

Volunteer and Faith Based Food Sharing Proposal

WHEREAS, the City of Houston appreciates those who take part in the charitable act of providing food for those in need, and finds and determines that such activities are of general benefit to the health, safety, and welfare of all citizens; and

WHEREAS, the City Council recognizes that those who are unable to provide food for themselves often must be fed outdoors by those dedicated to providing such charitable food services; and

WHEREAS, safe food practices are the norm among volunteer and faith-based providers, but improvements are always possible; and

WHEREAS, voluntary coordination among groups aiding homeless people across the city is to the mutual benefit of the homeless, the service providers, property owners, and the city; and

WHEREAS, litter is a manageable problem; and

WHEREAS, restrictions on locations where volunteer and faith groups can share on public property would negatively impact the homeless, and potentially cause an increase in unsanitary food practices, such as “dumpster diving,” and hoarding of food to the point it becomes contaminated;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT ORDAINED BY THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF HOUSTON, TEXAS:

1) Voluntary free-of-charge food safety training classes will be offered to the public. The program shall be coordinated jointly by the director of the health and human services department and one or more community-based organizations. Certifications shall be valid for a period of five years. The City and volunteers will do outreach to promote the classes.

2) In coordination with one or more corporate or individual donors and the existing management districts, The City of Houston will strive to provide more and larger trash receptacles.

3) The three management districts that serve the downtown area should be called upon to implement their existing service plans for beautification. They should further consider including construction of public toilets, water fountains, and hand washing stations if deemed appropriate.

4) A coalition of community-based organizations will develop and promote a “**Volunteer and Faith-Based Food Sharing with the Needy**” map / calendar website with several pages for coordinating service and for registering complaints. The site shall strive to keep information public, without censorship. Users will be required to use a confirmed email address, and all comments will be noted as strictly the opinions of the individual users.

a) On a “**sharing**” page, any group or individual can voluntarily indicate that they will be sharing free food. The notice will include any info about the group, type of food, and contact information. If two groups are planning a feeding within a block of each other within the same day three hour period, the site will notify both groups, providing each others’ contact information so that groups can co-ordinate if they so choose.

b) On a “**private property owners**” page, registered private property owners can allow for feeding to occur on their property or provide contact information enabling discussion of hosting a food sharing event. If the private property owner has not registered with the site, normal laws including those regarding trespassing will apply.

c) On a “**food-poisoning reports**” page, the public may leave and read comments about any food-poisoning incidents involving the homeless. Health care service providers who treat the homeless will be directed to this page.

d) On a “**trash issues**” page, the public may leave and read comments about sanitation issues that arise in given areas where people are sharing food. The management districts and the City will monitor this page for trouble spots that need to be dealt with.

###