

December 21, 2023

RE: HEALTH, SAFETY CONCERNS, MISMANAGEMENT & DISCRIMINATION at NEW ROOTS COMMUNITY FARM

Dear City of San Diego Councilmembers,

We are reaching out to you regarding a very timely and sensitive matter regarding a City of San Diego real estate asset that directly affects many San Diego community members. **The New Roots Community Farm** is a coalition of community farmers that have been cultivating and growing a small piece of City of San Diego owned land at **5326 Chollas Parkway N, San Diego, CA 92105** for over the past decade. A representative group of the farmers is extremely concerned at the management of the City land of the New Roots Farm and of the treatment of many of the farmers by the purported “manager” or “administrator” of the City plot. We have not been able to learn whether the **City Heights Community Development Corporation (CDC)**, who is acting as the “administrator” and indeed attempting to enter into “leases” with the tenant farmers, has any actual legal authority over the city plot. Requests for information regarding the source and scope of CHCDC’s authority, as well as the management of the funds collected from donors to New Roots have been met with stonewalling, lack of transparency, and even retaliation through threats of eviction of indigent farmers from the community’s most vulnerable groups who have worked the land for over a decade and rely on it for their health and financial well-being.

Because the community members who farm at New Roots are mostly new immigrants from poor, impacted and protected classes, many who do not speak English or Spanish (the only language the CDC members who deal with the farmers speak), they are especially vulnerable to intimidation tactics. In addition to the CDC withholding basic requests for information about the CDC’s role and its use of funds and donations, and concerns over the maintenance of the New Roots farm and treatment of farmers, we are informed of fear-mongering that the CDC is engaging in by threatening community members that they may lose the plot of land which for many years has been their only subsistence if they do not sign immediately a lease which many of the members cannot read or understand – or in many instances afford the increasing plot fees.

If the CDC is acting on behalf of the City of San Diego, we are concerned that it is putting the City and residents of San Diego in legal liability over the CDC management of the New Roots Farm and treatment of some of the farmers. Specifically:

• **Property Mismanagement:**

- Using coercion and intimidation to pressure farmers to sign leases and waivers of liability written in language that members do not speak under the name of CHCDC;
- The exercise of authority over the land by CHCDC in spite of not having a lease or any legal authority over the land for over 7 years;
- Absence of documented agreements for farm authority/management, including refusing to provide proof of a current lease with the City of San Diego;
- Improper care of the common areas, including the restroom facilities; and
- Absence of proof of insurance

• **Negligence and Transparency Concerns:**

- Failure to address safety, theft, injury, and disability access issues.
- Failure to provide promised support for the farmers for marketing their produce;
- Alarming absence of records post-2008 in the Public Records Act regarding project

permit renewal, indicating negligence;

- Absence of proof of donated funds to New Roots through the CHCDC being used for the benefit of farmers; and
- Failure to provide sufficient audit and/or financial accountability documentation upon request.

• **Discrimination and Favoritism:**

- Discriminatory practices favoring specific individual farmers and groups based on ethnicity/national origin and religion over others, and specifically targeting Black African-Americans, Muslim and other minority refugee groups.
- Unequal resource distribution and access to information, favoring English and Spanish speakers; and
- Making arbitrary and capricious policies without support of farmers intended to discriminate against families of the farmers who work the farm.

• **Safety Threats and Inadequate Responses:**

- Farmers threatened with vague “violations” of unwritten policies or leases and pressure tactics to sign immediately lease/plot agreements or lose their plots for voicing their concerns, specifically, African-Americans;
- Inadequate safety responses to critical farm issues;

These ongoing problems pose a severe threat to the community's well-being and must be addressed immediately by the City of San Diego. Several New Roots farmers are facing immediate “eviction” for failure to sign “leases” and releases with the CHCDC or pay arbitrary fees assigned by the CHCDC – leases they cannot read or understand and fees they cannot afford. The above matters remain ignored despite disclosure to City Council members and City departments which have been made aware of the circumstances. We hope the City Council will take this matter seriously as time is of the essence, as is the safety and well-being of individuals, as well as the integrity of the City of San Diego.

Sincerely,

New Roots Community Farmers Autonomy
Tenant Councils of San Diego
Democratic Socialists of America – San Diego
Bikes del Pueblo
Tech Workers Coalition San Diego
TEDxSanDiego
POC Fungi Community
UC San Diego "UCSD Action" Organization
Tierras Indigenas Community Land Trust
We All We Got San Diego
The People's Holistic Clinic
NiceNeighbors.org
Southern Sudanese Center of San Diego
Revolutionary Growers Garden
SURJ-SD Showing Up for Racial Justice
Aztlán Underground
People Over Profits SD
SDHS Gardening Club
Sudanese Community of San Diego
Arab American Civic Council

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