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To: Saint Paul City Council

November 6, 2013

From: The District 1 Community Council

Re: Changes to Zoning Code for Urban Agriculture

Our comments about the amendments focus specifically on the definition in Section 65.771 Agriculture

"Principal use of land for the production of food or horticultural crops to be harvested, sold or donated."

This statement is far too broad. It will cover land that is being used principally for community gardens. In doing so it will be opening those parcels up to different levels of property tax that will make it impossible for those activities to continue. Such a definition is totally unreasonable for the function such gardens are meant to serve. In effect such desirable community activities will no longer be viable. There is a difference between land that is gardened and land that is used for agriculture. This definition also does not distinguish between food or crops produced for donation and for sale. While the scale of these two activities should certainly be taken into account, to include food to be donated seems to discourage that activity at a time when it should be encouraged.

We would suggest instead that the language say - "Principal use of land for the production of food or horticultural crops to be harvested for sale." Agriculture is a business activity and we should be distinguishing it from gardening, especially community gardening, in that way.

Finally, the residents of District 1 live in areas with large lots. Our organization often receives requests from residents, particularly immigrant residents, for information about available land for agricultural uses. These zoning changes can have a major impact on our district and its residents. We want to make sure that the changes encourage the entrepreneurial independence that urban agriculture can represent, and bring fresh, healthy foods to communities that have limited access currently. We do not want those zoning changes to have a negative impact on community gardening activities that benefit the whole community in a variety of ways, especially since those changes can have impacts on the costs of gardening in a community-based setting.