019). What Gardens Grow: Outcomes From Home And Community Gardens Supported By Community-based Food Justice Organizations. *J Agric Food Syst Community Dev.*

<sup>7</sup> Carney P, Hamada, J, Rdesinski R, et al. (2012). Impact Of A Community Gardening Project On Vegetable Intake, Food Security And Family Relationships: A Community-based Participatory Research Study. *J Community Health.* 37(4):874-881.

<sup>8</sup> Santo, R., Palmer, A. & Kim, B. (2016). Vacant Lots to Vibrant Plots: A Review of the Benefits and Limitations of Urban Agriculture. Johns Hopkins Center for Livable Future.

<sup>9</sup> Firth, C., Maye, D., & Pearson, D. (2011). Developing “Community” in Community Gardens. *Local Environment,* 16(6), 555-568.

<sup>10</sup> Glover, T.D. (2004). Social Capital in the Lived Experiences of Community Gardeners. *Leisure Sciences,* 26(2), 143-162.

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<sup>12</sup> Poulsen, M.N., Hulland, K.R., Gulas, C.A., Pham, H., Dalglis, S.L., Wilkinson, R.K., & Winch, P.J. (2014). Growing An Urban Oasis: A Qualitative Study Of The Perceived Benefits Of Community Gardening In Baltimore, Maryland. *Culture, Agriculture, Food and Environment,* 36(2), 69-82.

<sup>13</sup> Milbourne, P. (2012). Everyday (In)Justices And Ordinary Environmentalisms: Community Gardening In Disadvantaged Urban Neighbourhoods. *Local Environment: The International Journal of Justice and Sustainability,* 17(9), 943-957.

<sup>14</sup> Shinew, K.J., Glover, T.D., & Parry, D.C. (2004). Leisure Spaces As Potential Sites For Interracial Interaction: Community Gardens In Urban Areas. *Journal of Leisure Research,* 36(3), 336-355.

<sup>15</sup> Wakefield, S., Yeudall, F., Taron, C., Reynolds, J., & Skinner, A.I. (2007). Growing Urban Health: Community Gardening in South-East Toronto. *Health Promotion International,* 22(2), 92-100.

<sup>16</sup> Saldívar-Tanaka, L., & Krasny, M.E. (2004). Culturing Community Development, Neighborhood Open Space, And Civic Agriculture: The Case Of Latino Community Gardens In New York City. *Agriculture and Human Values,* 21(4), 399-412.

<sup>17</sup> Poulsen, M. (2016). Cultivating Citizenship, Equity, And Social Inclusion? Putting Civic Agriculture Into Practice Through Urban Farming. *Agriculture and Human Values.* 34, 135-148



- Food justice organizers and organizations often use home and community gardening as a tool for anti-oppression and other transformational strategies for creating health, equity, sustainability and food sovereignty within the food system.<sup>18,19</sup>
- Still others have documented the power of seed propagation with promoting social change.<sup>20</sup>
- Mental Health
  - Gardening can support mental health and well-being by reducing stress, providing physical and purposeful activity, improving self-esteem and a sense of accomplishment, facilitating healing and strengthening relationships with nature.<sup>21,22,23,24,25</sup>
  - Community gardens can provide an increased feeling of social support that may allow communities to overcome racial and social structural disadvantages, thereby facilitating improved access to health-promoting resources such as education, transportation and healthcare.<sup>26</sup>
- Decreased Crime
  - Urban green spaces, which include parks, recreational spaces and community gardens have been associated with reduced crime rates in low-income neighborhoods and have been shown to be a sense of pride for community residents.<sup>27,28,29,30</sup>
- Increased Property Values
  - Community gardens can be facilitators in improving the aesthetics of a neighborhood, decreasing crime and increasing community connections. These factors, particularly in economically disadvantaged neighborhoods, are associated with higher property values and tax revenues in a 1,000-foot radius.<sup>31,32,33</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Bradley, K., Herrera, H. (2015). Decolonizing Food Justice: Naming, Resisting, and Researching Colonizing Forces in the Movement. *Antipode*

<sup>19</sup> Sbicca, J. (2012). Growing Food Justice By Planting An Anti-oppression Foundation: Opportunities And Obstacles For A Budding Social Movement. *Agriculture and Human Values*, 29, 455-466.

<sup>20</sup> Follman, A & Viehoff, V. (2015). A Green Garden On Red Clay: Creating A New Urban Common As A Form Of Political Gardening In Cologne, Germany. *The International Journal of Justice and Sustainability*, 10, 1148-1174.

<sup>21</sup> Santo, R., Palmer, A. & Kim, B. (2016). Vacant Lots to Vibrant Plots: A Review of the Benefits and Limitations of Urban Agriculture. Johns Hopkins Center for Livable Future.

<sup>22</sup> Wakefield, S., Yeudall, F., Taron, C., Reynolds, J., & Skinner, A.I. (2007). Growing Urban Health: Community Gardening in South-East Toronto. *Health Promotion International*, 22(2), 92–100.

<sup>23</sup> Armstrong, D. (2000). A survey of community gardens in upstate New York: Implications for health promotion and community development. *Health and Place*, 6, 319– 327.

<sup>24</sup> Wolf, K. L., & Robbins, A. S. (2015). Metro Nature, Environmental Health, And Economic Value. *Environmental Health Perspectives*, 123(5), 390-398.

<sup>25</sup> Brown, K.H., & Jameton, A.L. (2000). Public Health Implications of Urban Agriculture. *Journal of Public Health Policy*, 20-39.

<sup>26</sup> Wen, M., Browning, C.R., Cagney, K.A. (2003). Poverty, Affluence, and Income Inequality: Neighborhood Economic Structure and its Implications for Health. *Social Science and Medicine*, 57, 843–860

<sup>27</sup> Milbourne, P. (2012). Everyday (in)justices and ordinary environmentalisms: community gardening in disadvantaged urban neighbourhoods. *Local Environment: The International Journal of Justice and Sustainability*, 17(9), 943-957

<sup>28</sup> Garvin, E., Cannuscio, C., & Branas, C. (2013). Greening vacant lots to reduce violent crime: a randomised controlled trial. *Injury Prevention: Journal of the International Society for Child and Adolescent Injury Prevention*, 19(3), 198-203.

<sup>29</sup> Kondo, M., Hohl, B., Han, S., & Branas, C. (2015). Effects of greening and community reuse of vacant lots on crime. *Urban Studies* [online before print].

<sup>30</sup> Kuo, F.E., & Sullivan, W.C. (2001). Environment And Crime In The Inner City: Does Vegetation Reduce Crime? *Environment and Behavior*, 33(3), 343–367.

<sup>31</sup> Guitart, D., Pickering, C., & Byrne, J. (2012). Past Results And Future Directions In Urban Community Gardens Research. *Urban Forestry & Urban Greening*, 11(4), 364-373.

<sup>32</sup> Voicu, I., & Been, V. (2008). The Effect Of Community Gardens On Neighboring Property Values. *Real Estate Economics*, 36(2), 241-283.

<sup>33</sup> Gateway Greening (2009). Whitmire Study: Gateway Greening Community Garden Areas, Reversing Urban Decline.

- Particular attention should be paid to protecting community gardens from development projects and to ensure that community residents are given a voice in decision-making around urban agriculture and economic development issues pertaining to their surrounding neighborhoods.<sup>34</sup>

## Community Gardens in New York City

New York City community food gardens have played an important role in the City's recent history. During the financial crisis of the 1970s, there were vacant and abandoned lots, and the nonprofit environmental group the Green Guerillas, lobbed “seed bombs” containing seeds, water and fertilizer into vacant lots to beautify them when they were not able to get into the area. Eventually the efforts of the Green Guerillas were recognized, and a movement was started. After a few years, the GreenThumb program was established.

“Realizing the wisdom of outsourcing the maintenance of vacant city–owned lots to energetic community groups willing to tend to them and wanting to encourage grassroots neighborhood revitalization efforts, the City initiated the GreenThumb program in 1978 to provide assistance and coordination. Originally sponsored by the City Department of General Services and funded by federal Housing and Urban Development Community Development Block Grants (GreenThumb is still funded largely by community block grants from the federal Housing and Urban Development program), GreenThumb coordinated the leases for city–owned vacant land. Whether through vegetable plots or lush flower or herb gardens, residents transformed unattractive and sometimes unsafe spaces into green havens, providing open space in especially underserved areas.<sup>35</sup>

GreenThumb is one of the largest urban gardening programs in the country with more than 550 gardens.<sup>36</sup> The program also assists with workshops and helps other potential and current community gardens become established. Including the GreenThumb gardens, and more than 50 NYCHA gardens, collectively, there have been more than 900 community gardens total documented in New York City in recent years.<sup>37</sup> Approximately 80 percent of New York City’s gardens grow food.<sup>38</sup>

## The Future of Community Gardens: Recommendations and Suggestions

We recommend the following:

- Continue and expand the GreenThumb urban gardening program.
- Increase development of urban agriculture, including hydroponic production gardens, rooftop production gardens, and other measures to combat food insecurity in under-resourced communities.

<sup>34</sup> Santo, R., Palmer, A. & Kim, B. (2016). Vacant Lots to Vibrant Plots: A Review of the Benefits and Limitations of Urban Agriculture. Johns Hopkins Center for Livable Future.

<sup>35</sup> New York City Department of Parks & Recreation, *History of the Community Garden Movement*. Accessed on February 2, 2021 at <https://www.nycgovparks.org/about/history/community-gardens/movement>

<sup>36</sup> New York City Department of Parks & Recreation, *History of the Community Garden Movement*. Accessed on February 2, 2021 at <https://www.nycgovparks.org/about/history/community-gardens/movement>

<sup>37</sup> Altman L, Barry L, Barry M, Englese C, Kühl K, Silva P, Wilks B. (2014). Five Borough Farm II: Growing the Benefits of Urban Agriculture in New York City. New York: Design Trust for Public Space.

<sup>38</sup> Grow NYC, *Community Garden Survey*, Accessed on February 2, 2021 at [https://www.grownyc.org/files/GrowNYC\\_CommunityGardenReport.pdf](https://www.grownyc.org/files/GrowNYC_CommunityGardenReport.pdf)

- Create and expand community gardens and/or other community production gardens, including hydroponic production gardens and rooftop gardens, in NYCHA public housing.
- Explore additional ways community gardens and urban agriculture can contribute to the New York City food supply.
- Ensure the protection of community gardens from future development projects.
- Develop legislation and/or tax incentives that promote urban agriculture.

We at the Hunter College New York City Food Policy Center stand ready to support community garden food processing and agriculture.

The Hunter College New York City Food Policy Center recognizes that New York City community gardens play an integral role in promoting health and food education, improving food access in under-resourced neighborhoods, decreasing crime and connecting community members to one another and the food they eat.

For more information about the Hunter College NYC Food Policy Center, visit our website at [www.nycfoodpolicy.org](http://www.nycfoodpolicy.org) or email Dr. Charles Platkin at [info@nycfoodpolicy.org](mailto:info@nycfoodpolicy.org).

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide oral and written testimony.



**Testimony of Carlos Castell Croke  
Associate for NYC Programs  
New York League of Conservation Voters**

**City Council Committee on Parks and Recreation  
Hearing on Intro 1059  
January 27, 2021**

Good afternoon, my name is Carlos Castell Croke and I am the Associate for New York City Programs at the New York League of Conservation Voters (NYLCV). NYLCV represents over 30,000 members in New York City and we are committed to advancing a sustainability agenda that will make our people, our neighborhoods, and our economy healthier and more resilient. I would like to thank Chair Koo for the opportunity to testify today.

Community gardens are an integral part of the city's valuable green space and are essential to the neighborhoods they serve. Many of them operate community composting, run educational programs, and provide dense urban neighborhoods with open green space. Most importantly, with 83% of the city's 550 community gardens involved in community agriculture, they fight the food insecurities that disproportionately plague low income communities of color.

Demand for locally sourced food is growing as sustainability becomes a priority for more people. Energy costs, packaging waste, and carbon emissions are all factors that make food from remote locations more expensive and less appealing to consumers. However, as awareness grows of the environmental and health benefits of choosing local food, over one million New York City residents lack access and resources for sufficient nutrition. Entire neighborhoods are designated as food deserts due to the limited availability of fresh food.

This is why community gardens and urban agriculture are so important to New Yorkers. Many of the city's community gardens not only produce food but serve as distribution sites for farm shares and other locally sourced produce programs. These services have become increasingly more important during the pandemic as many families struggle with unemployment.

NYLCV therefore supports the passage of Intro 1059 which would mandate that the Parks Department report on community gardens that are engaged in urban agriculture. This kind of report would provide the information this city needs to understand the effectiveness of urban

agriculture, where expansions can be made, and where further funding is needed to operate programs effectively.

NYLCV is also a proud founder of the Play Fair Campaign, along with New Yorkers for Parks and DC37, and has fought hard over the past years for adequate parks funding. In 2019, this campaign successfully worked with the city council to secure an \$8 million investment in community gardens and the GreenThumb division. Unfortunately, this money was not renewed in the FY21 budget and is currently slated to be omitted from the FY22 budget. We hope that the Council and City will continue to value investments in our community gardens and the irreplaceable services they provide to their local communities.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.



**New York City Council Committee on Parks and Recreation  
Oversight – The State of Community Gardens and Urban Agriculture**

**Intro. 1059-2018**

**January 27, 2021**

**Jessica Saab, Advocacy and Communications Project Manager**

Good afternoon. My name is Jessica Saab, and I am the Advocacy and Communications Project Manager at New Yorkers for Parks (NY4P). I want to thank the Committee on Parks and Recreation for hosting today's hearing.

Community gardens play a critical and often overlooked role in our city's open space network. With over 550 community gardens citywide, these spaces, which are created and maintained by dedicated volunteers, drive grassroots neighborhood development, create space for our vibrant multicultural communities, and help address food insecurity on a local scale. Many gardens are the site of food production directly, but others also act as sites for Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) distribution as well as composting. Community gardens also provide a means for young New Yorkers to directly interact with land in ways that are often not available to residents in our dense built-out city. During the pandemic, some community garden groups stepped up even more, establishing community fridges, connecting networks of mutual aid, and growing additional food for neighbors.

In 2019, New Yorkers for Parks launched the Play Fair Coalition and Campaign, which sought to increase the expense budget for NYC Parks. One of the key pieces of our budget platform was an \$8M investment into our community garden network. We were thrilled when the City Council secured this funding, which marked the first-ever system-wide investment for community gardens. This funding allowed NYC Parks to hire 15 additional Outreach Coordinators for the GreenThumb division, provide fencing and sidewalks improvements to gardens in the GreenThumb network, and provide materials for gardens citywide. While this funding was not renewed in the FY21 budget, we hope that the City Council and Mayor's office will continue to value and invest in our community garden network and the incredible network of dedicated volunteers.

We are also testifying today in support of Intro. 1059, which would require NYC Parks to undertake a report to aggregate community gardens citywide that are engaged in urban agriculture. Having a detailed accounting of where there are additional opportunities for green spaces and urban food production in the City will provide useful data for decision-makers and communities citywide. We

also believe the data gathered in this report would help the City better allocate resources to gardens in need of additional material support. The City Council previously released a report called “Growing Food Equity in New York City” which proposed multiple policy initiatives that would help garden groups respond more effectively to issues in their communities. We recommend that the Council implement those policies as well to better protect community gardens and enhance their ability to thrive.

Thank you for allowing me to speak today. I’m happy to answer any questions the Council might have.

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*For over 100 years, [New Yorkers for Parks](http://www.ny4p.org) (NY4P) has built, protected, and promoted parks and open spaces in New York City. Today, NY4P is the citywide independent organization championing quality parks and open spaces for all New Yorkers in all neighborhoods.  
[www.ny4p.org](http://www.ny4p.org)*

Testimony of Riverside Park Conservancy  
Before the City Council Committee on Parks  
City Hall  
January 27, 2021

More than 35 years ago - before Riverside Park Conservancy was formally developed - a woman named Jenny Benitez joined up with several West Harlem neighbors to transform an abandoned lot at 139th Street. Just shy of one acre in size, this small patch of Riverside Park was at that time strewn with trash, abandoned cars, and home to dangerous activity - reflective of the conditions in most New York City Parks at the time, which were neglected and dangerous due to chronic major budget cuts from the Parks Department.

Today, after decades of community-led work to revitalize the land by planting trees, gardens, and building raised beds to grow vegetables, there is now a thriving garden, which continues to be stewarded by volunteers with support from Riverside Park Conservancy. Formally recognized as Riverside Valley Community Garden, it is known to many as “Jenny’s Garden,” in honor of the legacy left behind by Jenny Benitez, who passed away in 2019.

Jenny’s Garden is one of 550 GreenThumb gardens in the City, and over the years, has blossomed into a multi-generational, multi-cultural community of urban gardeners and nature enthusiasts in West Harlem.

For more than 40 years, Jenny’s Garden has been a place of joy and learning for countless individuals, some of whom have been involved briefly to lend a hand or stop by, and others who have been involved for several years as dedicated volunteers or regular visitors. The space has promoted the health of local residents by providing hands-on education, physical exercise, connection to the land and the community - and of course, fresh food.

The Garden serves as an excellent model for local urban agriculture; volunteers of all ages and backgrounds work collaboratively to grow squash, kale, cucumbers, tomatoes, lettuce, peppers, and more, much of which is harvested and donated to the Broadway Presbyterian Church Soup Kitchen at 114th Street throughout the season.

In addition to edible plants, volunteers provide horticultural care to trees, shrubs, and perennials in the surrounding area, including the upper level of the Park alongside Riverside Drive between 135th and 145th Streets. The Garden has a small composting station, which accepts food scrap donations from local residents a regular basis. And beyond its obvious function as space to grow fresh food, Jenny’s Garden also gives New Yorkers a tranquil setting where they can form lasting bonds with neighbors, appreciate nature, and simply take a breath of fresh air.



# Riverside Park Conservancy

Riverside Park Conservancy, which was formed by a grassroots network of neighbors in 1986 - and which today cares for nearly 400 acres of parkland - helps provide technical and financial support for Jenny's Garden. But many similar gardens in the City do not have a conservancy to help with technical and financial support for their operations. At a time when our country and our City continues to grapple with the chronic issue of food insecurity, we believe that it is in the best interest of the City to make more resources available to existing community gardens - and to expand this model of community-based urban agriculture in available spaces.

Investing in local agricultural and gardening operations is beneficial on several levels as we collectively work toward building a more equitable and environmentally conscious City. The presence of a thriving community garden enhances the quality of life for the surrounding neighborhood, empowers individuals and their communities, fortifies a network of food security, and supports the local ecology.



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January 27, 2021

**UPROSE Testimony Regarding The State of Community Gardens and Urban Agriculture and  
Int. No. 1059 A Local Law on January 27, 2021**

Testimony submitted by Shahela Begum, Climate Justice Resilience Coordinator at UPROSE to  
NYC City Council Parks and Recreation Committee

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony today on behalf of the State of Community Gardens and Urban Agriculture. My name is Shahela Begum and I am the Resilience Coordinator at UPROSE. I am here today on behalf of UPROSE, to express our support for Intro 1059, a local law to support urban agriculture in New York City. Founded in 1966, UPROSE is Brooklyn's oldest Latino community-based organization. UPROSE is an intergenerational, multi-racial, and nationally recognized BIWOC grassroots organization that works at the intersection of racial justice and climate change.

Thank you for addressing the need for community gardens and urban agriculture as a way to address resiliency efforts throughout the City. This is precedent setting. This law would propose an in-depth study and mapping of all community gardens while understanding food production capabilities, food variability being grown, and specific tools on site at these gardens. New Yorkers are extremely resilient in engaging with resources to provide supplemental food benefits for their community, however, this type of engagement should not fall on the community alone. The City Council Parks and Recreation Committee must commit to do more in support of community gardens in low income communities and communities of color. Providing funding support and valuable resources to frontline communities secures the future of urban agriculture.

COVID-19 has made a huge impact on communities of color, especially in urban areas such as New York City, forcing to reallocate resources and cut programs such as compost collection. Due to these types of cuts on environmental sustainability, many New Yorkers turned to their

local community gardens for their composting needs. Community gardens took much of the burden off the Department of Sanitation by reducing excess food waste and scraps in our landfills. Composting sites in local gardens throughout the City also play a vital role in building healthy, organic soil to use for gardening and distribution. Low income communities look to these gardens as a source of supplemental food where there is a growing food crisis during the pandemic. The variability of food grown depending on local neighborhoods represents the many diverse ethnicities and cultures that represent New York City. For all of these reasons, community gardens function not only as ecologically resilient hubs for our City but also uphold social cohesion and resiliency in our people.

There are a myriad of benefits and stacked functions of urban agriculture, one of which is climate resiliency. New York City receives an average of 45 inches of annual rainfall which makes it difficult for our existing infrastructure to process, leading to combined sewage overflows (CSOs). We see on-going flooding every time it rains, continuing to be a major problem in front line communities that also have to deal with pollution and flood damage. Urban agriculture is one way to relieve an excess amount of rainfall from overflowing our infrastructure since much of the rain is absorbed into the soil and spread slowly throughout. Furthermore, community gardens are also well known for rainwater harvesting in large tanks, which also plays a vital role in alleviating CSOs. Urban agricultural designs offer solutions for a healthier New York, reducing flooding/pooling in frontline neighborhoods, along with simultaneously producing the need for healthy food.

Air quality and temperature is dramatically improved with the increase of community gardens where cities often suffer from overheating due to urban island effect. Communities of color experience environmental pollution the most and as a result, green spaces are crucial in providing overall health for the community while also allowing for people to congregate. Certain plants and vegetation are known to remediate toxic soil and reduce lead poisoning, furthering the wellbeing of New Yorkers, especially in low-income neighborhoods.

This law helps to understand existing urban agricultural relationships at a local level. As New York City projects to tackle climate change, community gardens are a way to reduce the overall carbon footprint. Local food production and urban agriculture serves the local economy, where restaurants, small grocery stores, and citizens engage in purchasing locally grown produce instead of having it shipped in from other states/countries. This network of partnership already exists in neighborhoods throughout New York City, however, these relationships and the local economy can be strengthened with Law 1059. In an age where many New Yorkers are unemployed due to COVID-19, outdoor work in urban agriculture and community gardens offer

several employment opportunities to aid the local economy. There are very few opportunities which present itself as safe, socially-distanced work in a global pandemic.

Educational aspects of urban agriculture and community gardens provide several opportunities for New York City students. Children living in frontline communities often experience a disconnect to natural environments, not fully having the opportunity to understand where our food comes from, how it is grown, and the benefits of healthy eating. Community gardens serve as an outdoor classroom space for students to engage in areas such as environmental science, ecology, and food justice. Urban youth of color lack affordable access to healthy food, thereby emphasizing the need for urban agriculture which familiarizes children in the process of growing food and making healthier choices. As schools attempt to navigate safety around education and regular classes, outdoor education at community gardens offer a safe alternative during a pandemic.

Overall, UPROSE is in support of Law 1059 in order to understand an accurate assessment of existing resources along with support from the New York City Council Parks and Recreation Committee. Local community gardens in low-income neighborhoods of color are essential for New York City, from ensuring environmental resiliency, achieving food justice goals, strengthening social cohesion, serving the local economy, to meeting educational needs for our children during these difficult times.

I am writing in support of Intro No. 1059 The State of Community Gardens and Urban Agriculture A Local Law in relation to a report on community garden food processing and agriculture. Developing agricultural capacity within or close to urban areas like New York City has the potential to reduce food transportation costs and environmental impacts, provide economic development opportunities, and reduce disparities in health care access that have contributed to epidemic rates of obesity and diabetes especially among low-income populations. Despite these advantages, there are challenges to establishing the viability of urban production as compared to more conventional agricultural practices, including scalability, energy efficiency, and labor costs. ([NYC Regional Foodshed Initiative - Urban Design Lab \(columbia.edu\)](#))

Despite Commissioner Silver's hesitance of using the term Urban Agriculture about community gardens that is what they are. A farm is classified of having \$1,000 or more of agricultural products being produced or sold. ([Small Farms Ag Policy - Frequently Asked Questions \(ncagr.gov\)](#)). Community Gardens/Farms meet this criteria. For the past few years Cornell Cooperative Extension's Urban Agriculture program has provided support for urban agriculture in all five boroughs of New York City. With an emphasis on growing for market, they serve urban farmers through educational programming, technical assistance, and research. Whose program areas include production, marketing, regulations, food safety, and urban agriculture's social and environmental impacts ([Urban Agriculture - Harvest New York - Cornell University - Cornell Cooperative Extension](#)) Urban Agricultural Specialists, Yolanda Gonzalez and Samuel Anderson have been visiting urban farms taking soil samples discerning what is normal for urban soils versus rural farmland, consulting on integrated pest management (IPM) practices to increase crop production, formed a community mushroom educator program to train educators who work in underserved areas and holding office hours this Summer on GreenThumb's lunch hour series providing technical assistance to GreenThumb gardens/farms.

Kimberly Vallejo and Tahira Cook from New York State Agriculture and Markets share space with Cornell Extension. They have been working on grants such as Fresh Connect whose objective is : A maximum of \$10,000 per year is available to operate a Fresh Connect Food Box Program site to increase the fruit and vegetable consumption by low income, SNAP eligible consumers, and to reduce their incidence of obesity and chronic disease ([2019 eligibility for freshconnect food box program.pdf \(grownyc.org\)](#)) A written report by the Hunter College research group has sent around a survey for past and present NYC community gardeners. This study will inform the New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets' work with community gardens and local food programs.

On the morning of this hearing Joseph Heller, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) of the USDA held a webinar detailing Technical and Farm Resources for Urban Farmers in NYS. There were over 200 people on this webinar. Karen Washington of The Garden of Happiness explained the many hurdles to install a high tunnel in the garden that allows year-round planting. These professionals are here for a reason. The gardens and farms of this city are urban agriculture. To end the 2018 USDA Farm Bill recognition of urban agriculture has aided in bringing these resources to urban area. If you look on the web page you will see the pictorial representation of urban agriculture is a Farm at NYCHA ([Urban Agriculture | USDA](#))

In the case of agriculture processing garden/farmss are doing this as well. The New York Botanical Garden's Bronx Green-Up is excited to be part of an exciting new food initiative, The Bronx Canasta. This innovative food production and economic empowerment project aims to build self- reliance of Bronx communities to grow their own food and create, market, and distribute value-added products based on crops grown in the Bronx. ([New Food Initiative: The Bronx Canasta - Plant Talk \(nybg.org\)](#)) This would be a cooperative of urban farms/community gardens in the Bronx that would provide educational training services on the maintenance and sustainability of urban agriculture in an effort to build resiliency, sustainability and community ([Our Mission – The Bronx Canasta](#)).

I agree with Sarah McCollum Williams, Executive Director of Green Guerillas that Parks leadership has not upheld the values of those working in food justice. There is a difference between a park and a community garden/farm which I don't feel that Department of Parks and Recreation understand, especially after listening to Commissioner Silver downplay their importance. Community Gardens/Farms are a collaborative community effort to invest in the neighborhoods that have been redlined, suffered municipal disinvestment, benign neglect, and urban renewal. These gardens allow the gardeners/farmers to grow culturally appropriate food that they won't necessarily find in their neighborhood market giving them a sense of food sovereignty, as stated by Ray Figueroa, President of NYCCGC. Bill LoSasso stated that the gardens are clustered in certain areas. He is correct, today these neighborhoods deal with gentrification and rezoning continuing the historical trend of displacement of BIPOC communities.

