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**Testimony of Council Member Daniel R. Garodnick
Before the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation
On Proposed Community Garden Rules
August 10, 2010**

Good morning. My name is Dan Garodnick, and I represent the Fourth District in the New York City Council, an area that stretches from 14th to 97th Streets on the East Side of Manhattan, and which also includes a portion of the West 50s below Central Park. Thank you for the opportunity to offer brief testimony on the proposed Parks Department's rules governing community gardens.

I should note that I do not have any community gardens in my district. In fact, I represent the district with the least amount of parkland of any in the City. Yet I live near many community gardens and have a strong affection for them because each is unique, reflects the surrounding neighborhood in its own way, and provides an important peaceful, quiet space from the hectic nature of the rest of the City.

Community gardens also help to anchor and beautify a neighborhood by providing a gathering space for volunteer gardeners to work toward a communal endeavor, as well as educational, therapeutic and recreational opportunities for children and adults. Those that grow fruits and vegetables impart on neighbors the economic and environmental benefits of locally-grown foods.

One of my constituents, who is affiliated with El Sol Brillante Jr. Community Garden on East 12th Street and La Plaza Cultural Community Garden on Avenue C, expressed the community benefit of the gardens this way:

I treat going to my garden like getting a few precious hours escape from the bustle of the city, and it has made it much easier for me to live in the city with this opportunity for green escape so close to my home. I also found joining my garden and starting to work there one of the most pleasant interactions I have had with other people in NYC. I simply called the number

on the fence and one of the gardeners met me to talk about becoming a member of the garden. That was 6 years ago, and most of the gardeners at my garden have been members for more than 20 years. I really appreciate and respect all of their work to preserve gardens the last time the status was up for review and I hope to help with that effort this time around. Working in a community garden has helped me to feel safer and more connected to other people in my community, has given me the chance to know and befriend people of different ages and with different backgrounds from me, and given me a place to learn about gardening and connect to the earth in a busy city.

The Parks Department itself has recognized the importance of community gardens, having supported gardeners for more than thirty years with materials and technical guidance through the GreenThumbs program.

While the 2002 Memorandum of Agreement between the New York Attorney General and the City of New York served to establish a protocol for “the preservation and development of City-owned GreenThumb community gardens,” that Agreement is now expiring. The Parks Department has endeavored to replicate the rule and to find ways to protect the gardens going forward. While I appreciate the effort, I believe that the Parks Department proposed rule change can go further to afford community gardens the same protection as has existed under the expiring Agreement. With the proposed rule as currently drafted, City-owned community gardens under Parks Department jurisdiction could still be vulnerable.

In order to protect New York City’s community gardens, the Parks Department’s proposed rule change should more closely mirror the 2002 Memorandum of Agreement by continuing to permanently preserve as community gardens the majority of the three hundred eleven owned by the City.

I agree on this point with my colleague Council Member Rosie Mendez – who represents over 30 community gardens in her own district – who has expressed a need to ensure that there is more permanence in the rules. For example, Section 6-03(a) of the proposed rule says that “the Parks Department *may* renew a license if the Licensee complies with the terms and conditions set forth therein and continues to meet the registration criteria established by Green Thumb” (emphasis added). I believe that that language should be strengthened to indicate that the Parks Department *shall* renew a gardener’s GreenThumb license if the licensee continues to comply with the applicable rules.

Let us take all necessary steps to ensure the permanency of these neighborhood gems. Tweaking the rules in the manner suggested above will go a long way toward strengthening protections for these valued gardens into the future.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify.