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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 Travis County Commissioner’s Court in October 2024, includes strategies to address local food security and environmental sustainability; 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 20240318-8 urged Travis County to allocate funds and create a full-time equivalent (FTE) position to support the implementation of the Food Plan; and

WHEREAS, Travis County has a history of successfully managing agricultural leases through the Land stewardship program; and

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WHEREAS, Travis County currently operates a [Conservation Easement Program](#) that allows landowners to preserve agricultural, natural, or cultural resources while retaining ownership of their property. This program, funded by voter-approved bond funds and supplemented by donations, has successfully preserved significant tracts of land and helps protect vital resources such as watersheds, wildlife habitats, and agricultural lands; and

WHEREAS, the Conservation Easement Program has been a key tool for Travis County in its efforts to protect land from development, with more than \$24.9 million approved by voters in 2011 and 2017 for the purchase of easements. The program prioritizes properties in conservation corridors and those with significant environmental or agricultural value, aligning with the broader goals of the Austin/Travis County Food Plan to protect farmland for regenerative agriculture and promote local food systems; and

WHEREAS, the success of the Conservation Easement Program demonstrates that Travis County has the infrastructure in place to effectively support farmland preservation initiatives. This program's focus on protecting working farms and ranches directly contributes to the County's goals of promoting sustainable agriculture, local food production, and climate resilience; and

WHEREAS,

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, the Austin-Travis County Food Policy Board recommends that Travis County expand and build upon the success of the Conservation Easement Program and the Land Stewardship Program by creating dedicated funding and establishing a countywide land acquisition and preservation strategy to target agricultural lands at risk of development prioritizing farmers and ranchers that employ sustainable and regenerative practices. This strategy could include expanding conservation easement options for agricultural lands, ensuring that these lands remain available for future generations of farmers and ranchers; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that Travis County explore the creation of a revolving loan fund or other funding mechanisms to further support the purchase of conservation easements and agricultural land preservation, similar to existing bond-funded initiatives, to preserve agricultural land in perpetuity through either simple fee purchase or conservation easements. The county'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 county's investments.

BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED, that the Austin-Travis County Food Policy Board encourages Travis County to direct county staff to undertake an inventory of land that the county currently owns that could be used for agricultural 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 county.

Date of Approval: _____

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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)