

CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

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December 3, 2015
Start: 1:06 p.m.
Recess: 3:07 p.m.

HELD AT: 250 Broadway - Committee Room
14th Fl

B E F O R E: MARIA DEL CARMEN ARROYO
Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS: Annabel Palma
Elizabeth S. Crowley
Andy L. King
Vanessa L. Gibson
Alan N. Maisel
Helen K. Rosenthal

A P P E A R A N C E S (CONTINUED)

Barbara Turk, Director of Food Policy
Office of Deputy Mayor for Health & Human Services

Carlos Martinez, Director
Green Thumb Program
NYC Department of Parks and Recreation

Paula Segal, Director
596 Acres

Aresh Javadi
Community Gardens Activist
New York City Community Garden Coalition

Todd Corig

David Vigil, Project Director
East New York Farms

Sarah Hobel, Executive Director
Horticultural Society of New York

2 [sound check, pause]

3 CHAIRPERSON ARROYO: Um, you always leave
4 this point out, right. [pause]

5 [gavel]

6 CHAIRPERSON ARROYO: Good afternoon,
7 everyone. Thank you for joining us. My name is
8 Maria Del Carmen Arroyo. I chair the Committee on
9 Community Development, and I want to thank my
10 colleagues and the staff for coming together today
11 for this hearing. The hearing today will provide the
12 committee an opportunity to hearing legislation that
13 addresses the future of the city's community gardens
14 and the urban farming community at large. There are
15 over 700 or so urban gardening sites throughout the
16 city located in diverse areas in the city including
17 private farms. The Parks Department to their credit
18 has run the Green Thumb Program since the 1970s to
19 rehabilitate vacant lots and provide important
20 resources and support to the city's many community
21 gardens. The committee commends the work undertaken
22 by the Green Thumb Program, but we acknowledge that
23 more can be done to integrate the city's numerous
24 garden spaces particularly those outside the
25 jurisdiction of the Parks Department.

2 The bill we will hear today would create,
3 and the legislation would create a body to fill a
4 role very desperately needed in the city, the Urban
5 Agricultural Advisory Board as proposed by Intro 838
6 would provide a multi-agency approach to addressing--
7 He did double-sided. That's why it doesn't make
8 sense. Okay. [laughs] So I'm going to start all
9 over again, and since this is my last hearing I'm
10 just going to take the privilege of the chair.
11 [laughs] And for those of you are--who do not know,
12 I announced my resignation from the City Council
13 effective the end of this month. That's all right.
14 They'll be fine, you know. [laughs] So this is
15 technically my last hearing as the committee chair,
16 and I have to say that I have had the privilege to
17 serve with some incredible individuals that serve on
18 this body, but more importantly the people in the
19 public who come here to help us hear what the issues
20 are, and inform us and help us figure out how to deal
21 with some--what could be sometimes very complicated
22 situations. So, I want to thank you all for that
23 because you have all made me a lot smarter than I was
24 when I got here. I think we can all say that about
25 our public and the advocates in the community. So

2 good afternoon. My name is Maria Del Carmen Arroyo,
3 and I chair the Committee on Community Development.
4 I would like to thank my fellow committee members and
5 Council staff for coming together to hold this
6 hearing. Today's hearing will provide the committee
7 with an opportunity to hearing legislation that
8 addresses the future of the city's community gardens.
9 There are over 700 urban gardening sites throughout
10 the city located in diverse areas including private
11 farms, schools, public housing developments, vacant
12 lots, rooftops, and simply back yards. My mom has a
13 garden in her back yard. The majority of these
14 gardens are small. Most are under 5,000 square feet,
15 but the impact they have upon local communities is
16 often immense. Urban agriculturalists list and sell
17 their food to community supported agricultural
18 program, institutional farms, teach students on how
19 to use practical skills related to urban farming, and
20 vibrant community gardens provide a respite from city
21 life by supplying green space that can be tended and
22 developed by our local residents.

23 The Parks Department has run the Green
24 Thumb Program since the 1970s to rehabilitate vacant
25 lots and provide important resources and support to

2 the city's many community gardens. The committee
3 commends the work undertaken by the Green Thumb
4 Program, but acknowledges that more can be done to
5 integrate the city's numerous garden spaces,
6 particularly those outside the jurisdictions of the
7 Parks Department. The bill before the committee
8 today would create a body to fill that role. The
9 Urban Agricultural Advisory Board proposed by Intro
10 838 would provide a multi-agency approach to
11 addressing the many issues related to urban farming.
12 The proposed board would give community gardens a
13 voice regarding the city's urban agricultural
14 policies along with the Departments of Youth and
15 Community Development. And, we often forget that
16 youth and community development has got a very strong
17 community development component. It's not just about
18 youth and after school programs. Environmental
19 Protection, DEP, Housing Preservation and
20 Development, HPD, the Parks Department, Small
21 Business Services, City Planning and the Mayor's
22 Office of Long-Term Planning and Sustainability. And
23 with all of those combined I think we can create a
24 body that's very strong to oversee and help us plan
25 the future of these sites in our communities. The

2 role of this board would be to provide a forum to
3 consult and advise the Mayor and the city agencies on
4 issues relating to urban agricultural in the city
5 such as determining new potential production sites,
6 identifying impediments to local food production, and
7 the modification or expansion of urban agricultural
8 training programs. We hope this hearing, and I'm
9 sure that it will provide the Council, the
10 Administration and advocates an opportunity to
11 discuss ways to expand the role of the city's
12 community gardens, and to determine whether the board
13 proposed by Intro 838 would be useful to--a useful
14 tool for developing the city's urban agricultural
15 sector.

16 I want to take a moment to thank the
17 committee staff for making me sound so smart all the
18 time. The committee counsel to my left, Alex
19 Paulenoff. Thank you for working so closely, and for
20 having such an incredible passion for the subject
21 that we're going to discuss today. It was his idea,
22 by the way [laughs] to have this hearing. The Jose
23 Conde, who's the Policy Analyst always sitting in the
24 corner in the back and Jessica Dobson Ackerman who is
25 the Policy Analyst for the committee. Thank you all

2 for your work, and your support in my tenure as
3 committee chair. With that said, I want to turn it
4 over finally to the prime sponsor of Intro 838,
5 Council Member Corey Johnson.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER JOHNSON: Thank you, Madam
7 Chair. It's--it's good to see you and I am, as you
8 know, in complete denial that you are leaving the
9 Council. You have been such a god friend in my two
10 years in the Council. You are my predecessor
11 chairing the Health Committee, and did an incredible
12 job in that vain. In your 11 years of service on the
13 Council you have not just been an incredibly forceful
14 advocate on legislature, you've been a champion for
15 your community, and your voice is going to be missed
16 here in this legislative body, and it's been such a
17 privilege serving with you these past two years. So
18 I'm going to miss you. I want to welcome the
19 Administration and advocates to what I hope will be a
20 fruitful conversation, no pun intended, and just the
21 first of many. I know that there are many community
22 members and volunteers who could not be present
23 today, and I am committed to continuing this
24 engagement in other settings, in other forums to
25 ensure that the great diversity of voices out there

2 have an opportunity to contribute and be part of this
3 conversation as this legislation hopefully moves
4 forward. I want to thank the Administration for
5 taking today seriously, and bringing many of the
6 relevant agencies and offices to this hearing so that
7 we can address the multitude of issues that we
8 encounter in looking at these different programs. In
9 discussing the specifics of the programs, I'm--I'm a
10 little disappointed that some of the very relevant
11 government entities involved in some specific
12 problems faced by those in attendance here today may
13 not be represented. I also want to note that despite
14 my deep, deep, deep appreciation of the yeoman's work
15 today being performed by Barbara Turk, the very able
16 and wonderful Director of the Mayor's Office of Food
17 Policy, I am not entirely sure--and that's what this
18 legislative process is about--that the natural home
19 for this potential advisory board is in your office.
20 It might be. It might not be. I'm not sure, and I
21 think that's something that we'll have to work on
22 together, and figure out as we move forward given
23 that there are many shapes and innovations that
24 constitute this field. And, it is that desire for
25 whatever the appropriate space to tackle these issues

2 that brings us together here today. I want to keep
3 my comments brief because we are really here today to
4 hear from all of you to bring light to this policy
5 area, and have a public conversation. But, I want to
6 very quickly extol some of the virtues of urban
7 agriculture, which I think the chair spelled out very
8 well. And I look forward to you all teaching me more
9 about the area, and I know that we have to create
10 space both physical and policy space to foster the
11 conversation, and to work through some of the barriers
12 that you all currently face. Urban agriculture needs
13 to be a part of New York City's future so that we can
14 provide residents with nutritional food at low cost
15 so that we can strengthen the commitment to the
16 environment and to our residents, farmers and
17 workforce. And so, that we can promote
18 sustainability and resiliency, and give our
19 communities useful, practical and beautiful green
20 space for public use, for education and for urban
21 beauty. I want to close with an apology that I'm
22 going to have to step out at various points in this
23 hearing because I have another committee hearing that
24 I have to go check in at, and be at for a few
25 moments, but I'll be coming back. And, I want to

2 just let you know that I am deeply grateful for you
3 all being here today. I want to thank the staff as
4 well. I want to thank Jose Conde. I especially want
5 to thank the committee counsel Alex Paulenoff who
6 really worked closely with my Legislative Director
7 Louis Cholden Brown on this piece of legislation, and
8 as the Chair said, I know Alex has been very
9 passionate about this as has Louis, and that's what
10 has actually gotten us to today. So, thank you,
11 Madam Chair. I'm not going to acknowledge this is
12 your last committee hearing. It's too upsetting, but
13 I look forward to a good conversation today. Thank
14 you very much.

15 CHAIRPERSON ARROYO: Thank you, Council
16 Member and, you know, the--the wisest words that I
17 can impart on you is that *One Monkey Don't Stop, No*
18 *Show*. Okay, so--[laughs]. I want to acknowledge my
19 colleagues who are present from the committee,
20 Council Member Annabel Palma, Council Member Andy
21 King. You heard from Council Member Johnson and--and
22 Council Member Brad Lander. Members have competing
23 hearings so they'll come in and out, and--but we'll
24 be here to listen to everything everybody has to say.
25 I want to welcome to today's--Barbara Turk, Deputy

2 Mayor for Health and Human Services. I have Carlos
3 Martinez, New York City Parks Department, right?

4 CARLOS MARTINEZ: [off mic] Yes.

5 LEGAL COUNSEL: [off mic] She's in that
6 office, but that's not her title.

7 CHAIRPERSON ARROYO: All right, I'm
8 reading Deputy Mayor on here. I read what I'm given.
9 [laughs] So maybe it's a prediction. Who knows.
10 [laughs] I think he does need a deputy mayor to help
11 him in Human Services at this point, but somebody
12 wrote that on here. So, I read. I mean no offense
13 to anyone. Carlos Martinez from Central Office at
14 New York City Parks Department, and we also have
15 Gustavo Perez who is from the New York City
16 Department of Small Business Services. I called
17 three names. I see only two people, and I'm pretty
18 smart to know that somebody is missing. Well come
19 up. Either that or I'll call you. Okay. Okay. I
20 think we're supposed to like swear you guys in or
21 something, and that counsel will do that.

22 LEGAL COUNSEL: Please raise your right
23 hand. Do you swear or affirm to tell the truth, the
24 whole truth, and nothing but the truth in your
25 testimony before the committee today?

2 BARBARA TURK: [off mic] I do.

3 CARLOS MARTINEZ: [off mic] I do.

4 LEGAL COUNSEL: Thank you.

5 CHAIRPERSON ARROYO: Okay, you're on.

6 Identify yourselves for the record when you speak,
7 and if you forget I'll remind you.

8 BARBARA TURK: This is on, right? Okay,
9 great. Thank you. So good afternoon. My name is
10 Barbara Turk. I am the Director of Food Policy--I
11 know--I'm the Director of Food Policy, which reports
12 to the Deputy Mayor for Health and Human Services.
13 So that's what's happening there, and I want to thank
14 you Chair Arroyo. I want to add my congratulations
15 and thanks to you for your many years of service. I
16 don't know you as well as many people you serve with
17 but I certainly know you you've got a reputation in
18 the community and among many leaders in the--in New
19 York City, and so we thank you for your service. I
20 imagine that much of it is so--[laughs]. I'd like to
21 thank members of the Committee on Community
22 Development and also, of course, the passionate staff
23 for prepare--for preparing this hearing today, and I
24 look forward to this discussion and, of course,
25 discussions to come. I'm joined here, as you know,

2 by Carlos Martinez. Mr. Martinez is the Deputy
3 Director of Green Thumb at the Department of Parks
4 and Recreation. Huh? Yes, we do, and we're about to
5 have a love fest right now for Green Thumb. [laughs]
6 We're about to have an urban agricultural love fest.
7 So I would like to talk to you a little about what
8 we're--we're doing in the city. Welcome Council
9 Member Rosenthal. I'm here to highlight the
10 important role of urban agriculture in our city as
11 well as the value that we re--we--we place in the
12 Administration on community gardens. Urban
13 agriculture produces a small portion of the food in
14 our city, but it actually plays a very large role and
15 a critical role in communities to whom access to
16 affordable fresh food is limited. Urban farming
17 largely takes place at community run gardens, almost
18 entirely at community run gardens. It provides
19 opportunities for residents to connect with nature,
20 improve the environment, grow food, beautify public
21 open space, learn about growing and preparing that
22 food, and form lasting intergenerational
23 relationships and social bonds with these
24 communities. It provides opportunities for residents
25 to connect with nature, improve the environment,

2 grown food, beautify public open space, learn about
3 growing and preparing that food, and form lasting
4 intergenerational relationships and social bonds
5 within these communities. The city's handful of
6 commercial farms support our environmental goals and
7 offer an economic development opportunity within the
8 local food production sector. Many of our city's
9 community programs, such as after school sites and
10 school--and senior centers have gardens, and offer
11 educational programs about farming, the environment
12 and good food. Because of the significant value that
13 urban agriculture has for New York City's
14 communities, the city offers a number of initiatives
15 and resources through many different agencies, as you
16 know, to community gardeners and urban farmers.
17 These programs span these range of agencies and
18 provide material supported assistance to New Yorkers
19 in starting and maintaining gardens and farms in
20 their neighborhoods.

21 I'm going start by talking about Green
22 Thumb. Green Thumb is a program of the Department of
23 Parks and Recreation, and it's the nation's largest
24 urban gardening program by far. Green Thumb provides
25 technical assistance and material support to 544

2 community gardens, 545 school gardens, and there are
3 over 20,000 garden members throughout the city. In
4 fact, community gardens are situated over 32 acres
5 of land in the city. Green Thumb was created in
6 response to the city's financial crisis in the 1970s.
7 As many of you know when private owners stopped
8 paying their property taxes in some cases and
9 surrendered their land to the city, leaving the city
10 with more land but fewer dollars with which to
11 maintain it. The majority of Green Thumb gardens
12 were derelict vacant lots renovated by volunteers.
13 Since 1978, Green Thumb gardeners have successfully
14 transformed vacant, unattractive, unsafe plots of
15 public and private land into thriving gardens
16 throughout the five boroughs. These community
17 gardens are now managed by neighborhood residents.
18 They provide air quality, biodiversity and the
19 wellbeing of residents. They improve the--I'm sorry,
20 they improve the air quality, biodiversity and the
21 wellbeing of residents. Volunteer gardeners are the
22 backbone of this program, and are of diverse ages,
23 backgrounds and abilities. Community gardens provide
24 much needed green and open space to neighborhoods and
25 to schools, and are used to promote environmental

2 education, nurture intergenerational and
3 intercultural relationships, and to transform
4 otherwise unused open space. Green Thumb gardens are
5 hubs of neighborhood pride. They provide a myriad of
6 environment, economic and social benefits to the
7 neighborhoods in which they thrive. Some are full-
8 fledged farms, while others are more passive, passive
9 in the planning sense, that word, passive open
10 spaces. The active garden sites play an important
11 role in community building. They serve as anchors
12 for local neighborhoods while making the city safer,
13 healthier and cleaner. The Green Thumb program works
14 directly with the neighborhood residents in
15 stewarding community gardens. The program provides
16 supplies, including tools, lumber, mulch, compost,
17 safe soils and provides technical assistance
18 including educational workshops, which are held every
19 month of the year on topics ranging from gardening
20 basics to more advanced farming techniques and
21 community organizing. Green Thumb also works with
22 local gardeners on important environmental
23 initiatives such as Caltrain rainwater, and other
24 green infrastructural projects. Green Thumb partners
25 with citywide organizations that many of us are

2 familiar with, the New York Restoration Project, New
3 York Botanical Garden, Partnership for Parks, ASPCA,
4 Citizens Committee for New York City and the Shape Up
5 Program to bring engaging programming and volunteer
6 activities into our community gardens. In
7 partnership with New York City Service last year
8 Green Thumb launched a new Youth Leadership Council
9 to build the next generation of leaders for our
10 community gardens. Gardens have a small but critical
11 role in urban agricultural food production. Although
12 the size of Green Thumb varies from 2,500 square feet
13 to three acres, in many of the gardens at least 50% of
14 the garden is devoted to food production. Green
15 Thumb provides workshops in addressing issues
16 directly related to food production, preservation and
17 marketing as well as healthy eating and nutrition.
18 In partnership with Just Food, Grow New York City and
19 others, Green Thumb has offered workshops on
20 extending the harvest season, on canning and
21 preserving foods, raising chickens for egg
22 production, seed saving, soil health, rainwater
23 harvesting and other important urban agriculture
24 topics. In recognition of the increasing interest and
25 demand for access to fresh produce, Green Thumb is

2 helping to increase access to fresh local produce in
3 underserved areas by supporting the creation of new
4 farmers markets at gardens, and also helping
5 volunteer gardeners to develop small scale
6 entrepreneurship programs most often supported and
7 staffed by young people.

8 Another significant effort is the effort
9 of Grow to Learn New York City. It's an initiative
10 of Grow New York City in partnership with Green Thumb
11 and the Department of Education, and it has the
12 mission to inspire, facilitate and promote the
13 creation of a school garden in every public school in
14 New York City. Schools work directly with Grow to
15 Learn New York City to ensure that their garden
16 programs are sustainable, and responsive to their
17 communities, and transformative for student learning
18 in the cafeteria, the classroom and beyond. Grow to
19 Learn New York City provides the material and
20 financial support to get schools growing, provides
21 technical and professional development support to
22 school gardeners, and makes the scale of New York
23 City's school gardening efforts management by
24 bringing together citywide partnerships and resources
25 into one convenient central location. Since

2 launching in February 2011, 545 out of approximately
3 1,800 New York City schools have registered garden
4 projects with Grow to Learn. The New York City
5 Housing Authority also has a very, very significant
6 role to play here. Their gardening and greening
7 program serves low and moderate income residents
8 across New York City's 320-acre public housing
9 developments. Established in 1963, the 52-year-old
10 program provides year-round assistance to thousands
11 of residents and partners that operate senior
12 community and daycare centers. In 2015, Gardening
13 and Greening supported over 700 gardens, roughly half
14 of which are food producing and three urban farms,
15 each of which are managed by local community
16 partners. The program's work is guided by Next
17 Generation NYCHA, which is a strategic plan that
18 includes strategies to improve sustainability, reduce
19 the carbon footprint of the Authority, and increase
20 workforce opportunities for NYCHA residents. Further
21 supporting the growth of Garden and Greening in
22 public housing communities the City's One NYC Plan
23 includes a commitment to expand the scale of urban
24 farming ventures, and food producing gardens at NYCHA
25 developments. The new farms are expected to produce

2 approximately four tons of fresh produce and engage
3 an estimated 500 community residents in programming
4 each year while offering a venue for training and
5 service for young NYCHA residents in collaboration
6 with the organization Green City Force. We also have
7 a green infrastructure program that's a multi-agency
8 effort led by the Department of Environmental
9 Protection that designs and constructs and maintains
10 a variety of sustainable green infrastructure
11 practices such as green roofs, rain gardens, and
12 right-of-way bioswales on city-owned property such as
13 streets, sidewalks, schools and public housing.
14 Green infrastructure practices are designed and
15 constructed to manage storm water runoff when it
16 rains in order to prevent storm water runoff from
17 entering the city sewer systems. Green
18 infrastructure also makes the city more sustainable
19 by improving air quality, reducing temperatures in
20 hot summer months, and beautifying neighborhoods.
21 The green infrastructure program at DEP provides
22 funding for the design and construction of
23 sustainable storm water management practices on
24 private properties. Green infrastructure projects
25 can be rain gardens, permeable pavements and green

2 roofs including rooftop farms and other projects with
3 edible plants. For example, in 2011, Lenox Hill
4 Neighborhood House received a grant to build a 2,400
5 square foot green roof. The site grows edible plants
6 including herbs, greens, vines and tubers, and the
7 produce goes to Lenox Hill clients.

8 I'd also like to talk about two more
9 things before I end. One is to talk about zoning for
10 rooftop farms. This is a question we get a lot--a
11 lot of interest in rooftop farms obviously. In 2012,
12 the Department of City Planning proposed and the City
13 Council adopted the Zone Green Text Amendment, which
14 reflected recommendations to amend city regulations
15 to promote green buildings. This included a proposal
16 to allow greenhouses to be sited on top of
17 industrial, commercial, and school buildings to
18 enable year-round local food production and provide
19 educational opportunities. The Zoning Text now
20 allows a greenhouse to be exempt from floor area and
21 height limits by certification of the Chair of the
22 City Planning Commission. Greenhouses must be
23 located on top a building that does not contain
24 residences or sleeping accommodations. They must not
25 exceed 25 feet in height, must be set back six feet

2 from the roof edge, and must include practical
3 measures to limit water consumption. Applications
4 for certification for rooftop greenhouses must be
5 delivered to the affected community board when filed.
6 So there is a process for that. And finally, we're
7 happy to share that to further a new initiative of
8 the Mayor's Office called Building Healthy
9 Communities, which has an urban ag component, and
10 this was--We have-- There was an article in today's
11 *Wall Street Journal*, which serves as the announcement
12 for this program. To further support the development
13 of urban agriculture and provide resources for
14 communities where access to healthy food is limited,
15 we're launching this initiative, which is a multi-
16 million dollar public project partnership committed
17 to improving physical health, mental health, and the
18 quality of life in New York City's neighborhoods.
19 The initiative will be focused on three main goals.
20 The first is increasing access to healthy food. The
21 second is increasing opportunities for physical
22 activity, and the third is promoting public safety.
23 The initiative includes increase resources for food
24 producing urban farms, gardens and school gardens,
25 and assistance with establishing food market. The

2 program will also work to activate open space by
3 establishing opportunities for adults and children to
4 walk, run, bike and play. Resources will be focused
5 on 12 priority neighborhoods. They are Bed-Stuy,
6 Brownsville, Canarsie, Central Harlem, Corona, East
7 Harlem, Flushing, Hunts Point, Mariner's Harbor,
8 Morrisania, Mott Haven, and Stapleton. The program
9 will leverage existing city funded initiatives such
10 as the \$285 million commitment to improving 67 of the
11 city's neediest public parks through this--through
12 the CPI, the Community Parks Initiative, and will
13 work with generous private partners including the
14 Laurie M. Tisch Illumination Fund, which has been so
15 supportive of our work on food.

16 So in closing, I want to say that New
17 York City is a national and global leader on urban
18 agriculture and greatly values our volunteer
19 gardeners and the impact that they have in our
20 communities. We can't say enough about this--the
21 work that they do, and the support and the efforts
22 of--of all of the agencies that work to support those
23 gardeners. As to Intro 838, we appreciate the
24 Council's interest in this subject, which involves,
25 as you know, several different agency stakeholders

2 who each perform important roles in furthering urban
3 agricultural that we share with this Council. We
4 welcome the opportunity to discuss with you whether
5 an advisory board should be structured in the way it
6 is proposed in the legislation, and other issues that
7 could impact on the efficacy of such a board. Thank
8 you, and we're happy to answer your questions.

9 CHAIRPERSON ARROYO: Anyone else
10 providing testimony?

11 BARBARA TURK: No.

12 CHAIRPERSON ARROYO: Okay, um, but
13 they're not here for just decoration are they?

14 BARBARA TURK: No, of course not.
15 [laughter] They're here--they're here--they're here
16 to--

17 CHAIRPERSON ARROYO: [interposing] Okay.

18 BARBARA TURK: --represent all those
19 wonderful programs that I talked about.

20 CHAIRPERSON ARROYO: Okay, and I think
21 one of the things that we need to state, I think it
22 was an oversight on our part not to include NYCHA in
23 this conversation given that the city relies so
24 strongly on the space that's available in the public
25 development.

2 BARBARA TURK: Uh-huh.

3 CHAIRPERSON ARROYO: So, for that we
4 apologize.

5 BARBARA TURK: [interposing] NYCHA is
6 represented.

7 CHAIRPERSON ARROYO: That's nice.

8 BARBARA TURK: NYCHA is represented.

9 CHAIRPERSON ARROYO: They are, but
10 they're not at the table, and he's not going to say
11 anything, right? Are you?

12 BARBARA TURK: If you ask a question
13 about NYCHA, anybody who's present here--

14 CHAIRPERSON ARROYO: [interposing] Okay.

15 BARBARA TURK: --where I can't answer
16 your question immediately, I will ask that person to
17 come to the table.

18 CHAIRPERSON ARROYO: [interposing] Okay,
19 very good that's fair. So, um--

20 BARBARA TURK: That's how we're--what
21 we're going to do, and you can swear them in and do
22 whatever you want to do.

23 CHAIRPERSON ARROYO: You are great.

24 [laughs] So, um, so I have a couple of questions,
25 but I'm going to give, um, the primary sponsor of the

2 legislation an opportunity to pose some questions,
3 and then we'll go to the members of the committee.

4 BARBARA TURK: Okay.

5 CHAIRPERSON ARROYO: And we welcome
6 Council Member Rosenthal, a member of the committee.
7 Thank you for joining us.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER JOHNSON: Thank you, Madam
9 Chair. Thank you, Barbara, for your testimony today,
10 and I learned a lot from what you detailed and
11 outlined, and I think it's very, very exciting, and I
12 look forward to the Council working in partnership
13 with the Administration on how we can improve these
14 programs, and get support to the community gardeners,
15 as you said are really doing an enormous and
16 important amount of work throughout the city. Your
17 testimony was great, and there was two sentences on
18 the piece of legislation.

19 BARBARA TURK: [interposing] Uh-huh.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER JOHNSON: Does the
21 Administration believe that the establishment of an
22 urban agricultural advisory board would be a useful
23 tool in facilitating the expansion of the urban
24 agriculture sector?

2 BARBARA TURK: I think we want--I think
3 we would like to talk to you about how you want to
4 achieve that goal, which is basically what my--my
5 statement is. I think there's openness to having a
6 conversation about this, and how it could be most
7 effective.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER JOHNSON: Are you saying--
9 so does that mean that you think a potential advisory
10 board is an appropriate way of doing it?

11 BARBARA TURK: No, it's an appropriate
12 subject for conversation absolutely.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER JOHNSON: Are you a
14 lawyer?

15 BARBARA TURK: I'm not.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER JOHNSON: [laughter]
17 You're speaking like one.

18 BARBARA TURK: I'm not.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER JOHNSON: Um, [coughs]--

20 BARBARA TURK: No, we're going to talk to
21 you about an advisory board, but I don't think this
22 is the forum--

23 COUNCIL MEMBER JOHNSON: [interposing]
24 But that's what the--but that's--but that's what the
25 hearing is for.

2 BARBARA TURK: Yes, I know.

3 COUNCIL MEMBER JOHNSON: That's why we
4 have hearings on legislation.

5 BARBARA TURK: Yeah.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER JOHNSON: That's what
7 legislation is about.

8 BARBARA TURK: Yeah.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER JOHNSON: So the public is
10 here--

11 BARBARA TURK: [interposing] So I would
12 like to--

13 COUNCIL MEMBER JOHNSON: --the public is
14 watching on TV, and that is why--and that is why we
15 have this to--

16 BARBARA TURK: [interposing] Yeah.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER JOHNSON: --to have these
18 conversations and open. I'm always happy to
19 negotiate with the Administration--

20 BARBARA TURK: [interposing] So--so tell
21 me what--

22 COUNCIL MEMBER JOHNSON: --and to have
23 these conversations about--

24 BARBARA TURK: --what your question is.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER JOHNSON: My question is,
3 is the Administration opposed to there being an
4 actual advisory board?

5 BARBARA TURK: Are we--so here's my--if I
6 can ask you a question.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER JOHNSON: Yes.

8 BARBARA TURK: As written, I don't think
9 this is going to be--this is going to work.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER JOHNSON: Okay.

11 CHAIRPERSON ARROYO: We don't usually do
12 the questions in that direction.

13 BARBARA TURK: I know. So I just--so I
14 just--I just made a statement, Madam Chair, which was
15 the way you've written this I don't think it's going
16 to work to your--to what I think your ends are, and--

17 CHAIRPERSON ARROYO: [interposing] Okay,
18 do--

19 BARBARA TURK: --the Administration is
20 happy to work with you to make a bill that would
21 work.

22 CHAIRPERSON ARROYO: Okay, so, um--

23 BARBARA TURK: [interposing] I don't know
24 how that--that's--

2 CHAIRPERSON ARROYO: So let me ask a more
3 direct question. What components of the legislation
4 as written are troubling to the Administration to
5 make you believe it will not work?

6 BARBARA TURK: I think we need to talk
7 about who chairs the--who chairs it.

8 CHAIRPERSON ARROYO: That's it?

9 BARBARA TURK: I think that's--that's
10 one--that's the main think we need to do, and then
11 the other thing we need to do, which is missing here
12 for me is that--I'm speaking now for myself--is we
13 need to be very, very clear about what the purpose
14 is, which is not included in the legislation.
15 There's no preamble that says what the task and goals
16 of this advisory board, and I think we should sit
17 down together rather than me dictating to you what I
18 think they are because we are since about working
19 with you--

20 CHAIRPERSON ARROYO: [interposing] That's
21 fair.

22 BARBARA TURK: --on this.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER JOHNSON: This is--this is
24 very helpful.

25 BARBARA TURK: Yes.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER JOHNSON: And this is
3 exactly what I was looking for.

4 BARBARA TURK: Okay, good.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER JOHNSON: And so, I'm
6 absolutely--

7 BARBARA TURK: [interposing] Yes.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER JOHNSON: --perfectly
9 happy to have conversations about what the
10 composition of a board should be, who should chair
11 the board--

12 BARBARA TURK: [interposing] Yes.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER JOHNSON: --what the
14 mission statement of the board should be.

15 BARBARA TURK: [interposing] That's
16 correct.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER JOHNSON: Where--what
18 agency it should be staffed in. Those are all things
19 I'm perfectly open on, and flexible on in trying to
20 achieve shared goals from the Council's side--

21 BARBARA TURK: [interposing] Uh-huh.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER JOHNSON: --and why we
23 drafted this legislation. And from an administrative
24 and policy-oriented position of--of where the
25 administration thinks is the best fit. So I'm

2 totally open on that. Did--is there any expectation
3 or any projection on if we were to appoint a board,
4 at least I guess it depends on what the mission of
5 the board is, on what costs associated would be? I
6 mean. I mean we aren't looking to actually shackle
7 the city financially in doing this. We wanted to use
8 the appropriate stakeholders across city agencies to
9 come together and have conversations and do a report.
10 But, we weren't looking to have a huge financial
11 impact here.

12 BARBARA TURK: This will have to be
13 staffed.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER JOHNSON: Okay, you don't
15 think our current resources in particular agencies
16 could on the work that they're already doing come
17 together and do it?

18 BARBARA TURK: I think that's a topic we
19 need to discuss.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER JOHNSON: Okay.

21 BARBARA TURK: I think that's--that's
22 connected to the chair question.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER JOHNSON: Okay. So I only
24 have a couple more questions, and then I want to turn
25 it back over to the chair. In your testimony,

2 Barbara, you talked about, which is exciting, the
3 different neighborhoods throughout all five boroughs
4 where these type of programs are taking place. It
5 would be helping, and I'm sure you don't have it
6 exactly with you today, but if you could or the
7 administration could provide the Council with a
8 breakdown across Council districts--

9 BARBARA TURK: [interposing] Uh-huh.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER JOHNSON: --of where the
11 existing agricultural sites are located. I'm sure
12 that information--

13 BARBARA TURK: It exists.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER JOHNSON: Yeah.

15 BARBARA TURK: So maybe, Carlos, do you
16 want to talk about how easy it is to access this?

17 CARLOS MARTINEZ: Good afternoon. My
18 name is Carlos Martinez, and the New York Director of
19 Green Thumb. I do have the breakdown numbers by
20 Green Thumb gardens only, by--by borough. In
21 Brooklyn we have 237. In Manhattan we have 149. In
22 Queens we have 35. In Staten Island we have eight.
23 In the Bronx we have 116.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER JOHNSON: Great, and it
25 would be helpful if--if you don't have that

2 information that if you guys can go back and actually
3 organize it by council district that would be helpful
4 for us.

5 CARLOS MARTINEZ: Will do.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER JOHNSON: Great. Thank
7 you.

8 BARBARA TURK: There is a searchable map
9 on the Green Thumb website.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER JOHNSON: Great.

11 BARBARA TURK: And then the NYCHA farms--

12 CHAIRPERSON ARROYO: [interposing] So
13 does that mean you won't go back and bring it back to
14 us by council district?

15 BARBARA TURK: No, I'm just--I'm just
16 adding to his answer.

17 CHAIRPERSON ARROYO: Okay.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER JOHNSON: You were saying,
19 Barbara, you said NYCHA.

20 BARBARA TURK: I'm being--yes. NYCHA
21 there are three farms. We talked about there being
22 three farms. One is the Frederick Douglas House.
23 The other is Red Hook Houses in Brooklyn, and the
24 third is recently opened at Pink Houses by East New
25 York Friends, and the--the Greening and Gardening

2 Programs is putting together information on all of
3 their locations so that people can access that, too.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER JOHNSON: So--

5 BARBARA TURK: [interposing] So all of
6 those things are--are possible.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER JOHNSON: Great. And as
8 was said in I believe your testimony and also the
9 Chair's opening is that many of these community
10 gardens came into existence as a way to beautify
11 neighborhoods during the 1970s because of the fiscal
12 crisis where property owners couldn't pay their taxes
13 and these empty or abandoned lots came into city
14 ownership and receivership. Does the city currently
15 verify whether individual community gardens have
16 active members?

17 CARLOS MARTINEZ: We do have that
18 information in our database.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER JOHNSON: And so if
20 there's--if there's a particular plot of land that
21 for whatever reason the--the person who had been for
22 years--I can think of a spot in Hells Kitchen
23 actually in my district where there was a woman who
24 for 30 years was really the--the woman who took care
25 of a garden. And when she finally passed away, no

2 one really stepped up to--to step into that role. Do
3 we have certain plots of land across the city that
4 are not currently activated by local gardeners that
5 exist, but where there isn't anything actually taking
6 place?

7 CARLOS MARTINEZ: That is correct. All
8 of our community gardens are struggling because like
9 they are run by volunteers, and those volunteers are
10 aging out. So, our goal--we're a very small team.
11 We only have six office coordinators to cover over
12 600 gardens. So think about the capacity. We need
13 that support from--from the Council to like expand
14 that outreach program, and we'll be happy to like
15 increase our membership and work with--with local
16 residents to like take--take that role off of
17 stewardship.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER JOHNSON: And--and
19 Barbara, I apologize 'cause I think you may have
20 spelled this out. NYCHA is here.

21 BARBARA TURK: NYCHA is here.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER JOHNSON: And let me just
23 ask you what other city agencies are here besides
24 NYCHA?

2 BARBARA TURK: Okay, let's see. We have
3 DYCD well represented. We have the Office of
4 Sustainability is here. We have SBS to my left. We
5 have DEP. [background comments] The Mayor's Fund is
6 here, which is the Building Healthy Communities
7 League. We have the Department of City Planning
8 here, and I think I want to say--

9 COUNCIL MEMBER JOHNSON: [interposing] Is
10 HPD here?

11 BARBARA TURK: HPD is not here.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER JOHNSON: Okay. So I--I
13 asked because, um, rightfully this administration and
14 the Mayor during his campaign and during his first
15 years in office has really made a cornerstone of this
16 administration getting more affordable housing, which
17 I think the Council shares that goal. We may have
18 some quibble on--on exactly how we go about that, but
19 I think we share the goal of wanting more affordable
20 housing. And one thing that I think I run into my
21 district--I can speak for other members--is that when
22 we have a vacant lot, which I just had on 20th Street
23 between 6th and 7th Avenue in Chelsea. It used to be
24 a Department of Sanitation facility, an abandoned lot
25 for years. The previous administration was going to

2 build 75 units of affordable housing on that lot.
3 HPD had an RFP. Instead the community said we want a
4 park and a garden on that lot, and so my office was
5 able to find an alternative site where instead of
6 giving 75 units of affordable housing, we're going to
7 get 220 units of affordable housing, three times the
8 amount, and we've preserved a garden and going to get
9 the first new pocket park in Chelsea since 1968,
10 which is very, very exciting.

11 BARBARA TURK: Congratulations

12 BARBARA TURK: Congratulations.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER JOHNSON: Thank you but I--
14 -I bring this up because I know that that city wants
15 to achieve every unit of affordable housing possible.
16 But in some instances the local community may say we
17 want a garden. We want a park. We may not want
18 affordable housing in every single space depending on
19 what the needs of the local community are. And so
20 I'm wondering if there is a program that the city has
21 when they are identifying whether or not to convert
22 public or private lots into gardens? Is that done
23 through City Planning? Is that done through HPD?
24 When there is a public or private lot more and it's--
25 it's public, it's city owned, which agency makes the

2 determination what's going to move forward on that
3 lot? Is there a particular program that exists in
4 making that determination or process in anyway?

5 BARBARA TURK: Uh-huh. Okay.

6 CARLOS MARTINEZ: That's where we can
7 play that role. So we--community members reach out
8 to us, and they identify those like city-owned lots,
9 and they see the potential--they would like to see
10 gardens there, and that's where we start the process
11 with the community. And that's where we ask them to
12 create like for example we like to have at least 10
13 members advocating for that site. Once they have
14 that, we start the process. If the lot is own by
15 DPR, by the Department of Parks and Recreation, it's
16 an easier process. So we tend to work with each
17 borough office to convert that lot into a garden. If
18 it's owned by a different city agency, it's a
19 different process.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER JOHNSON: I'm--I'm going--
21 I'm going to hand it back over to the Chair, but I
22 just want to make a statement on this, which is that,
23 a month ago I emailed one of the deputy commissioners
24 at DCAs, and I said can you please email me every
25 DCAS owned site in my district? I wanted know if

2 they were open lots, abandoned buildings, whatever
3 they were. So that I could think about oh, here are
4 the places for affordable housing. Here are the
5 places that we should pursue parks. Here are the
6 places that maybe we could get an adoption center for
7 pets. I don't know, but what--whatever the local
8 community needs was. And was my fear--and again I'm
9 a huge proponent for getting affordable housing--is
10 that affordable housing can't be the end all and be
11 all of every piece of land in New York City. I'm not
12 saying that's the position you're taking today. But
13 what I'm saying is when I--I have I think seven
14 active HPD affordable housing projects that are very
15 exciting in my district. And the point I'm trying to
16 make is DCAs is in charge of city-owned property.
17 And so when they come up with a piece of city-owned
18 property, what is the process here? I'm not sure
19 there's an exact answer to this. I'm not saying that
20 to stump you. I'm saying it--

21 BARBARA TURK: [interposing] No.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER JOHNSON: No, I'm just
23 saying it because it's a--it's a point that we really
24 care about these gardens and--and you all are doing
25 incredible work. And if there a--if there's an

2 opportunity to even expand gardens even further,
3 there should be a process that takes place in looking
4 at sites across the city on whether to determine
5 whether or not housing is the appropriate thing or a
6 park or a garden. Thank you.

