



FOOD SECURITY TASK FORCE REPORT

OCTOBER 27, 2021

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Task Force Members and Staff

MEMBERS

KATHY BYRNES

Kathy directs Birds & Bees Urban Farm near downtown Des Moines. Her mission is to help people turn their yards into dinner, as one resilience strategy to the threat of climate chaos. Kathy and her partner, Ed Fallon, grow lots of food, save seeds, raise chickens, and keep bees, make their own compost, do public speaking, and teach workshops to help people learn to grow and enjoy good food. Through Kathy's experience as a communications professional for the American Cancer Society, as well as her career teaching high school English, she has a knack for sharing information that helps others succeed in their goals.

ED FALLON

Ed served fourteen years in the Iowa Legislature. For the past twelve years, he has hosted The Fallon Forum, which broadcasts on two stations in Iowa and in four other states. He also directs Bold Iowa, a grassroots organization focused on the climate crisis. In 2014, he spearheaded the Great March for Climate Action, a 3,100-mile trek from Los Angeles to Washington, DC. Ed and his partner, Kathy Byrnes, operate Birds & Bees Urban Farm near downtown Des Moines, where they grow a large portion of their own food and offer classes on how to turn your yard into dinner.

RYAN FRANCOIS

Ryan Francois is a Des Moines native who has been vegetable gardening since a young age. He has experience in backyard beekeeping, mushroom cultivation, chicken keeping, and pasture-raising quail. In addition, he enjoys getting out to tap for maple syrup and forage for mushrooms, berries, and other wild edibles. Since 2015, Ryan has worked as a local real estate developer renovating historic houses with his company Rally Cap Properties.

SHEILA KNOPILOH-ODOLE

Local Attorney & Sustainability Consultant, Sheila grew up in NE Iowa where her grandparents ran a 100-acre dairy farm and growing food was key to the lifestyle. She continues that tradition here in Des Moines with gardening to supplement her family's diet, as well as keeping bees and experimenting with growing mushrooms. An original founding member of SILT: Sustainable Iowa Land Trust, and a volunteer on the Des Moines Citizen Task Force on Sustainability, Sheila sees the work of the Food Security Task Force as a critical piece of a larger Climate Action & Adaptation Plan, and believes the sooner Des Moines addresses growing food within the urban boundary, the more resilient the area will be in the face of Climate Chaos. In addition to a law degree from Drake University, Sheila has a Master's in Urban

& Regional Planning from the University of Iowa and a Certificate for Resilience Planning from the Rocky Mountain Institute.

RACHAEL LOOSE

Rachael was appointed to the task force By Councilmember Westergaard and lives in Ward 2. An active member of the Des Moines gardening community, Rachael's work has focused on gardening food crops for subsistence and self-reliance. Rachael has also contributed work to promoting the raising of poultry and livestock within the city and brings experience growing and maintaining fruit and nut trees. She has been active in a number of community gardens throughout the city.

EDDIE V. ROBINSON JR.

Eddie Robinson was appointed by Mayor Frank Cownie and has been a leading advocate promoting urban agriculture throughout the City of Des Moines. Eddie has managed the Drake Community for over 20 years providing guidance, insights, and knowledge to dozens of aspiring gardeners. As a Master Gardner he helps guide the work of that organization and is the current Chairman of the Iowa State Extension's Master Gardeners Steering Committee. He is also an active interpreter across the metro for local courts, hospitals, churches and businesses.

STAFF

JEREMY CARON

Jeremy Caron serves as the Sustainability Program Manager for the City of Des Moines. Jeremy is responsible for developing and implementing a comprehensive sustainability strategy across the organization and the greater Des Moines community at large. In addition to managing several projects and initiatives through the program Jeremy staffs both the Food Security Task Force and the Sustainability Task Force. Jeremy received his Master's Degree in Design Studies - Sustainable Design, from Boston Architectural College, and his Bachelor's in Political Science from the University of New England where his concentrations included international relations and environmental policy.

Executive Summary

The Food Security Task Force wishes to thank the Des Moines City Council for the privilege to serve our community. In light of increasingly destructive climactic events and the worldwide pandemic, increased attention has been given to food security for many Des Moines residents. The establishment of this task force demonstrates the City's ongoing commitment to identifying, addressing, and overcoming the challenges faced by many across the metro, and the importance of this issue in ensuring a healthy, vibrant, and resilient community and food system. We understand the Council's urgency and share in its desire to ensure access to nutritious, and reliably available food, and to enable greater self-reliance. In our work this year, we met regularly to study, scrutinize, and discuss policy proposals and best practices from around the state, nation, and world.

