

COMMUNITY GARDEN INITIATIVE

CITY OF DOTHAN, ALABAMA

Leveraging the General Fund to Establish Congregation Led Food Gardens
at Local Places of Worship

Created by Kyle Scott Candidate For City Commission District 3





EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Dothan's FY 2024 General Fund tops \$119.9 million, with healthy year end reserves and more than \$8.8 million set aside for "Outside Agencies" and \$100,000 targeted to Neighborhood Services for housing rehabilitation.

Redirecting just **0.25%** of annual General Fund spending (\$300,000) can finance a city wide network of **30 congregation run community gardens** without jeopardizing core municipal services.

The program will

- Improve food security for the $\approx 19\%$ of Dothan residents living below the federal poverty line.
- Offset food at home inflation, which rose 1.8 % in 2024 after surging 11.8 % in 2022.
- Build social cohesion, deliver measurable health gains, and enhance neighborhood resilience—outcomes repeatedly confirmed in peer reviewed research on community gardens.

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NEED & RATIONALE

RISING GROCERY COST

Food at home prices increased 1.8% in 2024 on top of double digit spikes in 2022, eroding household purchasing power even as overall inflation cooled. For families already spending 12–15% of income on groceries, any additional rise pushes fresh produce out of reach and worsens nutrition gaps.

LOCAL POVERTY & FOOD INSECURITY

The U.S. Census Bureau estimates that 19.2 % of Dothan residents—nearly one in five—live in poverty, well above the national average (11.5 %). Community gardens are proven to stretch food budgets, boost fruit and vegetable intake, and reduce anxiety around where the next meal comes from.

HEALTH, EDUCATION, & ENVIRONMENTAL BENEFITS

Meta analyses link community gardening to higher produce consumption, lower BMI, stronger neighborhood connections, and even lower reported crime. Gardens double as outdoor classrooms for local schools and youth ministries, create habitat for pollinators, reduce storm water runoff, and sequester modest amounts of carbon.

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PROGRAM DESIGN

Financing Plan

COST ASSUMPTIONS

(Expansion years replicate per site costs but leverage already hired staff; Year 2 adds \$180 k, Year 3 \$160 k.)

FUNDING SOURCES WITHIN THE GENERAL FUND

The reallocation represents 0.25 % of total General Fund expenditures for FY 2024 (\$147 M).

STRUCTURING THE APPROPRIATION

- Utilize a Budget Amendment Ordinance (as modeled in Item #9775, April 2025 amendment).
- Place funds in a new line item “Faith Based Community Garden Initiative” under Neighborhood Services.
- Authorize multi year carry forward to ensure unspent balances roll into Years 2 3.

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EXPECTED OUTCOMES (FIVE YEAR HORIZON)

COMPLEMENTARY ELEMENTS & FUTURE GROWTH

- **Youth Workforce Track**

Summer internships teaching urban ag skills; link to Dothan's Youth Job Training Program.

- **Health Department Referral**

Physicians issue "produce prescriptions" redeemable at garden harvest days.

- **Pollinator Corridors**

Add native flower strips to boost bee populations and support urban ecology goals in the Strategic Plan.

- **Emergency Preparedness**

Gardens designated as neighborhood muster points with rain barrel water reserves for disaster response.

- **Community Compost Hubs**

Phase 2 adds neighborhood food scrap drop offs, cutting methane emissions from landfill organic waste.

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CONCLUSION & CALL TO ACTION

A modest re programming of existing General Fund dollars can launch an initiative that:

- Feeds families,
- Strengthens congregations,
- Revitalizes neighborhoods, and
- Showcases Dothan's commitment to innovative, people first budgeting.

The proposed ordinance and funding allocation can be drafted for first reading at the next City Commission meeting. With political will and community partnership, shovels can be in the ground by February 2026, ensuring fresh produce reaches pantry shelves before next summer's peak heat.

Let's grow together—for health, for fellowship, and for Dothan's future.

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