



March 2021

Dear Growers and Members of Philly's Urban Agriculture Communities,,

The planning process for Growing from the Root has been on pause for quite some time. With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, we made the difficult decision to cancel the second Public Meeting, which had been scheduled for late March 2020. We immediately began to adapt the planned public meeting content to an interactive web-based format, but come May, the Project Team (Ash Richards, Director of Urban Agriculture with Philadelphia Parks and Recreation, Soil Generation, and Interface Studio) made the decision to halt project work in order to address issues within the team's dynamics.

As a result, Philadelphia Parks and Recreation designed a five-month facilitation process to proactively address accountability within the team, resolve interpersonal conflict, and reconcile harm through education and facilitated conversation between Interface and Soil Generation. Please see this [WHYY article](#) if you want to read more about the process.

As a community group, being partnered in this process was important to those of us in Soil Generation because we understand and have been party to previous City plans with less than adequate community input. The City hiring a community group to be partnered contractually in this work with a design firm showed insight and a step in the right direction, but this planning process has also made us realize how much work is truly required on our part. During the facilitation among the team, we centered the importance of naming the emotional labor in reviewing project work for anti-racism and accessibility. A plan that starts with a racial analysis and ends with a thorough review means taking time to identify steps and processes that ensure we are creating a plan that truly centers racial justice and anti-racism. This also ensures that we are not only accounting for the "invisibilized" labor that Black, Brown, and Indigenous folks do, but also that it is valued.

Interface appreciates that our partners at Soil Generation spoke up about team dynamics that were harming the project work, and we thank the City and Ash Richards as Project Manager for investing in a carefully considered process of education and reconciliation. The facilitated process helped Interface become a better partner, helped build a stronger team, and will help the plan embody the project's values of centering Black and Brown voices by applying an anti-racist lens to both the planning process and the end product.

We, Soil Generation and Interface, have resumed work and are excited to move forward with the planning process with the launch of an interactive online website later that will continue engaging residents in this important work. We understand that Philadelphia's urban agriculture community is eagerly awaiting this next step, and we look forward to learning from you through this virtual engagement opportunity. The website will remain live for seven weeks, into mid-May.

We expect to deliver the final plan in Fall 2021, and are pleased with the team's new approach to working together, centering racial justice review at each step. Following the virtual second public meeting, we will report back to you about what we learn, and then we will come back to you again with draft recommendations for public review and comment.

Onward together,

Soil Generation & Interface Studio