We thank the numerous community members and organizations who provided the Task Force with research, written recommendations, and feedback. We incorporated many of their ideas into the FEED DSM website and our final recommendations, and this report is much more meaningful as a result. We would also like to acknowledge the assistance of the City Manager and staff whose work was invaluable to this process.

DEFINITIONS:

- ***Food Security:** People have **regular, reliable access** to enough **nutritious, affordable, high-quality food** to lead healthy active lives.*
- ***Food Insecurity:** People have **difficulty regularly accessing** nutritious meals, maybe due to not enough money, living in a food desert, or food system disruptions (like during the Covid pandemic and following Iowa's 2020 derecho).*

RECOMMENDATIONS:

As directed in the Council's resolution, the Task Force's recommendations are organized around three specific goals, and the subsequent findings and best practices borne of our collective research around each of those goals. Highlighted throughout this report are the significant themes and takeaways that emerged from our work.

The Task Force finds that addressing food systems and security challenges across the city cannot be fully resolved in a brief six-month period. Our work to address the needs of the community related to urban agriculture and self-reliance are just one aspect of a much larger issue. Therefore, we recommend:

- That the Council pass a resolution setting goals to facilitate increased urban food self-reliance, recognize the right to food as a human right, and formally recognize foraging on public land as a by-right use
- That the Food Security Task Force be reconvened to:

- Identify available public and private properties throughout the city and metro that can support urban agricultural activities and enable greater food production, access, and security
 - Partner with vulnerable neighborhoods for initial efforts
 - Engage with existing food access and security organizations to promote partnerships, programs, and resource access
- That at least one or two of the current members continue on to the next iteration of the Task Force, to give the work continuity
- That the collective body of work generated from the Task Force be fully integrated into and/or aligned with the City's forthcoming Climate Action and Adaptation Plan, which will be an essential tool to foster a thriving and resilient community
- That the results of our work be shared and coordinated with the Iowa State University Food Energy Water Systems grant project, which is working to uncover and address challenges to the multiple, interdependent systems that serve the greater Des Moines metro and on which all residents and businesses depend
- That the City adopt a formal process for managing, leasing, or otherwise enabling the operation of identified parcels as urban-agriculture properties in perpetuity and with strategies that ensure the greatest environmental, economic, and social value to the community and city
- That - to ensure the resources created by this Task Force remain relevant and up-to-date - a City staff person be responsible for regular, updates to the FEED DSM website and for additional work to address food security and support urban agricultural projects

TASK FORCE GOALS AND OUTCOMES

As directed in the Council's resolution, the Task Force's recommendations are organized around three specific goals, and the subsequent findings and best practices are borne of our collective research and findings around each of those goals. Highlighted below are the significant takeaways from our work.

GOAL #1

Working with the City Manager to develop and promote regenerative urban agricultural practices through various activities as the manager may determine, such as creating links on the City's website regarding City codes affecting food-growing in the City, and an FAQ document concerning urban agricultural laws and measures and other activities.

OUTCOMES

- Compiled a list of FAQs
- Reviewed and recommended changes to existing codes and ordinances
- Recommended new codes, ordinances, and policy focuses
- Championed the integration of Food Systems and Security as a key focus area for the Climate Action and Adaptation Planning process

GOAL #2

Research best practices related to urban agriculture from other cities/urban areas, comparing to City practices, and make whatever recommendations for amendments to Des Moines ordinances based on those practices.

OUTCOMES

- Held a stakeholder meeting with key food security stakeholders across the city to inform the Task Force's work on the current urban agricultural topic and identify future focus areas for the Task Force
- Coordinated with Iowa State University's Food, Energy, Water Systems initiative, an ongoing project to model interdependent systems and integrate social, biophysical, and climate models to ensure continued security
- Reached out to subject matter experts at other cities demonstrating success in addressing food security challenges including Boston, Minneapolis/St. Paul, Detroit, Baltimore, and Austin, TX
- Toured Des Moines metro area urban farms and permaculture farms to review best practices for growing and raising sustainable, high-yield food resources
- Coordinated with other city task forces, including the Sustainability Task Force

- Coordinated with local, county, and state agencies and organizations to begin identifying urban or interurban land that can serve as viable farmland to support regenerative agriculture practices while educating the greater Des Moines community

GOAL #3

Develop a resource guide for inclusion on the City's website and in other appropriate media, about where to find tools, soil, compost, seeds, seedlings, laying hens, honeybees, other urban agricultural equipment, supplies and guidance.

OUTCOMES

- Created the FEED DSM website, including planning how this toolkit can evolve over time as more work is completed to address food security
- Created supplemental publications, including brochures and information cards to be distributed at future events, including sustainability fairs, farmers markets, and available in the City's public buildings
- Drafted content for inclusion in future Sustainability Program Newsletters

BEST PRACTICES

Throughout the course of our work we've identified some of the best practices being implemented by communities across the country. These practices demonstrate the successes that can be achieved to address food security and serve as an inspiration and basis for the work of the Task Force. Here are some specific examples we would like to highlight.

CITY OF BOSTON - FOOD ACCESS INITIATIVE

In the City of Boston, food access has been front and center for several years. Providing a wealth of resources to the community for urban farming, non-traditional growing practices, including rooftops and containerized farming, and tools and resources to increase access and educate residents, there are many lessons to learn and build from. Learn more about Boston's programs and resources here: <https://www.boston.gov/departments/food-access>



Article 89 is a comprehensive rezoning initiative aimed at taking the confusion out of urban farming and paving the way for city codes that enable greater food security and address a wide range of urban agricultural topics. Learn more here:

<https://www.bostonplans.org/planning/planning-initiatives/urban-agriculture-rezoning>

ADDITIONAL EXAMPLES



CITY OF SEATTLE - COMMUNITY GARDENS AND EDIBLE FORESTS

- [P-Patch Community Gardening - Neighborhoods | seattle.gov](https://seattle.gov/p-patch)
- [Beacon Food Forest](https://beaconfoodforest.org/)

MINNEAPOLIS - URBAN FARMING PROGRAM

[Urban Farms](#)

[Tiny Fields Project](#)



CEDAR RAPIDS - FEED IOWA FIRST INITIATIVE

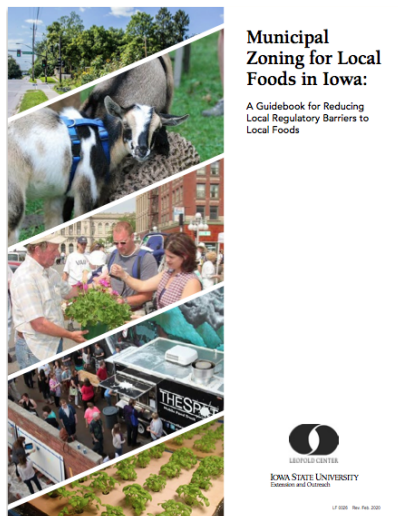
<https://www.feediowa1st.com/>

MATTHEW 25 URBAN FARM; CEDAR RAPIDS, IA.
PHOTO COURTESY OF NEO MAZUR



LINN COUNTY FOOD SHARE

<https://www.linncounty.org/1371/Food-Share-Linn>



IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY

[Municipal Zoning for Local Foods in Iowa: A Guidebook for Reducing Local Regulatory Barriers to Local Foods](#)



AUSTIN, TX - URBAN ROOTS

<https://urbanrootsatx.org/>

SO MUCH MORE THAN A FARM

BALTIMORE SUSTAINABLE FOOD INITIATIVES

- Baltimore Food Policy Initiative
<http://baltimoredevelopment.com/initiatives/baltimore-food-policy-initiative/>
- Food Sustainability Plan
https://planning.baltimorecity.gov/sites/default/files/Sustainability_Plan_Food.pdf
- Baltimore Urban Agriculture
<https://www.baltimoresustainability.org/projects/baltimore-food-policy-initiative/homegrown-baltimore/urban-agriculture-2/>
- Farm Alliance of Baltimore
<https://farmalliancebaltimore.org/>

DETROIT - MICHIGAN URBAN FARMING INITIATIVE

<https://www.miufi.org/>

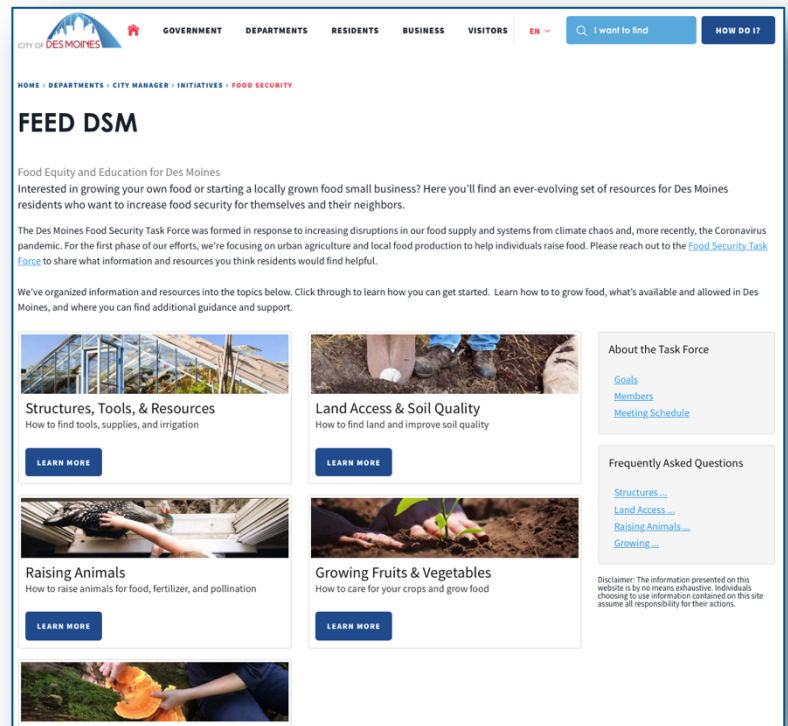
FEED DSM

One of the greatest successes of this Task Force's work is the creation of the FEED DSM website toolkit. This web-based platform is a living and evolving resource that will serve the greater Des Moines community for many years to come. Fulfilling several of Council's goals, FEED DSM is not only a clearinghouse for information and resources to get started growing one's own plants, raising animals, and foraging, but also clearly identifies ordinances and codes that allow or prohibit certain urban agriculture and food security uses in one easy reference location.

The website currently organizes information under five sub-categories:

1. **Structures, Tools, & Resources**
2. **Land Access & Soil Quality**
3. **Raising Animals**
4. **Growing Fruits & Vegetables**
5. **Foraging, Fishing, & Hunting**

Visitors can click through to each category to dive deeper into each topic. Each sub-category is organized for easy navigation, beginning with general information, followed by an overview of current regulations pertaining to the topic, and then links to resources and opportunities. FAQs are available for each topic, and users can submit questions or request additional information.



As future work of the Task Force and city staff continues, FEED DSM will be the primary tool for communication. The diversity of topics will grow and the tool will evolve. A collection of web-based and print-media resources will be provided through this initiative and the website, and related communication tools will be the primary mechanism for highlighting upcoming citywide events or activities related to food security. Newsletters, reports, and other documents and data will bring transparency to food security issues across the metro and update the community on the City's ongoing efforts to ensure a vibrant, healthy, diverse, and equitable food culture and system for the City.

Communicating about food security and overcoming food insecurity means meeting community members struggling to find nutritious, healthy, and reliable food resources where they are. Through this initiative the City will focus on embedding resources and events throughout the city and providing appropriate translation services for these resources where possible. As Des Moines continues to become a more diverse and inclusive community, we seek to celebrate and lift up the diversity of food cultures

across our city and to ensure that those food traditions are supported and valued for the role they can play in addressing food security.

NEXT STEPS FOR FEED DSM

FEED DSM will continue to grow. The task force and city staff have identified additional value-added tools that can enhance the toolkit, align the resource with city goals, and connect people to healthier, more reliable local foods.

Additional tools may include the following:

- Exchanges and/or message boards to link people who have urban agricultural space with those looking for space to grow
- Links for residents to register fruit- and nut- bearing trees and bushes and to request help for harvesting and/or notice of foraging opportunities
- Interactive maps of city-owned community gardens, edible landscapes and edible forests
- Integration of a tool for connecting food donations with the people who need them, similar in design as [myDSMmobile](#)

PUBLIC POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

To encourage and facilitate more local food production in the city, the Task Force makes the following general and code-specific recommendations.