7 BARBARA TURK: This is--thank you for
8 your question. I don't have a quest--I don't have--
9 I'm not prepared to talk about the--your DCAS
10 question. It's specifically about what happens if a
11 community wants a garden. Forget it if it's housing
12 versus, right? It's just a community wants a garden
13 here. What do we do, right? I mean I think there's
14 a number of ways to it, and you know that different
15 city-owned agencies--different city-owned properties
16 are designated to certain agencies for certain uses.
17 Excuse me. We have--I--I can speak to a situation we
18 have now where there were a number of lots that were
19 included in a request for expression of interest.
20 HPD is going through their portfolio to take a look
21 at where we have gardens in places that are part of
22 the HPD portfolio, and they're taking a very
23 thoughtful look at that with communities and with
24 city council members as I understand it. They're not
25 here, but we did talk before the hearing. And so my

2 understanding is that they're looking through that
3 portfolio of sites, and they're going to be
4 addressing the future status of those particular
5 sites at a--at a later date. But, you know, there
6 are all kinds of precedents for figuring out how we
7 take care of gardens that have been in place for a
8 long time. Your question about what do we do if
9 people want to start a new one on city-owned
10 property, I would have to get back to you on that.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER JOHNSON: Thank you.
12 Thank you, Madam Chair. Yes, thank you very much,
13 Barbara.

14 CARLOS MARTINEZ: Just to add to that
15 like every city agency has a different process. For
16 example, for DCAS--for HPD they offer lease for two
17 years. With Parks it's a similar process. We offer
18 the leases for four years. So it depends on who owns
19 the land, but we at Green Thumb we offer this process
20 on how community members can access the spaces,
21 organize the community and think like the future of
22 that space is. If it's a cultural hub or is it a
23 community garden or for urban farming.

24 BARBARA TURK: Or for both.

25 CARLOS MARTINEZ: Or for both. Right.

2 CHAIRPERSON ARROYO: Well, I--I think
3 Barbara and Carlos, I--that's where the issue--

4 BARBARA TURK: [interposing] Yes.

5 CHAIRPERSON ARROYO: --lies in that you
6 all work for the same Mayor, and every city agency
7 has a different process, and the mystery of what each
8 agency's process is, is I think is what's at the
9 heart of allowing community development to happen
10 with community input in the process. So depending on
11 what agency you're dealing that is controlling or
12 owns the property, you're subjected to the hoops and
13 tunnels--

14 CARLOS MARTINEZ: [interposing] Yes.

15 CHAIRPERSON ARROYO: --you have to jump
16 through or ride through to get the community's input
17 into the conversation. And--and I think hopefully in
18 your discussions with that prime sponsor of this
19 legislation that one of the things I guess work into
20 this conversation that there be a process. That is
21 open. That is transparent. That is clear to
22 everyone involved in the process what we can expect
23 the steps to be so that we can have community
24 involvement in the conversation about community
25 development. Which is all we've ever asked for. I

2 mean, you know, there are some folks in the audience
3 here where early in my tenure as a City Council
4 member the challenge was the plan that HPD had that
5 involved 27 or so gardens in the community, and how
6 we were able to save maybe I think half, less than
7 half of those to--to keep them open for community
8 gardening and green open spaces. And--and--it's such
9 a challenge for us in these positions to deal with
10 let along for community advocates and leaders that
11 want to be part of that conversation. And--and--and
12 that--that should change.

13 BARBARA TURK: [interposing] Uh-huh.

14 CHAIRPERSON ARROYO: There should be a
15 process that regardless of what city agency controls
16 the property, is--is clear and--and we can all feel
17 some sense of confidence that it's going to be fair
18 and it's going to be inclusive. Um, because at the
19 end of the day, whether I can pay X number of dollars
20 a pound for green peppers at the supermarket or have
21 them locally grown and go to the local market or--or
22 garden and help financially support that garden's
23 ability to function and--and be thriving is something
24 that makes a big difference in--in a community, in
25 particular communities like the one I represent. So

2 mom has a garden in the back yard, and we didn't buy
3 a tomato, a pepper or egg plant. She even grew
4 broccoli this last summer.

5 BARBARA TURK: That's impressive.

6 CHAIRPERSON ARROYO: If--if--but--but the
7 point being that I don't know how much money we
8 didn't calculate, how much money we saved having--not
9 having to go to the supermarket to buy this freshly
10 grown no--I mean she--she uses the waste from her
11 kitchen to fertilize the soil. No fertilizer.
12 Everything natural. Some of it is quite--quite ugly
13 because it's not perfect. It's not picture perfect,
14 but the taste you can't compare. And--and the
15 savings that we realized over the summer as a family,
16 and we fed the neighbors.

17 BARBARA TURK: [interposing] Yes.

18 CHAIRPERSON ARROYO: Everybody got
19 tomatoes. Everybody got ahillas (sp?) that we
20 couldn't find in the supermarket because there's some
21 Caribbean country limit to how many they can import.
22 So we had it for our forito (sp?) and we were giving
23 some to our neighbors--

24 BARBARA TURK: [interposing] Right.

2 CHAIRPERSON ARROYO: --that, you know,
3 the local impact of what these gardens represent in
4 our communities is so incredibly significant.

5 BARBARA TURK: Not to mention the stress
6 relief, right, that we got from having to out and
7 pick the--the vegetables and, you know, the day that
8 I was not at my best, I would go out and she would
9 say go get me some tomatoes, and by the time I came
10 back into the kitchen with the tomatoes, I was
11 feeling a lot better. And that is a value that I'm
12 not sure we can put a price on. So my advocacy
13 around this issue for the last 10-1/2 or so years is
14 we have to have a predictable process. It shouldn't
15 be a mystery, and it is a mystery that DCAS has one
16 process, and HPD has another and NYCHA has a
17 different one and City Planning I'm not even sure
18 that they weigh in on hey guys, you now, there's too
19 much brick and mortar going on. Why don't we
20 preserve some of the space for something else? That
21 is all we're asking for, and I'm going to encourage
22 my colleague to make sure that as--as you discuss the
23 legislation that it be inclusive of an open
24 transparent process that is uniformed across every
25 single agency. And that we demystify, you know, the

2 process. Which at this point--and to me I--I bring
3 it back to you all work for the same mayor. What was
4 so difficult about this? I don't get that. With
5 that said, I'm going to call on Council Member
6 Rosenthal.

7 BARBARA TURK: I just want to thank you
8 and we understand.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: I don't know
10 where to start with Council Member Arroyo or Director
11 Turn, but I think I'm going to start with you Council
12 Member. What, you know, what you just said, the way
13 you just summed--summarized up this issue is
14 extraordinary, and I'm really going to miss you on
15 the Council. I mean that's exactly what you bring to
16 the conversation is a thoughtful approach to how the
17 city should govern, the appropriate role for
18 oversight. You bring--you make it personal, and you
19 show how you care about your own district, and I've
20 learned so much from you and I'm not ready for you to
21 go. So I just want to thank you for that--for the
22 way you talk about issues. I really appreciate you
23 and I've appreciated working with you. And Director
24 Turk who I've worked with for a really long time, I'm
25 so--this--the--your--your testimony was really a

2 testament to the work that you've done as the
3 Director of Food Policy for the Mayor over the last
4 two years, and that you've really bought it together
5 in a way that I don't think anyone has prior to your
6 being a food czar, if there were a food czar before.
7 But you're definitely setting the bar high for
8 whoever comes next. I--I do support the idea of an
9 advisory council. It would be interesting to have
10 the discussions to think about how that might be
11 crafted, what the goals are. I just really wanted to
12 ask you in your--in your experience now of working
13 with green roofs whether or not it's something that
14 you think should be pursued or under what
15 circumstances you think they should be pursued, and
16 the reason I ask is because I have a private school
17 in my district that has had a green roof for the last
18 10 years. And has a sister school in the Bronx, and
19 that school it's the Calhoun School recommends
20 against putting up a roof garden because the
21 maintenance for the roof has been--the costs have
22 been extraordinary.

23 BARBARA TURK: Yeah.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: And they're,
25 you know, no matter how many times they fix it,

2 they're still having problems with it. So at the end
3 of the day, they were putting it up there, and they
4 are moving toward tower gardens. I don't know if
5 you've seen these things.

6 BARBARA TURK: Yes, yes.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: But they're
8 like a thousand bucks each and, you know, you can
9 feed the whole school off of five gardens and still
10 use it as a--as a curriculum, you know, tool. I
11 worry about city taxpayer dollars being invested in
12 roofs that don't make any sense, and I've actually
13 put a halt to putting in the dollars that are
14 allocated for me to distribute in my district not to
15 invest in roofs gardens.

16 BARBARA TURK: Uh-huh.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: I don't know.
18 What's your take on that?

19 BARBARA TURK: Yeah, so I--I appreciate
20 the question because often--it's a thoughtful
21 question. I just want to say that. In--in the realm
22 of questions I get about roof gardens, I assure you
23 it's cool.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: [interposing]
25 Can you describe what a tower garden is?

2 BARBARA TURK: I think you should
3 describe what a tower garden is.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: I'd be
5 delighted. So a tower garden is a--basically a
6 movable pot that has plants growing out of it. So
7 it has a stick in the middle that has pods all around
8 it where you can plant lettuce or tomatoes, whatever
9 it is you want, but it's really just one pot of--of
10 greenery. And, you can put your--you can have it
11 outdoor or you can have it indoor with UV lights.

12 BARBARA TURK: Uh-huh.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: And it costs a
14 thousand bucks.

15 BARBARA TURK: Yeah, it's--it's cheaper.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: Less than
17 millions of dollars in my--yeah.

18 BARBARA TURK: Yes, and--and roof gardens
19 are quite expensive, and not every roof can support
20 them. There's a lot of things that go into that. I
21 think, you know, there's this general question--
22 there's a lot going on right now around different
23 growing technologies, which you know, we used--we
24 never heard your mom, my mom never heard those words--
25 --two words in a phrase before. But that is what

2 we're talking about right? We're talking about all
3 kinds of different things that people are doing.
4 There's a lot of hydroponic technology and vertical
5 gardening and all these things. And we are--we are
6 regularly approached as is EDC, which is sadly not
7 here today, but they are involved in conversations
8 about vertical gardening and other related kinds of
9 technologies. I do think that the--the question
10 that's--that behooves us as stewards of public
11 resource is what are the best--these are all very
12 interesting, and compelling, and I think one of the
13 interesting policy questions that is before us is
14 what--where do we want to make our public
15 investments, right? There's a lot of reasons first
16 and foremost to invest in the gardens we're talking
17 about, the urban ag, the community gardens because we
18 get--You know, it's like--it's--it's not even a
19 triple bottom line. It's not even a win-win. It's a
20 win-win-win-win-win-win when you do a community
21 garden for all kinds of reasons that you so
22 eloquently talked about. But, you know, in school
23 settings, in--we've been approached on having, you
24 know, doing technologies that are in--what am I--
25 Storage, old storage shipping containers where, you

2 know, that companies are pioneering for emergency
3 situations that would allow you to grow food in an
4 emergency situation for an extended period of time if
5 you had, for example, another situation like we had
6 in New Orleans where, you know, getting food in and
7 out was difficult. They would haul these shipping
8 containers in. They would bring them. So there's a
9 lot of these things, and we are looking at them,
10 investigating them and evaluating them, and it would
11 be something that again could be a possible
12 discussion that--that the Mayor's Office and the City
13 Council might want to take on together. But--and I
14 appreciate your question by the way. I--as you know,
15 I used to run a lot of these in Brooklyn--in Brooklyn
16 and water is a problem in a building. It's really a
17 big problem. You know, and anything--any water
18 that's above the head of children I just want to say,
19 you know, leakage and stuff like that becomes
20 incredibly expensive because these systems degrade
21 pretty quickly.

22 CHAIRPERSON ARROYO: Not to mention the
23 health--

24 BARBARA TURK: Yeah. So it's exciting.
25 There's--this is not--I love Brooklyn Grange. I love

2 all this interesting and amazing stuff that's going
3 on. All of it has its place but, you know, the
4 question of what we bring to scale in the city is I
5 think one of the interesting questions before us.

6 CHAIRPERSON ARROYO: Okay. Council
7 Member King.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER KING: Thank you, Madam--

9 CHAIRPERSON ARROYO: [interposing] And
10 I'll just--we've been joined by Council Member Liz
11 Crowley. Thank you.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER KING: [crying] Madam
13 Chair, I'm going to miss you. You can't leave.
14 [background comments] I have to say it's been a real
15 delight because she gives--she gives it to you raw--
16 she gives it to you right.

17 CHAIRPERSON ARROYO: And he's from the
18 Bronx.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER KING: [interposing] Yeah.

20 CHAIRPERSON ARROYO: He's like always
21 like--

22 COUNCIL MEMBER KING: So, that's one
23 thing I do appreciate. You can sit in front of our
24 great chair and she will--you will never be lost on
25 what she's talking about.

2 CHAIRPERSON ARROYO: That's right.

3 COUNCIL MEMBER KING: You will know
4 exactly where she's coming from, and I appreciate her
5 directness and her wisdom because many of us are in
6 search of your wisdom, and you offer it to us
7 everyday when you walk in these halls. So thank you
8 again for your contribution in serving the residents
9 of New York and representing the Boogie down process
10 that you have.

11 CHAIRPERSON ARROYO: Yeah.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER KING: In fact, I'm going
13 to give you a hand for that. [applause] So I'm
14 going to be quick with my questions. We went to the
15 map that you referred to earlier when it was asked
16 about these gardens and--

17 BARBARA TURK: [interposing] Just now?

18 COUNCIL MEMBER KING: And we found that--
19 I know during the budget season I was looking to
20 allocate. I know I have two gardens Bristol Gardens
21 and River Run, but there was a third garden call-out
22 that I didn't know it still existed. I remember it
23 'cause they took it from me when I was a kid playing
24 on the rocks, and it's a garden. So I wanted to know
25 is there a way to continue to file it at these

2 gardens because you heard the story of Council Member
3 Johnson talking about the woman who passed away, and
4 no one picked up the responsibility of maintaining
5 her garden. So how do we know some of these gardens
6 are still active, and especially being on your
7 website how do you know? And if--is there going to
8 be a continuing way we update to manage or know if
9 these gardens are still operational?

