

Joint Sustainability Committee

RECOMMENDATION 20250226-006



Date: February 26, 2025

Subject: Support for Agricultural Land Acquisition and Preservation in Austin, Texas

Motioned By: Marissa Bell

Seconded By: Charlotte Davis

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 Austin-Travis County 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, agricultural lands are vital to local food security, environmental sustainability, emergency preparedness, and climate resilience; 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, the Austin/Travis County Food Plan's Goal 1 prioritizes expanding community food production, preserving agricultural lands, and increasing the amount of farmland dedicated to regenerative food production long-term in Austin and Travis County; and

WHEREAS, Strategy 1.1 of the Food Plan calls for the preservation of land for food production in Central Texas through conservation easements, fee-simple purchases, and land-banking, ensuring that farmland remains dedicated to agricultural use; and

WHEREAS, Strategy 1.2 directs the City of Austin and Travis County to pursue capital funding sources to finance the conservation of land for agricultural use through conservation easements or direct purchases; 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

WHEREAS, Natural Systems Goal 2 of 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, the City of Austin currently lacks a dedicated mechanism to effectively manage and prioritize the preservation of agricultural lands; and

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Joint Sustainability Committee encourages the Austin City Council to allocate funds and explore all available means 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 Joint Sustainability Committee recommends that Austin City Council allocate seed funding for a revolving loan fund from the general fund to preserve agricultural land and build on this initial investment through future general obligation bonds to ensure long-term sustainability and scalability. 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 may also attract private and philanthropic investments, helping to scale the impact of the City's investments; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Joint Sustainability Committee encourages Austin City Council to direct City staff to undertake an inventory of land that could be targeted for acquisition, preservation, and used for agricultural purposes. Acquired lands could be protected in perpetuity through conservation easements and then sold or leased to farmers or organizations producing food for the community, prioritizing those that utilize regenerative production practices; and

BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED, that the Joint Sustainability Committee recommends identifying existing City-owned lands that could be converted to agriculture. This land could include public right of way, floodplain buyout, or land that is slated for long term development

Vote Record: 12-0

Yes: Charlotte Davis, Haris Qureshi, Kaiba White, Chris Maxwell-Gaines, Marissa Bell, Lane Becker, Melissa Rothrock, Diana Wheeler, Heather Houser, Anna Scott, Chris Campbell, Rodrigo Leal

No: N/A

Absent: Yure Suarez, Natalie Poindexter, Amy Noel, Ben Luckens, Alberta Phillips

Attest:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Rohan Lilauwala', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Rohan Lilauwala, Staff Liaison