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TO: The Honorable Detroit City Council

FROM: David Whitaker, Director
Legislative Policy Division Staff 

DATE: November 19, 2025

RE: **RESOLUTION IN SUPPORT OF CREATING A POLICY TO ENSURE SUSTAINABLE
WATER ACCESS FOR DETROIT URBAN FARMERS**

City Council Member Latisha Johnson has requested that the Legislative Policy Division draft a resolution urging the relevant City departments to work with community stakeholders to develop a collaborative policy that ensures equitable and sustainable water access for urban agriculture. Council Member Johnson has requested that the involved departments set a target completion date of June 30, 2026. The requested resolution is attached for your review.

Please let us know if we may be of further assistance.

**RESOLUTION IN SUPPORT OF CREATING A POLICY TO ENSURE SUSTAINABLE
WATER ACCESS FOR DETROIT URBAN FARMERS**

- WHEREAS** Detroit’s urban farms are vital community assets that address food insecurity and strengthen the city by prioritizing community, spurring local economic development, promoting demonstrated sustainability practices, and fostering community resilience and autonomy; and
- WHEREAS** The city’s local urban farms provide profound economic, social and environmental value through the revitalization of vacant land, the practice of soil stewardship, the expansion of green space, the unification of community members and the promotion of sustainable agricultural practices; and
- WHEREAS** Urban farmers in Detroit encounter significant challenges in accessing reliable and affordable water sources, which can pose a potential threat to the long-term sustainability of Detroit’s urban farms and the wealth of benefits they provide to our residents; and
- WHEREAS** Many local urban farms operate on formerly residential vacant lots from which the city has disconnected municipal water service making reconnection prohibitively expensive,¹ which absent affordable options, will in turn force some farmers to rely on insufficient, unreliable, or potentially contaminated sources for water;² and
- WHEREAS** Reconnecting many of Detroit’s urban farms to the municipal water system often requires farmers to hire a master plumber and a Detroit Water and Sewerage Department (DWSD) engineer to locate shut-off valves and to access water or re-tap water mains,³ and
- WHEREAS** The cost of installing a dedicated water connection can exceed \$10,000, and recent quotes from master plumbers have been as high as \$21,000.⁴ Even when water service is restored, farmers incur significant ongoing expenses associated with their water-bill obligations;⁵ and
- WHEREAS** A collaborative, multi-departmental, community stakeholder-inclusive approach is necessary to develop a comprehensive and effective policy that addresses the unique needs of urban farmers and to ensure the responsible and effective use of City resources; and
- WHEREAS** A collaborative policy development team may explore the feasibility of working with the Water Consortium to advance pre-existing efforts⁶ to ensure Detroit farmers have access to water and could further explore the use of innovative methods that involve capturing rainwater through green stormwater infrastructure (GSI) projects and nature-based solution typology;⁷ and
- WHEREAS** The effective management of water resources can be further enhanced through a range of proven conservation practices and infrastructure solutions, as well as complementary practices such as irrigation water management and soil health testing, which are recognized as high-priority practices that align with state conservation goals, and which can be incentivized through targeted policy;⁸
- NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT**
- RESOLVED** That the Detroit City Council, in recognition of the immensely valuable contributions of local urban farms to the health, resilience, and food sovereignty of Detroit residents, hereby urges the relevant City departments—including, but not necessarily limited to, the Detroit Water and Sewerage Department (DWSD), the Planning and Development Department, the General Services Department

¹Planet Detroit, *How One Detroit Farmer Tackles Water Access* (Sept. 2025), <https://planetdetroit.org/2025/09/detroit-urban-farming-water-access/>.

² *Id.*

³ *Id.*

⁴ Patrice Brown, Associate Director, City of Detroit Urban Agriculture Department, Telephone Interview (Nov. 19, 2025).

⁵ Nina Misuraca Ignaczak, *Detroit Urban Farming: A New Vision for Gardeners and Green Spaces*, Planet Detroit (Mar. 2024), <https://planetdetroit.org/2024/03/detroit-urban-farming-tepfirah-rushdan/>

⁶ Water Consortium Project, Sanctuary Farms, <https://www.sanctuaryfarming.com/water-1/water-consortium> (last visited Nov. 19, 2025).

⁷ Patrice Brown, Associate Director, City of Detroit Urban Agriculture Department, Telephone Interview (Nov. 19, 2025).

⁸ U.S. Dep’t of Agric., Natural Resources Conservation Service, *Michigan Water Source Pilot for Urban Farmers* (July 2024), <https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/sites/default/files/2024-07/MI%20Urban%20Water%20Pilot%20Factsheet.pdf>.

(GSD), the Department of Public Works (DPW), the Detroit Fire Department (DFD), the Office of Sustainability, and the Office of Agriculture—undertake an interdepartmental effort, in collaboration with key community stakeholders, including urban farmers and gardeners such as the Water Consortium, the Black Farmer Land Fund, D-Town Farm (DBCFSN) and the Oakland Avenue Urban Farm, to engage in a coordinated process to develop a consensus policy that will ensure accessible and sustainable water sources for urban agriculture within the City of Detroit; and **BE IT FURTHER**

RESOLVED That Detroit City Council urges the aforementioned departments to identify and implement feasible and innovative solutions, endeavoring to complete the policy development process by **June 30, 2026**, and **BE IT FINALLY**

RESOLVED That the Detroit City Clerk will forward copies of this resolution to the Mayor’s Office, the Detroit Water and Sewerage Department (DWSD), the Planning and Development Department, the General Services Department (GSD), the Department of Public Works (DPW), the Detroit Fire Department (DFD), the Office of Sustainability, the Office of Urban Agriculture, the Water Consortium, the Black Farmer Land Fund, D-Town Farm (DBCFSN) and the Oakland Avenue Urban Farm.