The last report on community gardening was done in 2009/2010 a Community Garden Survey (staff at GrowNYC and GreenThumb; Bob Lewis and Christina Grace of the NY State Department of Agriculture and Markets; Guinevere Ury, Rob Callaghan, and Marcello Gasdia of Hunter College [GrowNYC CommunityGardenReport.pdf](#)) was done. A collaboration of GrowNYC with Lenny Librizzi, Mara Gittleman who at the time was a Compton Mentor Fellow, GrowNYC and today works for GreenThumb as Workshops & Education Coordinator and Edie Stone who was the Executive Director of GreenThumb. It is past time for another.

Before starting on this endeavor, a review previous reports such as the Potential for Urban Agriculture in New York City: growing capacity, food insecurity and green infrastructure. ((PDF) [The Potential for Urban Agriculture in New York City: growing capacity, food security & green infrastructure \(researchgate.net\)](#))

This last year 2020 community gardens have risen to the challenge of assisting in offsetting food insecurity despite not being deemed essential. These are just a few of the many projects:

**Bronx Green Up has begun a Community Farm Hub system, which is currently made up of 18 neighborhood gardens** ([Bissel Gardens](#), [Black Joy Farm](#), [Brook Park Youth Farm](#), [Garden of Happiness](#), [Garden of Youth](#), [James Baldwin Outdoor Learning Center](#), [Kelly Street Garden](#), [La Finca del Sur](#), [La Isla](#), [Las Casitas Community Garden](#), [Morris Campus Educational Farm](#), [Morning Glory Community Garden](#), [New](#)

Roots Community Farm, Padre Plaza Community Garden, Urban Cultivated @ Praxis Gardens, Rivers Run Community Garden, Taqwa Community Farm and Woodside Community Garden) and farms in Crotona/Belmont, Highbridge, Longwood/Hunt's Point, South Bronx, North Bronx, and Morrisania. These neighborhood gardens and farms have long been partners with Bronx Green-Up and leaders in their neighborhoods and wider community, organizing community markets, advocating for their communities, and running youth and health programs. All are predominantly run by volunteers who wanted to come together to support increased food production and distribution in their communities. ([Growing Locally: NYBG Partners with New Community Farm Hubs to Tackle Food Insecurity Close to Home » New York Botanical Garden](#)).

**La Finca del Sur** was part of the **South Bronx Food Hub Distribution (4 gardens Friends of Brook Park, Padre Plaza, La Finca and New Roots)** worked together to provide 150-200 produce bags for Mitchell Senior Center, Mitchell Houses Community Center and Abraham House. Gardens leveraged their relationships and partnerships working for and with their communities.

**Padre Plaza Community Garden** in the Bronx has had free food box distribution, book giveaways, food drives through community partnerships such as World Central Kitchen. Hornaday Community Garden in the Bronx partnered with Nos Quedamos, GrowNYC. Hispanic Federation distributing food boxes.

**Phoenix Community Garden** in Ocean Hill-Brownsville, Brooklyn used IOBY to raise \$33,564 for an elder box. They have distributed over 30 tons of fresh fruit and vegetables to over 70 isolated seniors; they will be able to continue their work through the summer of 2021. The Fresh Food Box Program at Phoenix Community Garden began collecting money to provide fresh fruit and vegetables to elders in isolation. We have recruited a team of volunteers to deliver the bags of produce and pantry staples following social distancing protocols. These volunteers are also checking in with the elders, making sure they're ok and have everything that they need. As the weeks have worn on, it looks like shelter-in-place and social distancing restrictions will be going on for several more months. We are committed to providing food security to every elder that we add to our list by providing them with a fresh food box every week ([Ocean Hill / East Bushwick Elder Boxes | ioby](#))

**Pleasant Village** in East Harlem won a Building Healthy Community Grant where they were able to grow fresh fruits and vegetables to the community at a sliding scale and has stepped up their composting. DSNY composting funding wasn't fully restored so Community Gardens have stepped into the brink to become a resource for composting of food scraps. Pleasant Village Community is now crowd funding to replace its three bin system with a hot box that will make easier to take in the increase in food scraps. (<https://ioby.org/.../east-harlem-double-composting-hotbox...>)

**Kelly Street Garden** (KSG) formed a partnership with Harvest Home Markets. Harvest Home Market received the Nourish NY grant to buy fresh vegetables from small farmers. We combined their produce with our garden harvest then packaging and distributing the

harvest as part of our weekly share. Neighborhood Youth ran the Farm Stand, thereby participating in the circular economy and investing in our community's future. KSG extended its growing season which we usually end the last week of October. We were able to distribute a Thanksgiving and Christmas share.

In the case of composting the community gardens have stepped up to be a resource as a Food Drop off Site. NYC was one of the recipients of the Community Compost and Food Waste Reduction Project of the USDA Agriculture Grant and Cooperative Agreements ([USDA Announces First-Ever Recipients of Urban Agriculture Grants and Cooperative Agreements | USDA](#))

Thank you.  
Renee Keitt





**Testimony of Keith Carr, Manager, Policy and Government Relations, City Harvest**

**New York City Council Hearing of the Committee on Parks and Recreation**

**January 27, 2021**

**Int. 1059-2018 Report on community garden food processing and agriculture.**

Good morning Chairperson Koo and members of the Committee on Parks and Recreation. Thank you for holding this timely hearing on how to best measure and document the immense contribution of our community gardens and urban farming in New York City. My name is Keith Carr and I am the Manager for Policy and Government Relations at City Harvest.

I testify today to state our continued concern for those hungry in the communities we serve. As the pandemic and economic crisis continue to loom and at a time of uncertainty regarding support at the federal level, we look to the city to remember the many low-income New Yorkers striving to balance food security, personal well-being, and costly housing. The need for emergency food in New York City is staggering and by itself it cannot meet the needs of all hungry and food insecure New Yorkers, it is important that we address hunger through well-rounded approaches that not only include emergency food programs, but supports community led efforts for food access and resiliency such as urban gardens.

A robust, inclusive and comprehensive urban agriculture plan for our city can serve a key role in addressing this by providing the quality, variety and amount of affordable nutritionally dense produce and eggs available in the communities that we serve and alleviate the demand on emergency food programs. Especially at a time when programs are stretched thin and the public's attention is drawn towards resiliency beyond the economic recovery.

