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TEMPLATE FOR BOARD/COMMISSION RECOMMENDATIONS



BOARD/COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION

Austin-Travis County Food Policy Board

Recommendation Number: (YYYYMMDD-XXX) (XXX is the agenda item number): Farmland Acquisition and Preservation

NOTE: The “WHEREAS”s should give the background and the “NOW, THEREFORE,” should state what the board is requesting Council to do.

WHEREAS, the 2022 City of Austin State of the Food System Report indicates that less than 0.6% of the food consumed in Travis County is produced locally, and that approximately 16.8 acres of farmland are lost daily to development pressures, underscoring the critical need for dedicated agricultural land preservation efforts; and

WHEREAS, land in the Capital Region is continuing to increase in value and decrease in quantity, it is imperative to act quickly as the cost of action will only increase over time; and

WHEREAS, the Austin/Travis County Food Plan, approved by the Austin City Council in October 2024, includes strategic, measurable, and time-bound goals and strategies to strengthen food security, promote environmental sustainability, and address climate change; and

WHEREAS, agricultural lands are vital to local food security, environmental sustainability, emergency preparedness, and climate resilience; and

WHEREAS, the goals and strategies in the Austin/Travis County Food Plan prioritize expanding community food production and preserving farmland for regenerative agriculture through strategies such as conservation easements, land purchases, and land banking; and

WHEREAS, the Austin/Travis County Food Plan also recommends pursuing funding sources, including general obligation bonds, to conserve agricultural land; and

WHEREAS, the Austin-Travis County Food Policy Board’s Recommendation Number 20240318-7 urged the City of Austin to allocate funds and create a full-time equivalent (FTE) position to support the implementation of the Food Plan; and

WHEREAS, preserving agricultural land also supports the goals of the Austin Climate Equity Plan by promoting sustainable land use, strengthening local food systems, and reducing carbon footprints through localized food production; and

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WHEREAS, the Austin Climate Equity Plan aims to protect 500,000 acres of farmland across the five-county region through legal conservation or regenerative agriculture programs by 2030; and

WHEREAS,

WHEREAS, the City of Austin currently lacks a dedicated mechanism to effectively manage and prioritize the preservation of agricultural lands;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Austin-Travis County Food Policy Board encourages the Austin City Council to allocate funds and explore all available means in order to establish a dedicated management mechanism, such as a dedicated city department or full-time equivalent staff (FTE), to oversee and coordinate agricultural land preservation and management efforts; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Austin-Travis County Food Policy Board recommends that Austin City Council designates seed funding for a revolving loan fund through the use of general obligation funds, to preserve and protect agricultural land. This fund will preserve agricultural land in perpetuity through either simple fee purchase or conservation easements. The city's leadership in helping create a working lands fund, would also attract private investment and philanthropy funds, with the potential to scale the impact of the city's investments.

BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED, that the Austin-Travis County Food Policy Board encourages Austin City Council to direct city staff to undertake an inventory of land that the city currently owns that could be used for agricultural production purposes over the next 3-5 years. This land could include public right of way, floodplain buyout, or land that is slated for long term development. This land could be protected through conservation easements to be preserved as agricultural land in perpetuity, and leased to urban farms or organizations producing food for the community. Nonprofit and for profit partners should be identified to manage the use of the land, so that operational costs are not incurred by the city.

Date of Approval: _____

Record of the vote: (Unanimous on a 7-0 vote, 4-3 vote with names of those voting no listed)

Attest: _____

(Staff or board member can sign)