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Recognizing the work of land stewards and supporting transparency in land disposition and the long-term preservation of stewarded land in the City of Philadelphia.

WHEREAS, There are an estimated 40,000 vacant lots in the City of Philadelphia concentrated in low-income and diverse neighborhoods, many of which faced redlining by the Federal Housing Administration and less investment as a result; and

WHEREAS, When vacant lots aren't stewarded, they become abandoned spaces for trash, crime, and rodents, and make residents feel unsafe about their neighborhoods; and

WHEREAS, Land stewards invest significant time, energy, and resources into improving vacant lots and strengthening their surrounding neighborhoods, despite often lacking legal ownership of the land they steward, and when taxes on these properties remain unpaid, stewarded land may be abruptly lost through sheriff's sale; and

WHEREAS, Land stewards often face significant barriers in navigating the legal process to acquire ownership rights, including limited access to affordable legal assistance, which can leave community members vulnerable to being outmaneuvered by developers seeking to purchase long stewarded lots in rapidly gentrifying neighborhoods; and

WHEREAS, Cleaning and greening vacant lots reduces gun violence and neighborhood crime; combats flooding and hot summer temperatures; and increases property values without driving displacement; and

WHEREAS, An estimated ⅓ of vacant lots in the City of Philadelphia are stewarded by community members and are used for side yards, gardens, playgrounds, gathering spaces, dog parks, memorials, chicken coops, and more; and

WHEREAS, Without ownership, they are at risk of displacement, especially in gentrifying neighborhoods. North Philly has lost 34% of its Black residents since 2000, and Norris Square has lost 13% of its Latino residents since 2013; and

WHEREAS, The City of Philadelphia has responded positively in several ways, by creating the Land Bank to streamline acquisition of vacant lots, establishing the Philadelphia Food Policy Advisory Council to coordinate food system initiatives, and creating the Philadelphia Urban Agriculture Plan; and

WHEREAS, Residents living near cared-for lots report a significant increase in positive interactions, increased use of outdoor spaces, and significantly improved perceptions of safety; and

WHEREAS, The City of Philadelphia owns most at-risk green spaces or has the power to acquire them through the Philadelphia Land Bank, meaning they have a central role to play in preservation; and

WHEREAS, Land stewards, including members of the Philadelphia Land Stewards Union, play an important role in shaping and maintaining the vacant lots they have stewarded over time; and

WHEREAS, Vacant lots that lack ongoing stewardship can contribute to illegal dumping, public safety concerns, and rodent activity, while land stewards often transform these spaces into valuable community assets, despite frequently facing challenges navigating the process of acquiring ownership rights; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, BY THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, Hereby recognizes the work of land stewards, and the need for increased transparency around land disposition and long-term preservation of stewarded land in the City of Philadelphia.

FURTHER RESOLVED, That an Engrossed copy of this Resolution be presented to the Philadelphia Land Stewards Union and land stewards across Philadelphia as an expression of the sincere recognition and appreciation of the Philadelphia City Council.

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