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July 5, 2013

Dawn Kamalanathan  
Director of Planning and Capital Management  
Recreation and Parks Department  
30 Van Ness Avenue, 5th Floor  
San Francisco, CA 94102

Dear Ms. Kamalanathan:

Pending final approval by the Board of Supervisors, we look forward to working with the Recreation and Parks Department (RPD) as you establish the city's new urban agriculture program. The first year of the program provides a unique chance to truly expand the city's internal coordination and general support for urban gardeners and farmers. During recent public meetings, you expressed interest in receiving recommendations from community organizations regarding how the new program should prioritize its efforts. With this in mind, below are some of our thoughts on how the program can be most successful from its inception.

- 1. Clearly establish the urban agriculture program as an initiative that works across agencies and assists gardeners and farmers of all types.** The success of the new program will require the new coordinator to serve as a liaison between many city agencies and community groups. Similarly, the mandate of the program necessitates that the coordinator support urban agriculture of all types and not just those projects on land managed by RPD. In some ways, the new program's cross-departmental goals are similar to those of the city's Green Building program housed by the San Francisco Department of the Environment. We encourage RPD to make clear, through the program's work plan, reporting structure, and communications that the program is housed in one department, but coordinates with many agencies to serve the whole city.
- 2. Operate as a "one-stop-shop" for urban agriculture.** One of the biggest shortcomings of the city's current support of urban agriculture is that the public finds it difficult to access accurate information and support from city agencies. The "Needs Assessment on Urban Agriculture" published by the City Administrator's office showed that almost all respondents desired "a clear point of contact and someone within the City that can provide correct information on Urban Agriculture." A top priority for the new coordinator should be creating a comprehensive website, providing timely responses to inquiries, and continuing to convene the urban agriculture working group (with representatives from various departments and community groups) on a monthly or bi-monthly basis to help address questions that don't have clear points of contact. The coordinator should also work with the other agencies to quickly adopt the streamlined application to start a project on public land that was published in the strategic plan.
- 3. Establish at least three urban agriculture resources centers during the coordinator's first year.** Resource centers that provide basic supplies such as mulch, compost, seeds, and tools can support gardeners and farmers of all types. Various city agencies already provide some of these resources to the public on an ad-hoc basis. Centers that consistently provide these resources could be created with minimal capital and operating expense by partnering with existing urban agriculture sites such as Alemany

Farm, Garden for the Environment, the Clean City Coalition Tool Lending Library and others. We encourage the department to establish at least three resource center sites, throughout the city, that are open to the public on a consistent schedule each week.

**4. Work with the Real Estate Division to complete the audit of city-owned rooftops suitable for urban agriculture.** The strategic plan published by the City Administrator notes that the second phase of the Real Estate Division's rooftop audit will include a closer examination of 208 city-owned buildings. San Francisco will be hosting Cities Alive, a conference dedicated to green roofs, in October 2013. By completing the rooftop audit in preparation for the conference, San Francisco could demonstrate leadership before a national audience, provide the new program with a quick success, and potentially open up a new set of sites for urban agriculture.

**5. Develop a strategy to reduce community garden waiting lists within the coordinator's first six months.** One of the main goals of the original urban agriculture legislation was to help more San Franciscans access land for gardening and farming. Addressing the backlog in the community garden waiting lists is one way of addressing this issue. Tackling this problem is not simple and will involve a mix of using existing community garden plots more efficiently, ensuring that the waiting lists are well managed, and developing new garden sites. The new urban agriculture program should work with the existing community gardens program within RPD, the volunteer community garden coordinators, and other city agencies to develop a clear strategy for helping meet the demand for community garden space in San Francisco.

**6. Add the Urban Agriculture Program as a standing, periodic item on the RPD Commission's agenda.** To provide an opportunity for formal public feedback and added transparency, especially during the first year, we believe it is important that the program provide a progress report and an opportunity for public comment at Commission hearings every three months. Additionally, holding "town hall" meetings on a weekend or evening six-to-nine months after the program launches, similar to those held during the strategic planning process, would help the Department reach the public that can't attend meetings during working hours. These presentations would supplement the more informal meetings of the working group and provide the broader public with a chance to offer feedback and learn about the program's initiatives.

Thank you for considering our comments. We appreciate the time and effort that RPD staff has put into discussing this new program with SPUR staff, our policy board, and with community groups. We look forward to continuing our work together as the program launches.

Sincerely,



Eli Zigas  
Food Systems and Urban Agriculture  
Program Manager

CC: Phil Ginsburg, Sarah Ballard, Melinda Stockmann