10 CARLOS MARTINEZ: Right. Our team we
11 have outreach coordinators, and they are responsible
12 to cover different districts in the city, and that
13 includes your outreach community in the Bronx. And
14 we have two inspections in the year where we follow
15 up on not only like inspections of the site, but also
16 like the membership of each group. So I will look
17 into that.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER KING: Please. Thank you.
19 And I just had a conversation with regards to healthy
20 eating, feeding our children, you know, lunch, or
21 every child gets a meal at lunchtime. And I was
22 working, you was talking about shortage of people
23 also being able to weigh. (sic) Are you all working
24 with the Department of Education and maybe having
25 schools adopt some of these gardens. This way, you

2 know, you're guaranteed to have people who cover the
3 children as a learning moment, as you heard earlier.
4 Also being able to produce enough food maybe that can
5 help us with cost of feeding kids in the school
6 system. We have a problem with the number of kids
7 who don't want to eat the school lunch, but if
8 they're growing their lunch, that's even more of an
9 incentive for them to eat the food because they're
10 prepared--they got their hands in the dirt
11 themselves.

12 BARBARA TURK: [interposing] Yes.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER KING: So--

14 BARBARA TURK: So that's why the Grow to
15 Learn--the Grow to Learn program is so key. Um,
16 that's the program that Grow New York City runs, that
17 I--that I mentioned briefly in my testimony, and
18 would love to invite you to come, any member of the
19 committee to see one of those schools in action. You
20 agree 100% with our school's chancellor who says that
21 the kids are much more likely to eat the--the--from
22 the salad bar if they're growing the food themselves,
23 and that they're much more participating in what's
24 going on in that--in the--in the cafeteria generally.
25 So the goal of Grow to Learn is to bring access for

2 kids in every single school to a garden. You know,
3 some of them have gardens in their--in some way,
4 shape or form in their immediate school property.
5 And some have relationships. I'm always interested to
6 see when I'm out and about, and visiting different
7 gardens how many of these gardens have developed
8 relationships with the local schools, and they're
9 bringing kids over and do really interesting things
10 around education and just community work so--

11 CARLOS MARTINEZ: And just to add to
12 that, the Grow to Learn Program is run between a
13 partnership--

14 BARBARA TURK: [interposing] Yes.

15 CARLOS MARTINEZ: --with Green Thumb and
16 Grow--Grow NYC, and many of these programs are like
17 gardens to tables. So the food that they produce
18 sometimes they feed the same kids in the school.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER KING: Okay. So I'm going
20 to end with that, but if you could help me with that
21 list that we just talked about as well as if you--if
22 you haven't connected any schools or having schools
23 adapt--adopt some of the gardens that are around, I'd
24 like to know with the three that I have, you know, if
25 there is a school that--I know there are schools in

2 the neighborhood, but how do we get them to manage
3 some of these as opposed to always spending money to
4 hire people or hoping a volunteer shows up or having
5 some consistency? And maybe some of our schools'
6 roof tops could be used a gardens if they're not
7 right now. Just food for thought. That's how my
8 Madam Chair told me how to deliver it. Just for
9 thought.

10 CHAIRPERSON ARROYO: Okay. [laughs]

11 CARLOS MARTINEZ: And also mentioned by
12 Barbara, we have a Youth Vision Council, which are we
13 are training the new generation of gardeners. So
14 this is a summer program that we are having like the
15 mentors from colleges, and the same gardeners that
16 existed in these gardens training kids how to take
17 care of those spaces. So we are working on that.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER KING: Thank you, Madam
19 Chair. God bless you.

20 CHAIRPERSON ARROYO: Thank you. Okay, so
21 let's talk about money. It's an expensive
22 proposition, and I know that Green Thumb--I didn't
23 hear you whining about not having enough staff,
24 although there might be a conversation that needs to
25 be had around how well you can manage the

2 responsibility with the limited staffing that you
3 have. Grow to Learn NYC what are we talking? Is
4 that a city effort, and how much money are we talking
5 about? And of the 545 schools that have signed up or
6 launched the--the gardening activity at the school,
7 how much are they getting to support the work that
8 this program brings to them?

9 BARBARA TURK: [off mic] Do you want to
10 answer that or do you want me to answer that?

11 CARLOS MARTINEZ: [off mic] You can
12 answer that.

13 CHAIRPERSON ARROYO: So Grow to Learn NYC
14 is funded at how much?

15 BARBARA TURK: I--I--I'm--I don't
16 remember off hand the total number. I--what I know
17 is that the individual gardens get--the individual
18 schools get grants.

19 CHAIRPERSON ARROYO: And what's the size
20 of the grant?

21 BARBARA TURK: \$2 to \$3,000.

22 CHAIRPERSON ARROYO: What?

23 BARBARA TURK: \$2 to \$3,000. That pays
24 for materials.

2 CHAIRPERSON ARROYO: [interposing]

3 That's not a--that's too much what--that's a--

4 BARBARA TURK: Is that too much?

5 CHAIRPERSON ARROYO: Are you serious?

6 BARBARA TURK: Is that too much or not
7 enough?

8 CHAIRPERSON ARROYO: That's not enough.

9 (sic)

10 BARBARA TURK: The money pays for--so
11 what happens, usually is that the teachers--there's
12 usually a teacher who really wants to take this on.

13 CHAIRPERSON ARROYO: That's unfortunate
14 yes.

15 BARBARA TURK: [interposing] So I just--

16 CHAIRPERSON ARROYO: There has to be
17 someone locally who's interested and has a commitment
18 to doing it whether it's gardening or an after school
19 program, you have no idea. I have two grandchildren
20 in school in PS1 in the Bronx, and they don't have
21 enough teachers to do the after school programs.

22 BARBARA TURK: [interposing] These are--

23 CHAIRPERSON ARROYO: So if have a
24 contract you're not--

25

2 BARBARA TURK: [interposing] It's in
3 school--

4 CHAIRPERSON ARROYO: --going to force the
5 teachers to do it.

6 BARBARA TURK: It's in school, and it's
7 \$2 to \$3,000 a year for materials.

8 CHAIRPERSON ARROYO: Okay. Got it. So
9 of the 545 we're looking at how much funding total?

10 BARBARA TURK: That's the number I'm
11 going to have to get for you.

12 CHAIRPERSON ARROYO: Okay, and--and so
13 the total pot--

14 BARBARA TURK: Uh-huh.

15 CHAIRPERSON ARROYO: --and how much has
16 been funded through to the local schools that have
17 signed up?

18 BARBARA TURK: Yes, we can provide that
19 to you.

20 CHAIRPERSON ARROYO: So less than half of
21 the schools are actively engaged.

22 BARBARA TURK: Less than a third.

23 CHAIRPERSON ARROYO: Okay, and--and how--
24 what are we doing to engage the Department of
25

2 Education and information out into the schools about
3 getting more schools to sign up?

4 CARLOS MARTINEZ: We're working on that.
5 Actually, the Grow to Learn Program has grown
6 exponentially. Last year we had maybe 150, and now
7 we grew up to like almost 600.

8 CHAIRPERSON ARROYO: That's very
9 positive.

10 CARLOS MARTINEZ: And we only have two--
11 our rich contributors to that program. I would love
12 to spend that.

13 CHAIRPERSON ARROYO: You might need to
14 talk off line and talk to the Commissioner

15 CARLOS MARTINEZ: [interposing] Yes,
16 please.

17 CHAIRPERSON ARROYO: --about that.

18 [laughs]

19 BARBARA TURK: Yeah, we have a--we have
20 pent up demand for participation in this program by
21 the schools.

22 CHAIRPERSON ARROYO: Okay.

23 BARBARA TURK: Pent up demand.

24 CHAIRPERSON ARROYO: That's not pos--
25 that's not a positive thing.

2 BARBARA TURK: No, I'm saying like in
3 terms of--it's not like the outreach is the problem.
4 The problem is the resources. That's what I'm
5 telling you.

6 CHAIRPERSON ARROYO: Okay, so then, you
7 know, you're--you open up a can of worms, right? You
8 have to be careful what you say because then we have
9 the right to pry.

10 BARBARA TURK: So, why--why?

11 CHAIRPERSON ARROYO: Why--what's the
12 capacity--given the pent up demand, what is the
13 capacity that we need to create?

14 BARBARA TURK: Well--well, we are--what
15 I'm going to do is if you are asking us for what we
16 could do to supply enough funds to be prepared for
17 that demand--

18 CHAIRPERSON ARROYO: [interposing] Yes.

19 BARBARA TURK: --rather than pulling a
20 number out of, you know where--

21 CHAIRPERSON ARROYO: [interposing] Yeah,
22 I appreciate that.

23 BARBARA TURK: --I'm going to put
24 together--I'm going to put together a follow-up
25 letter on this.

2 CHAIRPERSON ARROYO: Okay.

3 BARBARA TURK: And I appreciate your
4 interest.

5 CHAIRPERSON ARROYO: You make sure that
6 letter gets to me before December 31st--

7 BARBARA TURK: [interposing] Yes, ma'am.

8 CHAIRPERSON ARROYO: --or--or you can
9 maybe address it to the sponsor of the legislation
10 because I think, you know, one of the things that we
11 have an opportunity in the past we were working with
12 the Administration is respond to a budget that we
13 feel may need to include certain components that it
14 doesn't once announced by the Mayor in February. And
15 between February and June working some magic to
16 support the expansion of an effort that we I guess
17 all agree makes a great deal of sense. It's an
18 incredibly important thing for us to do as a city to
19 support the--the gardening and farming community in
20 the city as a whole. And more importantly how we can
21 bring that into the department--the curriculum of the
22 education curriculum so we can begin to build an army
23 of future gardeners and farmers. So that we don't
24 have to worry about a gardening site going under
25 because the--the advocate that spearheaded that

2 process is no longer around. And our--our children
3 are so resilient and, you know, I have the best
4 recycler that anyone can ever have in my grandson.
5 His job is to make sure that we don't put paper where
6 plastic and glass go. And so, he's very efficient at
7 it. Today he's been doing it for me now for four
8 years because I--I just used it for him to--So he's--
9 he's a more conscious individual about waste today
10 because he learned that process from the age of five,
11 and I don't think he's going to unlearn it, and
12 that's the point that if we can get to them while
13 they're young and--and build that into their way of
14 life that we will have a whole lot of future
15 gardeners in the city. And then the issue will be we
16 need more sites because we have too many gardeners,
17 and not that we're losing gardeners because the
18 advocate or the leader of that garden is no longer
19 with us. And that's the challenge that confront in
20 the community all the time. So I would encourage you
21 to absolutely bring back a proposal to the Council
22 that we can help advocate on, on behalf of the Parks
23 Department, your office to see how we can create the
24 capacity that we have just for the pent-up demand.

25 BARBARA TURK: Thank you.

2 CHAIRPERSON ARROYO: And--and then work
3 on more pent-up demand in the future given, you know,
4 that dollars are--are limited. But I think that's
5 important, and that in our hearings here my goal has
6 always been that lead to some kind of solution to a
7 problem that has been identified. And--and the
8 gardening community in our city is in need of
9 significant financial support, is in need of
10 significant leadership development for future
11 development. And more importantly that the
12 development in our city, housing development cannot
13 trump green open space and our capacity to produce
14 our own food. It can't do that because we will fail
15 our gardening community and our community development
16 potential, and it's not just brick and mortar as far
17 as I'm concerned. Community development involves a
18 great deal more than that. So, oh, we've been joined
19 by Council Member Maisel, and I think he has a
20 question.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER MAISEL: I do.

22 CHAIRPERSON ARROYO: Yes.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER MAISEL: Good afternoon.

24 This is serendipity because last week I chaired the
25 meeting at the Environmental Center adjacent to PS312

2 in Brooklyn because we have a half acre site right
3 near the school that I wanted to convert into a
4 community garden. And we had people from the Board
5 of Education, the Botanic Garden has expressed
6 interest in it. So we have the--we have the space.
7 The Board of Education owns it--

8 BARBARA TURK: [interposing] Right.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER MAISEL: --and we're going
10 to try to put together a project proposal, and I may
11 be able to fund it partially through capital money.
12 So how does one get on the list to be considered for
13 your involvement?

14 BARBARA TURK: [off mic] Do you want to
15 speak to this?

16 CARLOS MARTINEZ: Yeah. Good afternoon.
17 My name is Carlos Martinez, the Director of Green
18 Thumb. We have the Grow to Learn Program that we
19 work with schools. So I'll be in contact with your
20 office.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER MAISEL: Yeah, I
22 appreciate it. And then just two weeks before that,
23 I'm also trying to do something in the Bay View
24 Houses where the community gardens--where they're
25 going to probably build raised beds because the land

2 is probably contaminated. So maybe we can get some
3 assistance from you on that also. I used to be a
4 science teacher. I'm very interested in that also.

5 BARBARA TURK: Oh, great.

6 CHAIRPERSON ARROYO: And--and New York
7 City Housing is in the room by the way.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER MAISEL: It's out in New
9 York City. (sic)

10 CHAIRPERSON ARROYO: I like that, yeah.
11 Very good. [laughs] Thank you. Thank you, Council
12 Member. As you can see there is--you know, I--I
13 believe that every single council member here has an
14 experience of having land that they want to convert
15 to a product--productive use, and probably argued
16 with HPD or Parks or somebody else. Not with Parks.
17 We don't argue with Parks. It's just that their
18 projects are so expensive, but to--to preserve the
19 use for it to be open green space in the community.
20 And I think that that dynamic and that those things
21 have to change. That, you know, since HPD is not
22 here City Planning is. How many sites are out there
23 that we are looking to develop that are now gardens
24 or lots that can be converted into a garden?