**Background**

City Harvest pioneered food rescue in 1982 and, this year, will collect at least 144 million pounds of donated food (over 60% of which will be fresh produce) to help feed over 1.5 million New Yorkers struggling to put meals on their tables. Prior to COVID, we were on pace to deliver roughly 64 million pounds of food to our emergency food network. However, the total dramatically increased due to a 44% increase in food insecurity for all New Yorkers, a 64% increase in food insecurity for children, and over 2.2 million New Yorkers filing initial unemployment claims since the first case of COVID-19 in New York in March. Through relationships with farms, grocers, restaurants, and manufacturers, City Harvest continues to be able to collect nutritious food that would otherwise go to waste and to deliver it free of charge to over 400 soup kitchens, food pantries and other community food programs across the five boroughs. However, the volatility of unemployment rates, food insecurity and the demand for emergency food throughout the COVID-19 Pandemic underlines the importance of a multifaceted approach to address hunger, particularly one that supports community efforts for food resiliency,

### Urban Agriculture Can Improve Food Security

We at City Harvest know we cannot tackle hunger in NYC alone, especially in the context of the ongoing public health crisis. We look to both public and private partners to collaborate on this critical issue. Just as we partner with upstate and local agriculture to provide food for hungry New Yorkers, a significant collaboration with hyper-local urban farming will provide even more support to the emergency feeding partners we serve.

NYC has 14,000 acres of unused rooftops; the neighborhood of East New York, Brooklyn alone has more than 45,000 square feet of publicly-owned, unused land. An organized and determined approach to a comprehensive and inclusive plan to urban growing could greatly expand healthy foods availability to food insecure communities. Increasing fresh fruits, vegetables, and animal products (fish, honey and eggs) in those communities will improve local food security and nutrition. Urban farming has grown by more than 30 percent in the United States in the past 30 years. It has been estimated that urban agriculture can meet 15 to 20 percent of global food demand.

In Cuba, over 300,000 urban farms and gardens produce about 50 percent of the island's fresh produce supply, along with 39,000 tons of meat and 216 million eggs. Most Cuban urban farmers reach yields of 44 pounds per square yard per year. 1,200 acres of land would produce 88 million pounds of vegetables—enough to provide 220 pounds per year per person to almost 400,000 residents.

The communities that we serve typically have poor traditional retail access points to fresh fruits and vegetables, particularly to green leafy vegetables and usually there is very little variety among the options. Affordability is always a challenge and as the retail landscape in many gentrifying areas improves, the retailers' prices often increase and they begin stocking the shelves with more items that may be unfamiliar to longtime residents.

A common misconception for those in poor communities is that healthy food is too expensive and residents believe that they can't afford to eat healthy. This belief is substantiated by store operators who often inflate prices on produce items that are typically inferior in quality and freshness.

The development of more farm stands, food box distributions and farmers' markets at community gardens, urban farms and hydronic farms will provide an increase to the variety and availability of green leafy vegetables and other produce that is an affordable (and in many cases) free alternative traditional retail outlets. Cooking demos and tastings at these sites are very effective in encouraging customers to purchase new items and cook them in a more healthy way.

Other benefits to communities that face food insecurity includes:

- More access to and consumption of healthier green leafy vegetables and produce.
- Cost savings frees more funds available to purchase other items at supermarkets.
- Less reliance on food pantries especially during the growing season.
- Increase knowledge of where their food comes from and the benefits of hyper locally grown food

The Phoenix Community Garden (Ocean Hill, Brooklyn), 462 Halsey Community Farm (Bed Stuy), Hattie Carthan Community Farm (Bed Stuy), La Finca Del Sur (Bronx) and The Campaign Against Hunger's Saratoga Farm (Bed Stuy and Far Rockaway) are exemplary examples of urban agriculture's power to not just feed residents but to also educate them and create community, stimulate the local economy and develop jobs. I encourage you and members of this committee to visit these farms and others.

Through his Vital Brooklyn Initiative, Governor Cuomo, recognizing that community gardens provide critical opportunities for healthier lifestyles released significant funding to support the infrastructure of 22 gardens in Central Brooklyn. He also empowered the NYS Department of Ag and Markets to enhance the local food retail landscape with substantial grant funding to encourage more farm stands, markets and food box distributions at community gardens and CBOs in many of the communities we serve.

**Any plan for urban agriculture in this city must include proposals to provide for and aggregate urban growing by or in support of emergency feeding programs.**

Yes, urban ag "tech" like farms represent an exciting opportunity to feed New York and create a new job sector but the contribution of community gardening and urban farming offer a direct connection to free and affordable food in the communities who need it most. We cannot let the potential influx of speculation of a new lucrative industry and funding supersede their importance or neglect those who sowed and nurtured the community growing movement over the last 40 years.

Over the last year as the pandemic and economic crisis drove more and more of our neighbors into food insecurity and towards the pantry line we cannot deny the important role that community gardens played to fill the gap as many families struggled to put healthy food on their tables.

This study will document their important contributions and, we hope, lead to increased support from the Council to aggregate urban growing and improve access to healthy and affordable fruits and vegetables for underserved communities.

Thank you for ongoing commitment to ensuring rezoning processes are done equitably and have a positive impact on food security in New York City

**We welcome the opportunity to collaborate with the City and work towards creating new opportunities to move the dial on healthy food access.**

#### Conclusion

**City Harvest remains optimistic and eager** to work with the Administration and support its genuine efforts to alleviate hunger for all New Yorkers. Food insecurity is not only destructive on a personal level; the ripple affect can cause lasting social and economic damage throughout the community. Thank you for your earnest determination to address the pervasive hunger that continues to threaten our great City.

I am a participating member and volunteer at Down To Earth Composting garden at Avenue B and 12th Street. Last March, before COVID hit, our expansion into the community had surged. We were processing 3 brown bins every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday for the Department of Sanitation to pick up. This was a valuable service to the surrounding households and the shutdown was difficult to enforce. Once someone saves their scraps, they will insist on not throwing them back into the garbage. It is a habit once learned that is difficult to unlearn. We are losing momentum by keeping this program on hold.

We have kept the location alive as a resource for members and still produce a much smaller amount of compostables along with our sister garden El Sol Brillante. We are passionate about reinstating the much needed Department of Sanitation pickup so we can continue our outreach into the community. Recycling and sustainability is and should be a contagious movement in the time we are living in. We now have a presidential leader that enforces the environment as a priority. Shouldn't our city be able to do the same?

Sincerely,  
Lorraine Forte





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January 27, 2021 Hearing on Intro 1059 in relation to a report on community garden food processing and agriculture.

My name is Irene Van Slyke testifying for the Sierra Club NYC Group

The Sierra Club is in support of Intro 1059 and welcome a comprehensive report on the accomplishments of thousands of community gardeners. It is important to note that during the 1960s 70s and 80s many NYC residents struggled to save their neighborhoods from blight and disinvestment without any acknowledgement by the City.

And, just as those decades receded to give way to a new discovery by many that Cities were and are great places to live, then Mayor Giuliani decided to auction off vacant lots as they are still so listed by the City: vacant lots! We did not pay taxes he said. We have come a long way to a measure of respect and we acknowledge the support of many Council members for community gardens and gardeners.

This bill and the report it promises will set the record straight about who the people were who saved the hundreds of neglected lots and made them into community gardens. Their accomplishments are that they had a vision of the future of the value of open space. They are worth saving because when you grow food together you save your neighborhood its people and their culture. Now once more a community garden serves as a refuge while a virulent virus reigns in areas with very little open space. And, climate change can be mitigated by community gardens that will feed us and thereby add to the City's resiliency and sustainability. So every decade brings another reason to love our gardens and the vision people had to clear a dump and start a garden.

