



CITY OF DECATUR ILLINOIS

#1 GARY K. ANDERSON PLAZA

DECATUR, ILLINOIS 62523-1196

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Council approves urban agriculture projects with Good Samaritan Inn, Old Kings Orchard Community Center

Decatur, IL – On Monday night, the Decatur City Council approved agreements with two local nonprofits that promises to help revitalize the Old Kings Orchard (OKO) neighborhood.

The OKO neighborhood has one of the highest numbers of vacant/unutilized empty lots in the city's urban core. These vacant lots will soon have an important purpose as urban agriculture sites and a sports recreational site with the help of City partners: the Good Samaritan Inn (GSI) and Old Kings Orchard Community Center (OKOCC).

GSI will be scaling up their Mercy Gardens program which offers employment training for at-risk youth, homeless adults, and persons with chronic barriers to employment, and also provides fresh produce for their daily meals. The City will lease approximately seven acres of City-owned land for \$1 to GSI, and will monitor the program for two years before choosing to transfer ownership of the land if the program succeeds.

OKOCC will enhance their violence prevention programs that target at-risk youth and other clients who may have encountered barriers in living a crime-free life. They will run a similar urban agriculture project and will coordinate with GSI so that they do not grow the same products. Additionally, the Council's action will fund an inner-city sports area to be built near OKOCC. The area will include a football/soccer field and a baseball diamond.

These efforts are part of the City's larger, \$1.3-million investment in community development and violence prevention initiatives. \$1 million of this funding comes from the state Department of Commerce & Economic Opportunity thanks to efforts from Senator Doris Turner and a match the Council approved for this purpose in February 2023.

In other business

In other business...Council approved the adoption of the state's C-PACE program, adding another tool to the City's economic development toolbox. The state Commercial Property Assessed Clean Energy (C-PACE) program is a special finance program that can help fund energy efficiency projects.

C-PACE can be used on new commercial construction; however, it is more likely to be attractive to developers that are rehabilitating existing commercial buildings. This could apply to local projects such as the Tillamook Ice Cream Plant and the Barnes-Citizen building.

More information about these topics can be found in the City Council Agenda packet, downloadable/viewable here: www.decaturlil.gov/mayor-and-council/council-meetings/

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