

4207 SE Rex Street,  
Portland, OR 97206

October 10, 2014

Dear Members of the Planning and Sustainability Commission:

RE: Comprehensive Plan Testimony for Green Thumb  
6801 SE 60th Avenue, Portland, OR 97206

I served as an elected official on the Portland School Board, from 2003 to 2011. For almost 20 years, I have also lived in the 97206 zip code, about a mile from the Green Thumb property. Hence, I am writing this letter in my capacity of having had a long-term and deep understanding of communities of color and those who live in poverty, i.e. in outer southeast Portland--both through my own lived experience in the neighborhood, and also as a leader elected to the school board from zone 7, in the recent past.

As a long-term resident in the area, I have critical understanding of the issues that constituents and communities in the Green Thumb area face. Recent refugees and immigrant populations that have settled in the area, live in dire poverty. We need to preserve green spaces for our disenfranchised and marginalized families and children, many of whom have no power and cannot voice their interests due to lack of English Language access and a lack of understanding of the American political systems of civic participation. They have limited power and practically no time as they try to make ends meet.

I am here to speak for those who are voiceless and invisible in this area of town, mostly the forgotten communities of outer southeast Portland.

Unequivocally, for these populations, I support the re-designation and re-zoning the 12.8 acre urban agriculture and education site known as "Green Thumb" (6801 SE 60th Avenue) from Low Density Multi-Family Residential with an Alternative Design Density Overlay (R2A) to a designation that best reflects its actual use: Open Space (OS).

There are innumerable studies that show the negative effects of densely populated areas on the mental and physical health and well-being of individuals. With increasing congestion comes increasing problems of air-quality and related asthma and other health issues especially impacting the most vulnerable populations, our children. It is critical that we preserve green spaces for them.

In particular, for almost a decade as a faculty member at Portland State University, my colleagues and I have been committed to and engaged in community-based sustainability work at the Learning Gardens Laboratory (LGL), located at the 12 acre Green Thumb site. The mission

of the Learning Gardens Lab is to support academic achievement and local sustainable food systems by providing garden-based education for public school students and their families, university students, and community members. Established a decade ago, LGLab is a unique partnership between Portland State University, Portland Public Schools, The City of Portland's Parks and Recreation, and Oregon State University Extension Service. For Lane Middle school students, this facility is a haven for learning and engaging with food that they grow and harvest along with their families in the community. It is truly important to learn about food systems as these populations are even more vulnerable than affluent communities when it comes to food insecurity.

Hundreds of students and their families at Lane Middle School, have benefited by being involved at the Green Thumb site. I have seen first-hand and research with my colleagues provides evidence that adolescents express their sense of place and how important it is for them to have the natural area to work on food issues. They state that when they go home, there is no such opportunity for them. Through the resident farmer program, we have Lane and the Brentwood Darlington community participating in growing food. This helps with not only bringing healthy food to low-income communities but also helps with developing a sense of community for a population that is uprooted from their homes. Also, Lane students are benefitting academically particularly learning science in engaging ways, thus moving the school toward closing the achievement gap for low-income and minority students.

While affluent communities can take-for-granted that they can access green spaces, communities in poverty cannot. They do not have the luxury to go on field trips or camping to enjoy the "outdoors." For those without the means, the best option is to have greenspaces right where they live. Let's ensure that for generations to come, Green Thumb provides an outlet of health and also opportunities for children and adolescents and their families to grow food as is now done at the site.

I urge you to rezone the Green Thumb site to Open Space (OS), in order to ensure the quality of life that outer southeast residents deserve. It is the right thing to do.

Thank you for your public service.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Dilafruz Williams". The signature is written in black ink on a light-colored background.

Dilafruz Williams, Ph.D.  
Portland Public School Board member, 2003-2011  
Resident, 97206 zip code  
Professor, Portland State University