

Dear Councilmember

I am writing to ask that you consider voting against **City Council Bill 120917**, introduced by Councilman Brian O'Neill. The bill has **been amended, but still requires all market farms and community gardens on CMX-2 to obtain a "special exception."** Bill 120917 creates new and unnecessary barriers to gardening and farming in Philadelphia, putting at least twenty percent of existent garden and farm parcels at risk of fines and sanctions.

In Philadelphia, gardens have long been important social and cultural spaces. They are the cornerstone of vacant land stewardship in a city with **42,000 vacant parcels**. Community gardens and market farms offer proven benefits to our city, including opportunities for community and leadership development; more active lifestyles; increased access to healthy, affordable and culturally appropriate food; greener neighborhoods and better stormwater management.

Bill 120917 applies to **one third of all commercial land in the City** (CMX-2 and 2.5). Philadelphia residents currently participate in at least 345 gardens and farms on 1200 parcels across the city. **Twenty percent of those gardens are designated CMX-2 or 2.5. *If this bill succeeds, many people from youths to seniors, engaged in projects that are national models, will suddenly find their groups at risk of fines and sanctions and their good work in jeopardy.***

Philadelphia strives to be the "Greenest City" in the country, and our nationally acclaimed Greenworks goals call for increasing access to healthy food and green space. But Bill 120917 does the opposite, creating obstacles to greener communities at the very moment that the City and countless residents and community-based organizations are trying to **increase access to fresh, local food and create innovative solutions to our vacant land problem.**

As cities across the nation look for ways to support urban agriculture, this bill moves against the tide of progress and threatens Philadelphia's position as a leader in this area.

After years of work, Philadelphia's new zoning code is receiving national acclaim as a model of good government. In fact, the American Planning Association has just announced that Philadelphia's Integrated Planning and Zoning Process will receive the APA's 2013 National Planning Excellence Award for a Best Practice. This bill starts to undo much of what makes the code such a success, dismantling efforts to create walkable, mixed use, sustainable communities. **Councilman O'Neill's amendments slow and even reverse progress without offering a reason why.**

I am writing to ask you to vote for a Philadelphia with healthier food and greener spaces. Please vote against City Council Bill 120917 on January 24<sup>th</sup>.

Sincerely,