2 BARBARA TURK: Do you have that
3 information ready at hand?

4 CARLOS MARTINEZ: No, I don't.

5 BARBARA TURK: Yeah, I don't--I don't
6 have that information.

7 CHAIRPERSON ARROYO: I don't believe any
8 of you do, and I'm going to hit that point again. In
9 that that question should be easily answered so that
10 when we come back to community involvement about
11 community development that we know where the--the
12 process is for that lot. And let's not forget the
13 Department of Transportation because 596 acres I know
14 that you're here and will provide testimony, is
15 working with my office on a DMAP street that we're
16 talking about converting into a community garden and
17 that agency is very willing and open as long as
18 there's an organization that will take
19 responsibility. I mean it was that simple. Identify
20 the organization that you believe can shepherd this
21 process forward who is going to be held accountable
22 for whatever happens, and for ensuring that this
23 space is kept safe and healthy, and that was it. It
24 was that simple. So it should be that simple for
25 everybody else.

2 BARBARA TURK: I--I think that, you
3 know--I think that the issue is that it's not simple
4 with HPD is what I'm hearing.

5 CHAIRPERSON ARROYO: And since you all
6 work for the same mayor, you've got to take the
7 message back, right?

8 BARBARA TURK: Yes, I think--I think the
9 Mayor knows that.

10 CHAIRPERSON ARROYO: Okay, so--

11 BARBARA TURK: [interposing] I think we
12 know that it's not simple, and I think what I tried
13 to convey is that this Mayor does understand that we
14 need to be thoughtful about this. I go back as far
15 as the Dickens years, and I remember the Giuliani
16 Administration taking on all the gardens in the Lower
17 East Side. This is not that.

18 CHAIRPERSON ARROYO: I'm glad to hear
19 that, and I think we need to have a very serious
20 discussion about financing and the financial support
21 that this effort will entail, and that--that the City
22 the Administration and the Council need to make an
23 equal commitment to supporting financially the work
24 that we want to see thrive in our communities. And I
25 know that we do that very easily. All you need is

2 someone to say hey we need more worker co-ops, and
3 then we put money into the budget.

4 BARBARA TURK: [interposing] So, what
5 I've underlined is-- I'm sorry.

6 CHAIRPERSON ARROYO: That's how--that's
7 how we--so I think that the financing piece of the
8 work that needs to get done to build the capacity
9 that--that can broaden the reach of this effort in
10 our city is--has to be done collaboratively between
11 the Administration and the Council, and it should not
12 be something we argue about.

13 BARBARA TURK: Uh-huh. So, if I may, I
14 wan to underline the announcement yesterday of the
15 Building Healthy Communities Initiative, which, part
16 of which is an effort to not only invest further--is
17 to invest further in urban agriculture.

18 CHAIRPERSON ARROYO: Okay.

19 BARBARA TURK: And we would welcome the
20 City Council's participation in that initiative
21 around giving gardeners what they need.

22 CHAIRPERSON ARROYO: Okay. So bring
23 forward a proposal that--that we can look at so that
24 we can advocate for whatever appropriate agency or
25 agencies and what funding needs to get made available

2 to those agencies, and what the Council needs to put-
3 -what skin the game we need to put in, too--

4 BARBARA TURK: [interposing] Great.
5 Thank you for the invitation.

6 CHAIRPERSON ARROYO: --so we have that
7 partnership, and--and if somebody can just--what's
8 the difference between a farm and garden?

9 BARBARA TURK: That was such a great
10 question.

11 CHAIRPERSON ARROYO: Because they keep--I
12 keep hearing both terms and I thought they were--

13 BARBARA TURK: [interposing] Do you have
14 a good answer to that question Mr. Martinez?
15 [background comments] Yeah, so--so here's the
16 thing. I mean I think--I'm going to give you an--do
17 you--do you have an answer, Willamine?

18 CHAIRPERSON ARROYO: Well, what don't we
19 wait until the public comes up?

20 BARBARA TURK: [interposing] In their--in
21 their testimony yeah, they'll come and talk to you
22 about it.

23 CHAIRPERSON ARROYO: So the teacher, the
24 teacher has got his hand up. [laughter] Council
25 Member--

2 COUNCIL MEMBER MAISEL: A garden--a
3 garden is not meant for commercial purposes. A
4 garden is a non-commercial entity designed to
5 engender beauty and enjoyment. A farm is a, you
6 know, is a revenue generating enterprise.

7 BARBARA TURK: Uh-huh, okay.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER MAISEL: That's it.

9 CHAIRPERSON ARROYO: So for the purposes
10 of this conversation, I think--

11 COUNCIL MEMBER MAISEL: [interposing]
12 You can call me.

13 BARBARA TURK: [interposing] That may
14 not be the definition we used as a city, but--

15 CHAIRPERSON ARROYO: [interposing] Okay.
16 So, but--

17 BARBARA TURK: --I appreciate what you're
18 saying.

19 CHAIRPERSON ARROYO: But I--I--the terms
20 are being used differently at different points, and I
21 don't want us--I don't want us to open up a
22 possibility for confusing the conversation--

23 BARBARA TURK: [interposing] Hence--hence
24 the use of urban agriculture.

2 CHAIRPERSON ARROYO: --and that it would
3 be for gardens to plant only beautiful flowers, and
4 not grow tomatoes, then if they're growing--growing
5 tomatoes, then we call it a farm. You know, I don't
6 want to split hairs, but let's--let's be clear about
7 what--what we're talking about.

8 BARBARA TURK: Yeah, so I guess what I
9 want to say is that we have been focused in this
10 hearing today on urban agriculture, which refers to
11 food--

12 CHAIRPERSON ARROYO: [interposing] Okay.

13 BARBARA TURK: --but not all of the
14 gardens grow food.

15 CHAIRPERSON ARROYO: Okay, and do we have
16 a list of the--which ones don't grow and are just
17 passive--

18 BARBARA TURK: [interposing] Yes, we have
19 all of that.

20 CHAIRPERSON ARROYO: --community gardens?

21 BARBARA TURK: Yeah, we have all of that.
22 We know a lot. You know, these--these--these gardens
23 have to register with--

24 CHAIRPERSON ARROYO: [interposing] Uh-
25 huh.

2 BARBARA TURK: --Green Thumb. They have
3 an extensive database of information when they
4 license these folks about volunteers and acreage and
5 activity. The other thing I recommend that you take
6 a look at is--and I would be remiss if I didn't
7 mention before leaving is the Design Trust for New
8 York City did an amazing job in its five borough farm
9 project, which has had three different iterations in
10 life, of putting together information about the
11 benefits of--of gardens. Of what ways to think about
12 this, a lot of support. They've put together now a
13 database that gardeners--an open space database
14 called Farming Concrete, which provides as good a
15 data as goes in. So there's--things are--this is
16 really a movement and it's moving along in such a way
17 that we're going to have a lot more data and a lot
18 more information about what's being grown in New York
19 City.

20 CHAIRPERSON ARROYO: And, you know, when
21 preparing the list by Council District, if we can on
22 that list have who the lead organizer for each garden
23 or farm or, you know, whatever--

24 BARBARA TURK: [interposing] The
25 registered point person. Sure.

2 CHAIRPERSON ARROYO: --we're calling it.

3 CARLOS MARTINEZ: I think we have it.

4 CHAIRPERSON ARROYO: You know, because
5 we--we need to make connections where connections
6 have not been made at the local community level so
7 that we can work with those open spaces, gardens and
8 urban farms. I know--I'm very engaged with several
9 in my district, but they--they're relentless, and I'm
10 sure that some are not so much--

11 BARBARA TURK: [interposing] Yes.

12 CHAIRPERSON ARROYO: --and--and don't
13 understands the benefit that we can create when--when
14 creating a real strong working relationship between
15 the--the organizers, the leaders of those spaces and
16 their elected officials. Not just Council members
17 across the board. So, if we have no other questions,
18 I'm going to excuse the panel. I thank you very much
19 for your testimony, for your willingness to continue
20 the conversation around the legislation that we're
21 hearing about today. And, Council Member Johnson,
22 while you went to check into the other committee, I
23 strongly urged the Director to prepare a proposal
24 that will align for us the funding necessary to build
25 the capacity primarily in the Grow to Learn

2 curriculum with the Department of Education. Because
3 there is some of that need that is out there that we
4 need to work together to provide for the schools that
5 are on a list, or waiting to--to get some funding.
6 So I look forward to hearing something in the news in
7 the future about that initiative in the City Council.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER JOHNSON: Thank you for
9 your testimony. I look forward to working together.

10 BARBARA TURK: Than you for the
11 opportunity

12 CHAIRPERSON ARROYO: And, um, I--I think
13 that this is a meaningful conversation and we need to
14 develop a structured form to monitor, keep track of,
15 and help build our gardening capacity in the city so
16 that we can have more experiences like the ones my
17 family had over the summer. Which I cannot
18 underestimate enough--over-estimate actually, the
19 benefit that it could have on families in our city in
20 particular families that are living in poverty that
21 are looking for a way to feed their family healthy
22 food that they can't afford to buy in the supermarket
23 because the prices are ridiculous and the quality is
24 horrible. Yes. Yep, there you go. Thank you very
25 much. Enjoy your holiday.

2 BARBARA TURK: You, too.

3 CHAIRPERSON ARROYO: And I hope that the
4 representatives from the agencies will remain so that
5 we can hear what the public has to say about this
6 conversation. It's always helpful to know that
7 although the big cheeses leave that you guys remain.
8 [background comment] Okay, and I am going to call
9 up--[background comments] Okay. So we're going to
10 have two panels. We're going to try to limit--okay
11 for those of you who are coming up, please--usually
12 you'll give us written testimony. Don't be compelled
13 to read every word of it. Summarize and give us the
14 real meaningful points. I have a meeting I have to
15 be at, at 4 o'clock in Midtown, and I don't want to
16 rush anyone. So--but I will if I have to. Arish
17 Javadi, More Gardens; Paula Segal, 596 Acres, and
18 Todd Corig or Corey, Craig--

19 LEGAL COUNSEL: [off mic] I think it's
20 Greg.

21 CHAIRPERSON ARROYO: Greg. Oh, my God.
22 Okay. I'm going to talk--Greg, where are you? Come
23 on up, I'm going to talk about your penmanship.
24 [laughs] Okay, so I'm going to take one second
25 before you start, please. Give me. [pause] Okay.

2 Okay, so, identify yourselves for the record. Speak
3 into the mic. We're being recorded and you are on
4 camera, so put your nice side toward the camera, and
5 you may begin when you're ready. We'll hear from all
6 three of you, and then if we have questions then
7 we'll--we'll do that after you all testify.

8 PAULA SEGAL: So I'm Paula Segal. I'm the
9 Director of 596 Acres and before I start the formal
10 portion of my testimony, I have to apologize if I'm
11 still sitting here in 20 minutes. I'm just abruptly
12 leaving. I have a plane to catch. So that's--and
13 then to answer a question that the Administration
14 could not answer earlier, there are at least 18
15 active vibrant community gardens on the list of
16 properties that HPD published in January offering
17 developers to propose pausing (sic) projects that can
18 cost up to \$3,200 for a family of four. So 18 such
19 sites are at risk and you'll hear from gardeners
20 directly. I won't actually talk about the situation.
21 I'm going to address the legislation. So thank you
22 to the committee and to the sponsors of the bill for
23 creating this time and space for advocates to come
24 together on the subject of urban agriculture. I'm
25 hopeful that today's hearing will lead to more

2 conversations, and a more structured engagement
3 between the government entities that we need to
4 facilitate agricultural activities in the city and
5 the New Yorkers who engage in those activities.
6 Agriculture in the city is a vibrant local and
7 regenerative infrastructure practiced as a craft and
8 as a business. I commend you for recognizing that
9 and look forward to conversations to which the
10 broadest swath of regulatory and policy issues each
11 of our urban agricultural practices touches becomes a
12 regular subject in the Council. I'm here today to
13 speak about what I know as the Director of 596 acres,
14 New York's Community Land Access Advocacy
15 organization. The focus is on community. We connect
16 neighbors with the information they need to create
17 new pocket parks, community gardens and community
18 farms, and to actually navigate that maze that we
19 heard about from the Administration, the maze that
20 the Administration actually couldn't even really talk
21 us through. These are among the diversity of forms
22 that agriculture takes in the city. It's certainly
23 not comprehensive. New York City also has private
24 growing operations on roofs, in basements. It has
25 markets that organize small and mid-sized growers into

2 marketplaces. And, of course, like the Council
3 members mother, New Yorkers grow food in their own
4 back yards, and they keep bees on their roofs. Since
5 2011, 596 acres has facilitated the 34--the creation
6 of 34 new community places where there were once
7 vacant lots. In total these amount to over seven
8 acres of new open space and green space in
9 neighborhoods that need it. An area in total larger
10 than Union Square Park. These spaces are not
11 struggling. These are vibrant thriving gardens,
12 farms and parks with dozens of volunteers and
13 hundreds of users. About a thousand people are
14 impacted by each one of these spaces if you just take
15 the New York City average of 250 people or so living
16 on every block. There's a list in the printout that
17 I've given you, and I just want to draw your
18 attention to Warwick Greenery Grow--Glow. It's sort
19 of buried in Brooklyn. It's a garden that was
20 actually active in the 1990s and early 2000s that
21 closed. It is on parks land and it is about to
22 reopen because we helped some young people recognize
23 it as an opportunity. It's another easy one. It was
24 already parks land, and we're actually just waiting
25 for Green Thumb to fix the fence so that they can

2 reopen. I hope that that will happen quickly. The
3 total of these spaces have been made permanent to
4 transfer us to the Parks Department or leases with
5 public authorities that don't have any competing use
6 for the land. We also saved two spaces from post-tax
7 lien--from close--from post-tax lien sale from
8 foreclosures by transferring to the Brooklyn-Queens
9 Land Trust. We continue to fight to preserve three
10 others that were illegally threatened with evictions
11 by developer--by developers. While ultimate
12 preservation for those three spaces has not yet been
13 attained, evictions have been definitively stopped.
14 They're our online tool, Living Lots NYC. New
15 Yorkers and the committee's future members can
16 identify most existing and potential urban--potential
17 agricultural food production sites in the city. I
18 say most because we are relying on data that's
19 provided by the Administration on the Open Data
20 Portal. The map includes all vacant municipal land,
21 as well as private parcels that have been offered by
22 owners for community uses that can include
23 agricultural production, and available MTA parcels.
24 It also shows existing community managed spaces,
25 gardens parks and farms on public land as well as

2 those on private land or land trust land and open to
3 the public by their stewards. I encourage you to
4 explore the tool and be in touch with any questions,
5 clarifications or suggestions for improvements. You
6 can filter by council district, and you can filter by
7 agency, and you can do both to very quickly answer
8 your question about what DCAS has in your district.

