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Minneapolis digs into community gardening

Starting this week, 21 vacant lots owned by the city of Minneapolis will be available for groups of gardeners to lease in a new program designed to encourage healthy eating and promote locally grown food.

The lots are in north Minneapolis, northeast Minneapolis and the Midtown, Phillips and Powderhorn Park neighborhoods. City officials say the gardens will help strengthen communities.

"There's nothing better than going to your garden and picking that tomato or digging up that carrot," said Third Ward City Council Member Diane Hofstede, as she stood Tuesday with others at the future home of a community garden in the Beltrami neighborhood. "This is part and parcel of what this is about." The city currently has more than 100 community gardens.

WHO'S IN CHARGE?

The program is run by Homegrown Minneapolis, a city initiative to improve the growth and consumption of healthy locally grown foods within the city. A community garden program is one of nine Homegrown

Minneapolis recommendations adopted by the City Council.

TILLED TO LAST

The city's pilot program will make leases available to nonprofit groups for community gardens on 21 "non-buildable" lots, meaning they will remain available for years of gardening, even as the economy changes and redevelopment picks up in the city. The leases will go to groups rather than individuals so that the gardens can benefit whole neighborhoods.

HOW TO APPLY

The lots are available first-come, first-served to qualifying groups. Experienced groups will be eligible for three- to five-year leases, while first-time gardening groups will start with one-year leases.

Qualifying groups include a not-for-profit or a group with a not-for-profit sponsor. The garden will need to have liability insurance. Applicants should be ready to discuss the garden's layout, management and how it will engage community members.

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For more information, visit the Homegrown Minneapolis Community Gardens Pilot Program website at www.ci.minneapolis.mn.us/dhfs/homegrown-home.asp.

ABBY SIMONS

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 A promotional banner for a performance by Jimmy Sturr. On the left is a photograph of Jimmy Sturr singing into a microphone. The background of the banner is a warm, orange and yellow abstract design. The text on the banner includes:

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