



JUSTICE FROM THE GROUND UP

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March 23, 2015

Vicki Been, Commissioner
NYC Department of Housing Preservation & Development
100 Gold Street
New York, NY 10038

Dear Commissioner Been:

I am writing on behalf of Just Food and our community partners to urge you to remove the 17-plus existing community gardens from your list of sites planned for housing development through the recent RFQ for the New Infill Homeownership Opportunities Program and Neighborhood Construction Program.

Garden permanence is crucial to the economic, environmental and personal health of all New Yorkers. It is particularly important in low-income communities where residents frequently lack access to fresh, affordable, healthy food. Walk into a New York City community garden and you might find:

- neighborhood residents tending vegetables, herbs and fruit trees;
- children engaging in hands-on learning about where food comes from;
- teens building a greenhouse or painting a mural;
- hens laying eggs and bees making honey;
- organic waste transforming into nourishing compost;
- neighbors holding workshops that address community food justice issues;
- residents accessing fresh, nutritious produce at a community-run farmers' market; and/or
- community members leading cooking demonstrations that incorporate fresh, local produce.

Founded in 1995, Just Food empowers and supports community leaders—including community gardeners—in their efforts to advocate for and increase access to locally grown food, especially in underserved New York City neighborhoods.

Community gardens provide a wealth of benefits to New York City residents. Just Food urges HPD to build on actual vacant lots; to preserve community gardens which are bringing life to their neighborhoods; and to partner with impacted communities, along with housing and community garden advocates, to ensure that urban renewal efforts confirm the vital coexistence of affordable housing and community gardens.

Sincerely,

Jasmine Nielsen
Executive Director