9 The universe of activities that can be
10 defined as urban agriculture is broad spanning from
11 neighbor tended community gardens to production farms
12 to goats being used instead of pesticides to keep the
13 weeds down. What unites urban agriculture
14 practitioners is the need for a space to practice.
15 Land access is fundamental to any community-based
16 entrepreneurial agricultural activity. Land
17 disposition for municipal real estate may need its
18 own focused committee to address a multiplicity of
19 community needs, not just the needs of urban
20 agricultural practitioners. I urge that such a
21 committee be created, and focused on land
22 disposition. The Urban Agricultural Advisory as
23 proposed today will be a great collaborator to
24 practitioners of urban agriculture no matter the
25 underlying ownership of the land. There are

2 regulatory and collaborative hurdles for programs
3 that are cross-sector advisory, which members of city
4 agencies will be well positioned to address. Those
5 goats that are in Red Hook will need some help. The
6 land access issues are more complex, and I believe
7 they require greater focus, and collaboration with
8 other community advocates working on the development
9 of permanently community controlled affordable
10 housing, of parks and of other community facility.
11 Such a committee could be charged with studying the
12 entire municipal real estate inventory, altering the
13 process through which the Department of Citywide
14 Administrative Services assigns land to agencies
15 frequently than hold it with no development for
16 decades. And also assessing the surplus real estate
17 option through which our public lands and buildings
18 are currently regularly offered for purchase by
19 private developers. Thank you for inviting me to
20 testify, and I look forward to further dialogue with
21 the committee.

22 ARESH JAVADI: Thank you, Paula. Thank
23 you Chair, Maria. Nice to see you again. It's been
24 a while. I am very, very grateful for this moment in
25 time on this earth where right now over in Paris

2 there are people talking almost similarly about how
3 do we save this planet. How do we make sure--and
4 again, how do we make sure that we as people keep
5 going on this earth. And this is a very similar
6 thing. How do we fee ourselves? How do we take care
7 of this green planet that we're on with what we've
8 got around us? And I mean like 15 years ago
9 Esperanza, the community garden on the Lower East
10 side, Hilary Clinton at the time was running for
11 Senator against Giuliani. And right as I was getting
12 arrested when that garden was bulldozed, she said,
13 "You can't bulldozed your way to the senate,
14 Giuliani." And it's great to now see there is a real
15 huge difference. At that time, the majority of the
16 people were like who's gardens are these? Why are
17 they here? Is it housing versus gardens? Our law
18 has changed enormously, but again I'm at a point
19 where I'm like do I need to be out there getting
20 arrested because these gardens are getting bulldozed
21 again and again. There is that point--that critical
22 point where it's like how do we put ourselves in a
23 place where we shift that right now, this moment in
24 our lives? So, on that point, thank you, Council
25 Member Johnson and Koo for writing this. I actually

2 apologize for not having been as NYC--New York City
3 Community Garden Coalition and more gardens in the
4 ones approaching all of you through Councilman--
5 through the Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito saying
6 there is an enormous need to preserve all the
7 endangered gardens. There's enormous need to create
8 more of these food-producing areas, and we need to
9 find ways which already exist in creating new housing
10 after 13,000 vacant lots 15 years ago were built for
11 housing plus another 3 or 400 on top of community
12 gardens. So we've been losing gardens and, you know,
13 building most luxury condos through Giuliani and
14 other folks, and so low-income housing, which only
15 have like a 10 or 15-year life span. Some 20, some
16 more, but really we are at this point right now.
17 There are awesome ways to create, as we just spoke
18 about, made many low-income housing right integrated
19 with community gardens right on the same block. You
20 build a little bit higher. You create that open
21 space right next to it. They both benefit, and it
22 keeps going. So we need more green spaces. There
23 should even be a dialogue about saving another 17.
24 There should be a vision like the million tree
25 vision, another 1,000 or 500 in 20, 30 years of these

2 green spaces all over New York City. That's the
3 vision. That's how I would like to be sitting here
4 and discussing with this mayor. Not save our
5 gardens, but how many more are we creating in the
6 next 10 years, 20 years, 30 years. How are we going
7 to get to that place of, you know, a 1,000 more
8 gardens? So that's what I'm here to kind of point
9 out. That's where we need to be at. Vertical
10 gardens yes. Rooftop gardens yes. And on the earth
11 right there where you can just walk into those
12 beautiful areas. So that's the debate I want to push
13 this Council and all the people who are--we are
14 representing forward, too. So I'm really grateful
15 for that, and again look forward to getting together
16 as a whole and getting gardeners to be those voters
17 who make sure that their land stays the way it is and
18 decide on how it goes forward. So, thank you very
19 much.

20 TODD CORIG: Yeah, I would like to thank
21 you for providing us this opportunity to bring some
22 testimony before the Council, and I'm going to
23 primarily just focus on a similar snail's eye view of
24 the world rather than making it the global issues,
25 which are hopefully present for most of us. As we

2 just said, we're right in the middle of the Cop 21
3 Event in Paris where they're trying to fix, you know,
4 a huge problem with impacts on civilization as we
5 know it. So there's obviously big wheels that are
6 turning, and this idea of urban agriculture didn't
7 even exist 10 years ago. Anyone can see that New
8 York City has defeated itself. We rely on California
9 for our tomatoes. Thank you very much. The idea
10 that we may have to grow our own tomatoes in the near
11 future is kind of a shocking concept, but it's a very
12 real one I think we're all aware of, and I think this
13 urban ag opportunity is something that gives that.
14 But more specifically, I am a facilitator for two
15 gardens in the Crown Heights section of Brooklyn.
16 One is located at 1682 Pacific Street. It was
17 converted or taken over by community gardeners in
18 2011. They're licensed under HPD, and since those
19 four years, we've added 13 raised by. We brought in
20 a 350-gallon storage tank to capture water off the
21 adjacent roof. We've built a polycarbonate
22 greenhouse about 12x13 feet where we are doing our
23 own seedlings in the spring. All this funded by
24 various citizens, the Committee, by the Green
25 Gorillas, by--NYRP has donated quite a bit of

2 material, and as Paula mentioned suddenly in January
3 of this year, we discovered that we are on a list.
4 No one even told us we were list. I don't think the
5 garden--the Green Thumb people even knew they were on
6 the list. So again, it point so this lack of
7 coordination among the city's agencies. One hand is
8 doing one thing, the other hand doesn't know about it
9 until some private citizen brings it to their
10 attention. And so now we're obviously struggling in
11 the garden. We are not going to be apply for any
12 grants in the near future unless we end up becoming a
13 development site. So are basically like hit in the
14 head, stunned. Right next to that garden is another
15 garden that is mostly owned by New York Restoration
16 Project. This is an 89 Schenectady Avenue.
17 Unfortunately, NYRP owns 87 and 91 Schenectady. It
18 does not own 89 Schenectady for some, you know,
19 omission on the city's part. It actually did not
20 sell that at auction and it was left on the city's
21 ownership list, and suddenly in June we found out the
22 city's intent was to auction off that property for
23 tax liens. And, in fact, it was sold on August 24th
24 for \$365,000 to a private developer, and we were able
25 to crate enough pushback in the community. On that

2 particular lot there's an 80 foot willow tree, and
3 probably the largest chicken coop in Brooklyn. So
4 this came as quite a shock to the community to find
5 out their willow tree and community chicken coop is
6 about to be turned into a luxury housing project. So
7 that kind of got a little pushback, and the developer
8 has now decided to rather than develop the site he's
9 going to sell it to some other developer for
10 \$690,000. [laughs] So the greater fool theory here
11 applies for this. In any case so these are just two,
12 you know, of many, many gardens that are under
13 pressure, and just kind of graphically portray the
14 types of piecemeal haphazard way that our gardens are
15 being treated without any type of oversight by the
16 city in a comprehensive way for these gardens. Thank
17 you for your attention.

18 CHAIRPERSON ARROYO: Okay, so my--I have
19 a real basic question and hopefully you've had an
20 opportunity to review the legislation that we're here
21 discussing although we love to hear from you all the
22 time about the nuances in the local communities, and
23 you help inform the work that we do here
24 tremendously. I said that in my opening statement,
25 and I mean that wholeheartedly. Aresh and I were

2 part of a team that helped to save I think it was 17
3 of 27 or 12 of 27 back in 2005 in my district. Your
4 opinion on the legislation? Any criticism?
5 Something that you would recommend to the prime
6 sponsor and, of course, you need to be ready and
7 available to ensure that as he moves the conversation
8 forward with the Administration that you are able to
9 provide some constructive feedback and input on how
10 working with the Administration and the legislation
11 can be something that's going to work for everyone
12 concerned. Anything on the legislation?

13 ARESH JAVADI: Okay. One of the main
14 things that on the legislation I would say foresight
15 is that gardeners weren't involved in forming this.
16 Community gardeners and local folks and supports of
17 community gardens were very little involved. I mean
18 as New York City Community Garden Coalition, we
19 represent them. So that's a key part of creating it,
20 and now there is an opportunity to again pull us in
21 the table and create that. Part of the--what I read
22 and again like we've been working on legislation to
23 try and preserve community gardens, create more
24 gardens and make sure that the ones that are in
25 danger move forward. So again, there's an apology

2 that, you know, that wasn't included or you didn't
3 even know about those particular moves. How--now,
4 when I've read this, this seems very much about urban
5 food production, food policy. If that is what it's
6 really about, then again gardeners are part of that
7 and a big part of that. And if it's an advisory
8 board, personally like I've been on the community
9 board and I've been places and advisory ends up being
10 advisory like I really want this to happen. I want
11 this to move forward, and have more teeth to it than
12 just advisory. So that's just me again speaking.
13 Like to make gardens permanent I don't want to just
14 be advising somebody who is then is going to--the
15 next mayor who may not particularly like gardens or
16 anything. This one who is building on some of them
17 or may build on them, let's say he preserves them.
18 So how do we put some more teeth into that? I mean
19 again it might be that you just need people just to
20 give you feedback in regards to--to how to move
21 forward and, you know, people who are in the
22 community who give you feedback on that. Maybe
23 that's the focus, but personally, I would like
24 something that's way more real and way more pushing
25 on what's going to happen to our food production and

2 make it go forth. So that's more of what I would be
3 looking for us.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER JOHNSON: Thank you for
5 that and I acknowledge as I--as I did in my opening
6 and I probably should have repeated it that, you
7 know, there are still a lot of conversations that
8 need to take place, and I take responsibility for the
9 fact that for a host of reasons we were unable to sit
10 down and meet with many of the key folks that have
11 been part of this movement as you have been for
12 decades, and preserving these gardens across the
13 city. And are really invested in the future of our
14 existing gardens and creating more gardens and coming
15 up with a sensible policy, as you just mentioned for
16 even when there is going to be development, how do we
17 incorporate gardens and green space into that
18 development? And so, you know, I think that the
19 Administration gave some good feedback on coming up
20 with a clear and realistic mission statement related
21 to this advisory group. The reason why I put forward
22 a advisory group is that I think it's not always--in
23 government we are not always [coughs] good at talking
24 with each other regularly. And to convene some type
25 of space for multiple city agencies and for the

2 Administration and the Council to have a formal
3 advisory group that looks at these issues broadly and
4 specifically, and to come forward with
5 recommendations. I mean my hope is that there may be
6 some ideas already where we could even maybe come up
7 with more legislation. But separately on an ongoing
8 basis as things evolve, this group should be an
9 incubator for ideas both from a legislative budgetary
10 and land use perspective in informing all levels of
11 city government on how to move forward. And I look
12 forward to having--continuing this conversation with
13 you, and this legislation will not move forward or be
14 adopted until we are actually able to sit down and
15 fully flesh out and have a more informed piece of
16 legislation that looks at all of the things that you
17 raised. So thank you. It was very helpful.

18 CHAIRPERSON ARROYO: And that--and that
19 may include another piece of legislation because, you
20 know, one piece may not necessarily answer all of the
21 concerns that cover all of the nuances that are
22 required to be covered, and given jurisdiction and
23 city agency involvement, that also influences what
24 rolls out. So I--I urge--I warn you, right, if you
25 come here with a recommendation or an issue, then you

2 become part of finding the solution. I will excuse
3 myself and I'm going to ask the ranking member of
4 this committee to sit in my stead for the remainder
5 of the hearing. I'm going to get to a meeting by
6 4:00 in Midtown, and traffic doesn't usually
7 cooperate with me. Council Member Palma. Thank you
8 Annabel.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER JOHNSON: Thank you,
10 Maria. [applause]

11 ARESH JAVADI: She will be a fine voice
12 here.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER PALMA: Thank you, Council
14 Member Arroyo.