So we support this bill and hope that many council members will find it worthwhile to co-sponsor it. And while the bill emphasizes community gardens under the jurisdiction of the Department of Parks, the bill's language appears to include other entities such as the 3 land trusts in NYC that own scores community gardens in many different neighborhoods as well as NYC Restoration that owns scores of community gardens as well.

Thank you

Irene Van Slyke  
One of the founders of Brooklyn Queens Land Trust



Elizabeth Street Garden (ESG) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit with the mission to: **Protect & preserve the magic of Elizabeth Street Garden as a public community green space and to determine how the City together with the community can protect the space for generations to enjoy.**

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**Written Testimony Presented Before the New York City Council Committee on Parks and Recreation Regarding The State of Community Gardens and Urban Agriculture and Int. No. 1059 - A Local Law in relation to a report on community garden food processing and agriculture.**

Date: 01/27/2021, 1:00 pm

Statement by Joseph Reiver,  
Executive Director, Elizabeth Street Garden  
[www.elizabethstreetgardeen.com](http://www.elizabethstreetgardeen.com)

Like many of the community gardens across the city, Elizabeth Street Garden serves as the center of our neighborhood. At just over 20,000 square feet, the garden provides an abundance of greenery, including trees, grass areas, and community garden beds where neighborhood volunteers grow a variety of plants, fruits, and vegetables. Due to the size of the garden, ESG is able to simultaneously provide appropriate recreational areas and gardening areas for food processing and agriculture.

While our neighborhood Little Italy and the adjacent neighborhood SoHo make up 23% of Community Board 2's population, the two areas only have 3% of the district's open space resulting in an open space ratio of 0.07 acre per 1,000 residents or 3 sq ft per resident. This leaves the district with one of the lowest ratios of public open space in the city. Apart from Elizabeth Street Garden, the existing open spaces in the district are predominantly paved, highlighting the importance of protecting the garden.

In 2019, the NYC Council voted in favor of destroying Elizabeth Street Garden in order to build a mixed-use building comprising of 123 units of non-permanent senior affordable housing, 4,400 sq ft of luxury retail, and 11,200 sq ft of office space for the participating developer.

Despite over 5,500 letters of support for the garden, +12,000 petition signatures, 5 community board resolutions of support, years of community outcry, and an alternative gravel-filled lot that could provide up to 5x the amount of housing in the same district, the Council deferred to Councilmember Margaret Chin, who supported the proposed development. Sadly, Councilmember Chin and Speaker Corey Johnson have still not visited Elizabeth Street Garden to experience all that the space offers in person.



**As our city continues to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic, the need for community gardens and public green space is clearer now more than ever before.** Along with sustaining park and garden equity across the city, our City Council and City Planning Commission must prioritize the preservation of open green spaces at risk of being destroyed for development. With existing residential and office space vacancies all across the city, there are now additional alternatives to satisfying the need for truly low-income housing. Far too often, New Yorkers are faced with the false dichotomy of community green space **or** housing and development; a divisive approach that falls short of viable long-term city planning.

Achieving a sustainable and more unifying long-term vision starts with setting new precedents. Precedents such as mapping all community gardens for what they are and not as vacant property, establishing reasonable agreements with existing Green Thumb gardens that address all of the needs brought forth by the community stewards, and in our case, saving Elizabeth Street Garden.

As a volunteer-based nonprofit organization, ESG has put forth future plans to protect and preserve Elizabeth Street Garden as a Conservation Land Trust. This model would allow the garden to continue all current operations at **no cost to the City**. With hundreds of free public programs and over 100,000 visitors each year, this would be a huge community achievement. As a Conservation Land Trust, ESG would have the opportunity to increase our ability to produce an abundance of food through the construction of a community greenhouse. While the existing garden beds offer ample space for plant and food growth, a greenhouse would create the opportunity to expand our food production and educational workshops through the winter. Please see our future plans at: <https://www.elizabethstreetgarden.com/future>

With ESG's current lawsuit still pending and the upcoming change in administration, we have a unique opportunity to shift our perspective, adjust our approach, and in fact, achieve more affordable housing and more public open space by using the existing alternatives for housing and saving Elizabeth Street Garden. All of New York's community gardens can and should be at the forefront of our plans for urban agriculture and our pandemic recovery strategy, both of which are interwoven into the health and vitality of this City.

For more information on ESG please visit [www.elizabethstreetgarden.com](http://www.elizabethstreetgarden.com)  
To view ESG's 2019 Annual Report, please visit: [www.elizabethstreetgarden.com/annual-reports](http://www.elizabethstreetgarden.com/annual-reports)

Sincerely,  
Joseph Reiver



**TESTIMONY FOR INTRO 1059 IN SUPPORT OF COMMUNITY GARDENS FOR  
URBAN FARMING AND AGRICULTURE  
City Council Parks Committee Hearing on January 27**

My name is Magali Regis and I'm a New York City resident (East Village) and a member of Campos Community Garden on E 12th Street. I am unable to attend the Hearing on January 27th. Below is my testimony:

If this bill is calling on the Dept. of Parks & Recreation to step up to support our urban farms, this is huge and should be applauded as it looks like the narrative about what gardens do is changing. I would like to believe that long gone are the days when we had to fight to prove that we are worthy of existing, that we are worthy of occupying public land for the public good (remember the animosity against gardens during Giuliani years?). I would like to believe that a new day has come where the work we do is appreciated and valued, that community gardens are no longer seen as marginal spaces for the benefit of a few (i.e. private social clubs) but necessary and important spaces that can nourish the communities they serve.

Community gardens have given NYC residents the opportunity to grow our own food. In low income neighborhoods of food deserts, this has had a positive impact on health, both physical and mental. Growing food is a powerful act. It allows self-sustenance, it allows for a deep connection with the land in the most profound way, where the land sustain and nurture. Community gardens have allowed us to green our urban environments that are so often devoid of nature. Many gardens are located in neighborhoods with no access to parks and those gardens also provide a respite from intensity of urban life.

The city should do all it can to encourage its residents to grow food right in their neighborhood, even expending gardens on rooftops where appropriate (NYCHA buildings for instance), and in city parks (small fenced areas can be set aside for community gardens. I know of such gardens run by local residents in Riverside Park (Harlem), Mc Carren Park (Williamsburg) to name a few. There are also plenty of under-used and neglected parks and city-owned land adjacent to highways (some of the GreenStreets lots for instance may be appropriate if properly surveyed) that could be transformed into vegetable gardens.

All we need is access to four elements: earth, water, air & sunlight, and we do the rest.

Earth/clean soil: Conduct a study to identify city-owned plots of land located in every neighborhood that could be used as gardens / When the land is identified and found to be appropriate, to make it garden-ready, provide clean soil. (The Parks Dept. has good practices of dealing with soil contamination by providing proven soil remediation methods). Furthermore, the gardens could serve as a composting-drop off sites for community residents, and the organic waste used to fertilize the soil.



Water: Provide every garden located in these newly-found spaces with dedicated water lines or rain water-harvesting capabilities as some may not have access to hydrants. Without water, we can't grow food.