General Recommendations

- Work with businesses, churches, and nonprofits to create sponsorships in each community garden to grow a certain portion of food for local food banks and refugee programs. Sponsorships can be in the form of financial support to hire summer/fall gardening staff or in the form of volunteers to work in the gardens and help with the harvest.
- Create a Gardening Corp of at-risk youth to give these young people skills in growing food and to provide consistent staffing for Community Gardens.
- Create a City Staff position to coordinate and supervise the work at City-owned community gardens.
- Incorporate more edible plantings into city Facilities and Parks and Recreation plantings on City property.
- Require more edible plantings or the provision of garden space through development agreements for projects pursuing commercial tax abatement.
- If growing for retail or wholesale commercial purposes, require soil testing, unless title research demonstrates no historical risk of soil contamination.
- Create a specific Des Moines Municipal Code Chapter to address urban farming.
- Reconvene the Taskforce for another six-month duration focused on topics to include commercial urban farming, food access, food waste, and protecting the other ancillary systems and resources that ensure food security.
- Select two to three current Taskforce members to continue working with the next Taskforce for continuity of the work.
- Allow, by right, more intensive agricultural use categories in commercial and industrial zones as a specific use.

CITY CODE RECOMMENDATIONS

COMMUNITY GARDENS

[§134-3.7.1 Community and Urban Gardens](#)

[§134-3.7.2 Crop Production](#)

[§134-3.7.3 Nursery or Truck Farm](#)

Recommendations:

- Eliminate codes related to fencing for community gardens.
- Work, in coordination with Des Moines Water Works, to explore systems and resources to enable increased access to water resources for urban agriculture. Without an existing waterline this is a barrier to water access at \$670 deposit for a self-installed hydrant meter plus a \$30 monthly fee.
- Consider improvements to the Stormwater Best Management Practices program that enable alternative financing mechanisms that support urban agriculture through rain catchments, cisterns, or other technologies.
- Revise §135-2.22 to enable the use of temporary structures for seasonal use that supports starting seedlings and/or extends the growing season. Provide exemptions for hoop houses and greenhouses.
- Allow on-site sales of all or part of locally grown products or produce from urban agricultural uses within City jurisdiction.
- Revise, in §134-3.7, existing definitions of urban agricultural operations to create clear distinctions between uses and or by size.
- Extend crop production uses to allow, by right, indoor or outdoor agricultural operations in a broader range of zoning districts (e.g. CX, EX, I1 & I2).

PLANTINGS IN THE RIGHT-OF-WAY

Recommendations:

Add the following language to [§102-656. - Legislative findings; statement of purpose and intent](#)

(12)Residents who abut the right of way may plant, grow and harvest vegetable and fruit crops in the public right of way; provided such crops do not interfere with the provision of public services, vehicular and pedestrian traffic, or impede visibility. Any person(s) growing such crops is entitled to the harvest of such crops, provided it does not further interfere with the provision of public services.

Add the following language to [§122-3. - Unauthorized interference with trees or shrubs or food crops](#)

- (a) No person shall remove, prune, cut, molest, break, deface, destroy, spray, repair or do surgery work upon any tree or part thereof or in any manner interfere with, disturb or injure any tree, shrub or plant upon the public property of the city nor shall any chemical be used for the control of insects or diseases or for any other reason. No person shall permit any chemical, either solid or fluid, to seep, drain or be emptied on or about any tree, shrub or plant that is or may be growing upon any public property of the city without first obtaining a permit from the forestry division.
- (b) Neither shall they do likewise to any plantings of food crops upon the public property of the city, or those planted within the public right-of-way.
- (c) Foraging for sustenance upon the public property of the City and its public right-of-ways, is expressly allowed by right to any person within the urban boundary, unless posted otherwise.
[Task Force Vote: 3 Yea, 2 Nay]

GREENHOUSES, SHEDS AND ACCESSORY BUILDINGS

[§26-302. - Building permit exemptions](#)

[§135-2.22 Accessory Structures](#)

[§135-2.22.2 Accessory Buildings - shall be fully enclosed](#)

[§135-2.22.3 Accessory Outdoor Paving and Structures](#)

[§135-2.22.4 Accessory Utility Structures](#)

Recommendations:

Structures that extend the Growing Season:

1. Create definitions in code for hoophouse and greenhouse structures that define the structures, use dates, size constraints and durability of structures including wind and snow loads.
2. Differentiate between temporary and permanent use. The line between hoophouses (generally temporary structures) and greenhouses (permanent structures) is significant for regulatory treatment.
3. Exclude Hoophouses from calculations of maximum site coverage and maximum number of buildings;
4. Treat Greenhouses as any other permanent structure and regulated as an accessory structure.

