



## PARTNER ORGANIZATION LETTER OF SUPPORT

February 23, 2023

City of Buffalo Common Council  
65 Niagara Square  
Buffalo, NY 14202

Dear City of Buffalo Common Council,

The mission of the Buffalo and Erie County Food Policy Council (FPC) is to advocate for an equitable and sustainable food system for the people of Buffalo and Erie County. In 2020, the FPC completed a [Local Food Action Plan](#) that serves as a framework for Buffalo and Erie County to build a prosperous local food system. The City was represented in this Plan through a series stakeholder interviews which occurred in 2018/2019, and has representation on the FPC through an appointed seat. The Plan identifies six priority areas and key actions to help support our goals.

Land is the foundation of our food system and the FPC believes that publicly-owned land should be made accessible to the public. For these reasons, the FPC supports the Public Land for Public Benefit Campaign spearheaded by Grassroots Gardens WNY, in partnership with many other local nonprofits. This Campaign connects with the Plan by way of the following:

### Agriculture

- Support policies permitting the use of vacant land for urban agriculture, and free use of publicly-owned vacant land
- Support policies permitting the use of vacant land for community gardens, and free use of publicly-owned vacant land.

### Economic Development

- Support "food system-friendly" zoning ordinances and policies to encourage: small-scale food production in communities; residential food sales; farm stands at community gardens, school gardens, urban farms, affordable housing projects, and public facilities; and adaptive reuse of vacant commercial and industrial structures for local food system uses.

### Education

- Promote multidisciplinary efforts that educate youth through food production (i.e. gardening on school public and/or residential spaces), food choices (i.e., budgeting, shopping, nutrition), and food justice based community service.
- Educate and engage local and state elected representatives and public officials on the importance of having a sustainable local food system.

### Environment and Climate Change

- Promote the inclusion of food systems as part of climate resiliency and/or disaster mitigation planning efforts.

***Our mission is to advocate for an equitable and sustainable food system for the people of Buffalo and Erie County.***

Food Access

- Advocate for zoning and land use policies to ensure appropriate support for community gardens, urban farmers, and backyard gardens.
- Advocate for streamlined permitting process and support increased use of public spaces for non-permanent fresh food retail, demonstration, mobile vending, and farmers markets.
- Develop maps and other tools that highlight neighborhood assets, gaps, and opportunities for creating complete food environments in Buffalo and Erie County's low and moderate income neighborhoods (i.e., prioritize neighborhoods that are currently food deserts).

Health

- Ensure engagement of those most impacted by health disparities, including low-income, African American, Hispanic, Native American, immigrant, refugee, and other underrepresented communities, in developing and implementing culturally appropriate food assistance, education, nutrition, gardening, and cooking programs

This Campaign is paramount in achieving an equitable local food system. The FPC stands in full support of the Campaign's vision for a participatory planning model on how publicly-owned land is utilized.

In addition to our support for this Campaign, we offer the following recommendations on vacant land use in the City:

- Create an interactive map of available vacant lots on the City website.
- Devote additional funding to the Office of Strategic Planning to facilitate further neighborhood-level planning.
- Develop systems of interaction between planning staff, inspectors, and the Division of Citizen Services to encourage holistic planning for land in the City.
- Conduct a large-scale "cleaning and greening" of publicly-owned vacant land in the city. Cleaning and greening involves removing trash from vacant lots, planting and maintaining grass on the lot, then adding a fence to the property. This is a cheap and effective way of showing that the lots are being cared for, and it discourages dumping and other illegal uses.
- Prioritize neighbors within a half-mile radius of a vacant land for the purchase of that lot.
- Explore mechanisms to discourage land purchase by speculators.
- Require developers interested in publicly-owned vacant land to approach nearby residents to discuss possible development at the beginning of the planning process.
- Prioritize BIPOC voices and needs in decision-making on land usage, especially those on the East Side that have been impacted by food apartheid, redlining, and historic land theft.

The FPC strongly encourages the City to meet with the coordinators of this Campaign and discuss next steps in enacting a participatory planning process for public land.

This letter serves as our formal support of and commitment to this campaign. We look forward to working with the coalition and the City in furthering our collective goals of making the food system equitable, accessible, and just.

Sincerely,



Antonina Simeti  
Chair, Food Policy Council of Buffalo & Erie County

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