Sun: To grow food, we need sunlight, guaranteed available sunlight. Many infill lots that gardens are located in can be challenging with just two hours of sun and are not always adequate to grow food. Lots with good access to sunlight would be desirable.

Air: We need to locate gardens in pollution-free zones to keep the food we grow healthy.

The Parks Dept. can continue to support community gardens by identifying non-utilized public land in every neighborhood that are appropriate to create gardens (those able to meet the four criteria: Soil/Water/Air/Sun) and expand the number of gardens in our city. Waiting lists are long in most gardens; the desire to garden to grow food is strong and growing, and expanding the number of GreenThumb gardens will be environmentally beneficial to the city.

With regards to 'food processing' mentioned in the bill 1059; community gardens are not really places where we process food. We grow it, harvest it, then share it, bring it home to use. Community gardens, I don't believe, 'process' food on site.

Thank you for your attention.

**Magali Regis**

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**From:** emilysmith2010

**Sent:** Tuesday, January 26, 2021 7:58 AM

**To:** Ayala, Diana ; Koo, Peter ; District2 ; Van Bramer, Jimmy ; District7 ; Moya, Francisco ; District37 ; NYC Council Hearings

**Subject:** Parks, Community Gardens Questions

Esteemed council members and, I am having trouble submitting my questions on the website, so I am emailing both questions. 1 about changing city/parks rules and the other about food distribution and onerous restrictions during this emergency.

1) The Citywide Administrative Procedure Act ([CAPA](#)) has legal processes for changing rules governing New York City, including rules of agencies. Italics copied from CAPA below. Why did Green Thumb and NYC Parks not follow any of this process with changing the terms of it's license agreement? No public hearings or comment period were included before hand. Why?

*"a. "Rule" shall include, but not be limited to, any statement or communication which prescribes (i) standards which, if violated, may result in a sanction or penalty; (ii) a fee to be charged by or required to be paid to an agency; (iii) standards for the issuance, suspension or revocation of a license or permit; (iv) standards for any product, material, or service which must be met before manufacture, distribution, sale or use; (v) standards for the procurement of goods and services; (vi) standards for the disposition of public property or property under agency control; or (vii) standards for the granting of loans or other benefits."*

*"1. Each agency shall publish the full text of the proposed rule in the City Record at least thirty days prior to the date set for a public hearing to be held pursuant to the requirements of subdivision e of this section or the final date for receipt of written comments, whichever is earlier. A proposed rule amending an existing rule shall contain in brackets any part to be deleted and shall have underlined or italicized any new part to be added. A proposed rule repealing an existing rule shall contain in brackets the rule to be repealed, or if the full text of the rule was published in the Compilation required to be published pursuant to section one thousand fortyfive, shall give the citation of the rule to be repealed and a summary of its contents. Such published notice shall include a draft statement of the basis and purpose of the proposed rule, the statutory authority, including the particular sections and subdivisions upon which the action is based, the time and place of public hearing, if any, to be held or the reason that a public hearing will not be held,*

*and the final date for receipt of written comments. If the proposed rule was not included in the regulatory agenda, such notice shall also include the reason the rule was not anticipated, as required in subdivision c of section one thousand fortytwo of this chapter."*

2) My second question - why is Green Thumb not more supportive of food distribution during this pandemic and ongoing crisis? Why have they created barriers to food distribution at gardens? From [the Green Thumb website](#), I quote "**NYC Parks Requirements:** For gardens on NYC Parks property, only food produced on-site can be sold, and only to support the continued operation of the garden, with the exception that gardens can also serve as pick-up locations for Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) programs. Prepared meals and processed foods may not be distributed at gardens." Why the ban on prepared meals and processed foods to be distributed? Don't you trust gardeners to work with partners to do this properly and to serve our communities?

Thank you  
Emily

Thank you for the chance to provide written testimony regarding “The State of Community Gardens and Urban Agriculture and Int. No. 1059 A Local Law in relation to a report on community garden food processing and agriculture.

My name is John Dorer and I’ve been a West Harlem resident for over 20 years.

I’ve been involved with Jenny’s garden on a regular basis for the past couple of years. My involvement has been primarily with repairing and building garden boxes and the compost bins.

We’ve seen a huge increase in the number of local residents bringing their weekly compost to our garden.

As a result we have been working hard turning the bins, and repairing and building new bins.

The finished compost is used in both garden beds and surrounding parkland to enhance the soil.

The benefits?

Enhanced, nourished soil for city gardens, trees and plants to flourish.

The kitchen scraps used to create the compost are diverted from the waste stream. This means the city uses fewer resources to pick and ship waste to landfills.

Residents have a sense of community and attachment with the park when they compost.

Investment in city gardens has many tangible and intangible positive returns:

Strong community compost programs reduce the waste stream, reduce department of sanitation costs, help with rodent control, and provide mental health benefits through beautifying local communities.

**A Local Law in relation to a report on community garden food processing and agriculture**

Thank you for taking my testimony into account.

My name is Shawn Schoonmaker and I am a born and raised Harlem Resident of 60 years.

I have seen the changes good and bad since the 60's.

I am one of the stewards of the compost site at Harlem's Jenny's Garden.

With community support, we have redirected large amounts of food scraps which enriches the soil and lessens the carbon footprint.

We are a group of several who share the goal of beautifying through community service and the bonding which it naturally promotes.

Jenny's Garden harvest organic and pesticide free vegetables for a soup kitchen and offers volunteer spots for those wanting to give back.

Community gardens have provided NYC residents an opportunity to be a part of their neighborhood's positive growth.

We at Jenny's Garden are grateful for this wonderful opportunity to clean up the surrounding areas and to add toward community development alongside our neighbors.



Legislation Text

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**File #:** Int 1059-2018, **Version:** \*

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Int. No. 1059

By Council Members Ayala and Rosenthal

A Local Law in relation to a report on community garden food processing and agriculture

Be it enacted by the Council as follows:

Section 1. The department of parks and recreation shall conduct a study on the prevalence of urban farming and agriculture and submit a report with the findings of such study to the mayor and the speaker of the council within six months of the effective date of this local law. Such report shall include, but not be limited to:

1. The number of community gardens under the jurisdiction of the department of parks and recreation presently engaged in farming or food processing;
2. The amount and types of foods produced by such gardens;
3. Information on the types of equipment used by such gardens for agricultural purposes, including, but not limited to, greenhouses, hydroponic systems, food processing systems and composting systems;
4. A list of the resources provided by the department of parks and recreation and other government agencies to aid in farming and food processing;
5. Information on the availability of potential sites throughout the city that could be developed for urban agricultural purposes;
6. Information on the feasibility and costs associated with expanding the number of farmers markets operating on department of parks and recreation property and the number of community gardens that engage in urban agriculture; and
7. Recommendations on how the city can provide more technical assistance and financial resources to

expand the number of community gardens that engage urban agriculture.

§ 2. This local law takes effect 90 days after it becomes law.

KS  
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2/27/18 5:00PM