15 CRAIG CORNIG: Like I just--one--one
16 brief thought I missed. I know there is a sense that
17 we'd like to add more bite into this committee to
18 have statutory power to enforce their will. And I
19 think sometimes that may be a dangerous assault (sic)
20 to get onto because I think--I'm a member of a
21 community board now in Crown Heights for some eight
22 years, and as we all know, community boards are
23 almost exclusively advisory. But as you're seeing
24 what's doing on now with the Mayor's rezoning
25 proposals for housing and the way it's being--it runs

2 through the community boards, it's getting a lot--a
3 lot of coverage in the press and generally bad
4 coverage. I think it's going to be very hard for the
5 Mayor to put it through in its present form just
6 because of all the bad exposure getting--going
7 through this process. And I think like similarly, a
8 lot of these problems we've seen in the community
9 gardens is exposed in a committee and then a spot
10 like Quini (sp?). I think a lot of the agencies
11 would be very hesitant to do what they're doing.
12 Just because no one has noticed and paid attention,
13 they did away with a lot of what they had. So I
14 wouldn't--I think it may be easier to form an
15 advisory committee, and get it approved and actually
16 get it done as opposed to one that just has some
17 statutory standing, and might take years and years in
18 negotiation and litigation to get it passes. This we
19 can get done, and I think it may be adequate to get
20 our objective achieved. So that's my thought. Thank
21 you.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER PALMA: If there are no
23 further questions, I'll excuse this panel, and call
24 up our last panel. David Vigil. Thank you for
25 testimony. Sarah Hobel and Alice Forbes Peer. (sic)

2 [pause] You guys can decide on how you want to--who
3 wants to start or take the lead.

4 DAVID VIGIL: Thank you.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER PALMA: Just make sure to
6 introduce yourself for the record.

7 DAVID VIGIL: Sure. Good afternoon. My
8 name is David Vigil. I'm the Project Director of
9 East New York Farms. I'm testifying on behalf of
10 East New York Farms, a food justice and urban
11 agriculture project in East New York, Brooklyn.
12 Since 1998, we have been working with East New York
13 residents to grow food, run farmer markets and start
14 and maintain community gardens and farms. We provide
15 things like seeds, soil, plants, and other supplies
16 to over 300 gardeners in the neighborhood who grow in
17 30 community gardens plus back yard gardens. Fifty
18 of those gardens--gardeners sell food at our farmers
19 market, one of the largest youth run farmer's markets
20 in the low-income community. This year we also
21 started a half acre farm at the Lewis H. Pink Houses,
22 a NYCHA development in East New York, with all of the
23 food given away free of charge to Pink Houses
24 residents. We believe that growing food in our
25 community is a powerful act, providing not just

2 nutrition, but also education, cultural preservation,
3 environmental benefits and a stronger and a stronger
4 sense of community. Suffice it to say we were
5 pleased to hear about the proposed amendment to
6 create an urban agricultural advisory board, and we
7 wish to share some of our thoughts of how we can
8 ensure that this board can further the needs of
9 communities like East New York that are reshaping our
10 local food systems. Most importantly, we want to
11 make sure that community gardens remain in the
12 forefront of any conversation about urban agriculture
13 in New York City. While any single garden may not
14 look as impressive as a rooftop farm or a hydroponic
15 greenhouse, when taken as a whole community gardens
16 constitute a much larger part of our local food
17 system than any of the more high visibility farm
18 projects. Community gardens are also an important
19 part of the legacy of the land stewardship and some
20 of the communities that were hit hardest by
21 redlining, arson, abandonment and neglect. Community
22 gardens bring together residents of all ages and all
23 backgrounds. In East New York you will find
24 gardeners from the American South, the Caribbean,
25 West Africa and Bangladesh all working together in

2 the same space to feed their families and their
3 neighbors. This proposed advisory board must take an
4 active role in preserving these spaces for local food
5 production by community residents. We appreciate the
6 effort to bring a broad range of city agencies to the
7 table to address issues of urban agriculture. We
8 would like to encourage the Council to consider other
9 agencies that could have an interest and an impact on
10 urban agriculture in New York City. The Department
11 of Sanitation has been a key partner for us and many
12 urban farms, helping them distribute massive
13 quantities of compost as well as support the training
14 of master composters. The Department of
15 Environmental Protection should also be at the table
16 considering the benefits that urban agriculture could
17 have on our over-burdened sewer system by collecting
18 rainwater and allow rainfall to permeate the soil.
19 We also believe that some of the agencies and
20 institutions holding large amounts of public land
21 should also be at the table. Gardening and farming
22 in NYCHA communities, public schools and colleges
23 would bring a wide range of benefits to New York City
24 residents, and there are many examples of these types
25 of farms in existence today. Finally, we want to see

2 the appointed members of the Board comprised of a
3 diverse range of practitioners from around the city.
4 Urban agriculture takes on many forms from the back
5 yard garden or the rooftop beehive to the NYCHA farm
6 or the greenhouse in an elementary school. We want
7 to make sure that the skills, views and needs of low-
8 income communities of color have a voice on this
9 board. But in addition to increasing the local food
10 production, we can seek to achieve food justice in
11 our city. Thank you.

12 SARA HOBEL: A tough act to follow.

13 [laughs] I'm Sara Hobel. I'm the Executive Director
14 of the Horticultural Society of New York. I'd like
15 to thank the Committee on Community Development for
16 holding this hearing and giving us the opportunity to
17 testify. As an organization, we wholeheartedly
18 support Council Members Johnson and Koo in their
19 efforts to amend the New York City Charter in
20 relation to developing an urban agricultural advisory
21 board. The Horticultural Society of New York has
22 been promoting the need for the strong connection
23 between urban dwellers and plans for over 100 years
24 since 1902. We have long advocated for a broad
25 understanding and approach to incorporating urban

2 agriculture into our city planning so that it can be
3 a part of our residents' daily lives. Human
4 civilization after all began with the cultivation of
5 plants. As our world becomes more urbanized,
6 opportunities for a direct connection to growing
7 plants have greatly diminished especially for those
8 who are economically disadvantaged. The outcomes of
9 this disconnection grow more apparent each year, and
10 I'm sure you are aware of them: Obesity, diabetes,
11 asthma, high blood pressure, the loss of cultural
12 heritage and an overall loss of the very well
13 documented spiritual, physical and mental health
14 benefits of living with regular and processed--and
15 proximate access to getting your hands dirty in a
16 natural world. Since the early 1980s, the
17 Horticultural Society has provided social service
18 programs to populations in need throughout the city.
19 We teach in over 25 public schools. We have built
20 over 60 school gardens in the last eight years. We
21 provide teacher trainings that credit them and give
22 them professional development courses to allow them
23 to incorporate plants and gardens into their
24 curriculum. We build gardens in supportive housing,
25 a very, very needy group, and provide weekly programs

2 for residents to integrate the garden into their
3 daily lives. We are the country's leading
4 organization in providing horticultural therapy to
5 prison populations. We fund and we run the largest
6 horticultural therapy program on Rikers Island
7 serving over 400 detainees and sentenced individuals
8 each year. We have, in fact, been asked to expand
9 that program because of the clear impact that
10 gardening provides people in a therapeutic manner.
11 We also run an after care transitional employment
12 program for ex-offenders, engaging them in building
13 and caring for green spaces, gardens and public
14 plazas in low-income communities. We also provide
15 technical assistance to community gardens performing
16 remediation services, building raised beds and
17 teaching garden skills. As you can imagine, these
18 programs have served to reconnect children, youth,
19 adults and families to the cultivation of plants
20 including the concomitant benefits of improved
21 nutrition through the preparation of meals from fresh
22 vegetables and foods. Improved kinesthetic and
23 science learning through direct engagement with the
24 natural world. Improved artistic expression through
25 engagement with the awe of natural beauty and

2 discovery, and improved mental and physical health
3 through the hands-on immersive experience with
4 plants. We have pioneered a holistic approach to
5 connecting urban communities to the importance of
6 agriculture in the urban environment. Our programs
7 incorporate education, vocational, nutritional,
8 therapeutic and spiritual elements, all very
9 important, that provide a well rounded understanding
10 of why the practice of growing food and plants is
11 essential to human wellbeing. Over the many years,
12 the sum of our experience with these programs and
13 populations has strengthened our conviction and our
14 mission to ensure that our great city provides
15 equitable opportunity for residents to benefit from a
16 direct connection to plants. Benefits that are to us
17 as important in our city as public schools, public
18 transportation, public health, and even public
19 libraries, just to name a few. To ensure that our
20 city's residents have equal access to all the
21 benefits of plants, we strongly urge the creation of
22 an ongoing urban agricultural advisory board that
23 incorporates the learning and know-how of many
24 organizations in this city.

2 ALICE FORBES SPEAR: Hi, I'm Alice Forbes
3 Spear, an I'm here from 462 Halsey Community Garden
4 in Bed-Stuy. I got my start in urban farming on
5 Eagle Street Rooftop Farm in 2009. I apprenticed and
6 worked there for three years. I ran the Education
7 Program, exposing hundreds of New York City kids to
8 urban agriculture for the first time. I learned the
9 basics of urban farming and the importance of the
10 Upstate/Downstate connection while I was at Eagle
11 Street. When people in my neighborhood started
12 meeting in 2011 to plan what would become 462 Halsey
13 Community Garden, I didn't know that this burgeoning
14 understanding of the important rooftop/sidewalk
15 connection in urban agriculture would take over my
16 entire life. Since 462 Halsey opened its gates,
17 gates that remain open all day, everyday from April
18 to November, I have worked with a diverse group of
19 people to transform a lot full of garbage into an
20 active community center with over 500 square feet of
21 organic food growing space, and a compost project
22 that diverts nearly 2,000 pounds of food scraps every
23 month from landfills into garden beds. In
24 partnership with Grow NYC we host a weekly CSA
25 program that is utilized by around 100 households

2 every week. We grow fruits, vegetables, and herbs
3 that we share free of charge with anyone who wants
4 them. Our bees pollinate the neighborhood and
5 provide delicious medicinal honey for our community.
6 We run education programs with local schools, serve
7 as a gallery for local and international artists, and
8 also have really, really great parties. The
9 neighbors who come together as community in our
10 garden bring all different experiences, skills and
11 personalities to this space. Some, like me, are 20
12 or 30 somethings who are new to agriculture. Others
13 are older, wiser members, are West Indian or from the
14 South. They came up growing food. And then there
15 are the children, the new generation that will know
16 how to grow food, create life giving soil and tend
17 bees despite growing up in this concrete jungle.
18 Community gardens nurture vital intergenerational
19 skill sharing. If we as a city are serious about
20 urban agriculture, then we need to be serious about
21 growing farmers. That happens at community gardens.
22 These are the spaces that will grow our kids into
23 wise elders with green thumbs who know how to feed
24 their neighbors. 462 Halsey is one of at least 18
25 gardens on the HPD list for development as part of

2 the Mayor's Affordable Housing Plan. Our communities
3 desperately need affordable housing, but I also know
4 that my beloved garden could be bulldozed to create
5 condos with two or three apartments designated for a
6 family of four that costs \$3,200. That's not
7 affordable in Bed-Stuy or anywhere else. To pretend
8 that our choice is between community gardens and
9 slightly less expensive housing is a red herring. We
10 dissolve--we deserve both, and there are smart
11 dedicated New Yorkers willing to make both a reality.
12 The hundreds of active community gardens in New York
13 City are prime examples of what New Yorkers can do to
14 make their city a better, more just and more livable
15 space. I used to tell the kids I worked with that my
16 favorite thing about urban--urban farming is that
17 it's so rewarding. It's a vital tool in this--in the
18 fight for social, environmental and food justice.
19 Fighting to make the world a better place is hard,
20 exhausting work, but when farming is your tool at
21 least you get some vegetables at the end. [laughter]
22 What's more, you get to nurture other living things
23 and help them grow. At community gardens not only do
24 we grow food and innovate waste management systems,
25 we foster community. We come together to make our

2 city better, greener and healthier. We need your
3 help to protect our community gardens. I promise if
4 you help us keep our spaces, we will continue our
5 work block by block to turn New York City into a
6 model for urban agriculture. Thank you.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER PALMA: Thank you all for
8 the testimony. Do you have questions?

9 COUNCIL MEMBER JOHNSON: No, thank you
10 very much for being here. I look forward to working
11 together. I--I learned a tremendous amount today,
12 and I look forward to continuing these conversations.
13 The work you all are doing is incredible, and it's a
14 huge service to the neighborhoods you serve and the
15 city as a whole. So thank you.

16 PANEL MEMBERS: Thank you.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER PALMA: Thank you all
18 again for everyone who testified, the Administration,
19 the public and we want to thank Council Member
20 Johnson for putting forth this piece of legislation,
21 and recognizing the importance of what we need to do
22 to make sure that we continue to develop not only
23 gardens, but for urban farms throughout the City of
24 New York. Thank you for--Chairwoman Arroyo for her
25 dedication to this issue. I've seen her mom's garden

2 [laughter] and--and I'm--I'm a beneficiary of her
3 mom's garden. And, you know, she filled so much, and
4 she's also growing a pineapple. I never knew
5 pineapple could grow in the Bronx, but I have a
6 picture of it. So thank you all again, and I know
7 that Council Member Johnson will continue to work
8 really hard with the Administration to make this a
9 fair and justable piece of legislation.

10 PANEL MEMBER: Thank you.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER PALMA: And I will adjourn
12 this meeting. [gavel] Meeting adjourned.

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C E R T I F I C A T E

World Wide Dictation certifies that the foregoing transcript is a true and accurate record of the proceedings. We further certify that there is no relation to any of the parties to this action by blood or marriage, and that there is interest in the outcome of this matter.



Date December 15, 2015