BUILDINGS FOR ANIMALS

§18-7. - Construction and cleaning of buildings for housing animals on acreage.

§18-137. - Enclosures.

§54-174. - Storage of animal feed.

§54-175. - Garbage and dead animals.

Recommendations:

- **§18-137 Enclosures:** Add language that addresses buildings for housing animals must comport with state and national standards for the breed and species of animal and/or according to existing associations that establish norms for breeding, confining and rearing of the species/breed (e.g. ISU Extension, or the National Pygmy Goat Association)
- **§18-4.B:** Allow animal husbandry on multi-family properties, provided the owner of such properties supports the practice.
- Allow the processing of any animal allowed by code for personal consumption, with minimal guidelines, to include:
 - For personal consumption
 - Processing out of public view
 - Disposal of waste in accordance with relevant city code

FENCING

§134-3.7.1 Community and Urban Garden

Recommendations:

- Remove the requirement for fencing of Community and Urban Gardens

SALE OF GOODS

§134-3.7.1 Community and Urban Garden

§18-3. - Sale of fowl as pets or novelties

Recommendations:

- **§134-3.7.1 (A):** Revise to remove barriers to the growth and sale of food products and allow for onsite sales at community and urban gardens and farms.
- **§18-3:** Revise to include the highlighted language below to enable individuals to sell fowl:
 - No person shall sell or offer for sale, barter or give away baby chicks, ducklings or other fowl as pets or novelties, whether or not dyed, colored or otherwise artificially treated. This section shall not be construed to prohibit the sale or display of natural chicks or

ducklings in proper brooder facilities by [individuals], hatcheries or stores engaged in the business of selling them to be raised for commercial purposes.

Task Force Resolution Recommendations

The Task force recommends consideration and passage of two resolutions that will address food security and foraging. Template language has been provided below to assist Council members with drafting of the resolutions.

FOOD SECURITY RESOLUTION

WHEREAS, the effects of climate change are evident and being experienced within the City of Des Moines, and

WHEREAS, the best science consistently states that crop failure, supply chain disruption, and food shortages will become more prevalent in the coming decades, and

WHEREAS, populations displaced by climate disruptions will mean more people migrating to urban areas in the upper Midwest, such as Des Moines, and

WHEREAS, a healthy, productive urban agriculture system takes time to develop, and

WHEREAS, it is in the best interest of present and future residents that the City of Des Moines encourage the growth of urban agriculture, and

WHEREAS, cities can realize tangible social and economic benefits that attract new residents, agritourism, and businesses through the promotion and proliferation of urban agriculture and a local food economy, and

WHEREAS, The City of Des Moines is the capital city of a state defined by its agricultural heritage, and

WHEREAS, the City has the capacity to function as a hub for fostering greater food security and a sustainable food system,

NOW THEREFORE, the City of Des Moines resolves to reduce barriers to individuals and businesses for producing and processing food within the urban boundary, and

NOW THEREFORE, the City resolves to provide funding where possible, and to seek public-private partnerships that expand food access and security, and

NOW THEREFORE, the City will specifically focus on programs and strategies that prioritize vulnerable, underserved, and historically disenfranchised neighborhoods and populations, and

NOW THEREFORE, the City of Des Moines resolves to encourage, support, and cost-share the development of urban agriculture such that an equivalent of 30% of the food consumed by the population of Des Moines is grown within the City's urban boundary by 2050, and 60% of food consumed is grown within the urban boundary by 2075.

FORAGING AS A HUMAN RIGHT RESOLUTION

WHEREAS, every human has a right to healthy, nutritious food, such that they can live healthy lives, and

WHEREAS, not everyone has the resources to access healthy nutritional food, and

WHEREAS, the City manages in the public trust properties that facilitate services to the residents of Des Moines, and

WHEREAS, climate chaos has already displaced millions of people, many of whom will seek refuge in Des Moines,

NOW THEREFORE, the City of Des Moines recognizes foraging as a human right, and

NOW THEREFORE, the City of Des Moines will invest in edible plantings, gardens, and forests that enable foraging on land held in the public trust, and

NOW THEREFORE, the City of Des Moines resolves to recognize and codify the rights expressed in this resolution.