



**MEMORANDUM**

Community Services Department

**DATE:** March 13, 2019

**TO:** Parks and Recreation Commission

**FROM:** Shaun Chilkotowsky, Recreation Supervisor  
Kristine Crosby, Recreation Manager

**SUBJECT:** Community Garden Guidelines and Fee Structure

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**RECOMMENDATION**

1. Forward a recommendation to City Council for the attached Community Garden Guidelines to be implemented for all three community gardens: The Willowgate Garden, Senior Garden, and Latham Community Garden.
2. Forward a recommendation to City Council to update garden fees for Community Gardens as shown in Figure 1 of the report.
3. Forward a recommendation to City Council to allow for up to 10 plots at Latham Community Garden to be short-term plots for a maximum term of one year.
4. Forward a recommendation to City Council to implement a financial assistance program for gardeners at Latham Community Garden where eligible garden members will pay the senior discounted rate.

**BACKGROUND**

The City of Mountain View currently operates two community gardens, the Senior Garden and the Willowgate Garden. The Senior Garden is located on the Hetch Hetchy right-of-way at the corner of Escuela Avenue and Crisanto Avenue and has 63 plots. The plots are all a standardized size of 108 square feet. The Willowgate Garden is located at the end of Andsbury Avenue and currently has 109 plots. The plots at Willowgate vary in size and can be as large as 396 square feet. In June 2015, when additional gardens were being reviewed, the wait list for Willowgate Garden was at 97 people and 55 for the Senior Garden. There is an average turnover rate of 8 to 10 people per year at Willowgate Garden and 2 to 3 people per year for the Senior Garden.

Citing a need for additional garden space to accommodate the wait lists, Council developed a Fiscal Year 2014-15 Major Goal of “Look for opportunities to add garden space to existing open space.” An extensive review of available parcels within the City was completed with direction provided by the Parks and Recreation Commission (PRC) and City Council. In June 2015, City Council approved the use of a 0.8-acre City-owned property on the southwest corner of Shoreline Boulevard and Latham Street as a new community garden site. In October 2018, City Council approved plans and specifications for the new garden and approved the official garden name of “Latham Community Garden.” Construction of the new garden began in February 2019 and is scheduled to be completed in late spring 2019. Since then, the awareness of an additional garden has increased in the community, and today there are 158 people on the regular wait list and 60 people on the wait list for the Senior Garden.

In preparation of the new Latham Community Garden location, staff has been reviewing existing garden guidelines and associated fees. Through this review, staff is recommending changes to make the garden program more efficient and to further meet cost recovery for this program.

## **ANALYSIS**

### **Community Garden Guidelines**

The Willowgate Garden and Senior Garden currently utilize two separate sets of garden guidelines. With the addition of Latham Community Garden, staff believes there is an opportunity to streamline garden guidelines and provide consistency (Attachment 1 – Draft Community Garden Guidelines and Procedures).

Staff has created an updated set of guidelines which include eligibility and registration requirements, community responsibilities, general rules and expectations, emergency procedures, and more.

### **Increasing Available Plots**

The new Latham Community Garden, with 84 individual garden plots, will bring the total number of plots available in Mountain View to 256. In order to accommodate more gardeners off the wait list, staff began splitting the existing plots at Willowgate in 2016. Due to the large size of the plots, half a plot provides enough space to garden and is similar to the size of a Senior Garden plot and that of the future Latham Garden plots. Through this process, those that received a half plot have been paying half the fee of a full plot. This process has not decreased overall revenue since two gardeners are

paying for what was the cost of one plot. As plots become vacant at Willowgate Garden, staff will continue to split the plots to reduce the wait list.

The new Latham Community Garden provides staff an opportunity to further split plots at Willowgate Garden. Staff recommends allowing existing gardeners the choice to move to the new Latham Garden once complete. As these gardeners move, the existing plot will then be split into two.

In 2015, Council directed staff to create short-term garden plots at Latham Community Garden. Staff recommends a one-year term for these plots. The short-term plots will create a high rate of turnover and allow more people access to the garden. Those with a short-term plot are eligible to be on the wait list for a regular garden plot.

### **Fee Structure**

The Recreation Division has a Cost Recovery Policy that establishes cost-recovery levels based on the type of service, population services, and the level of benefit to the community. The cost recovery of the garden program has decreased over the past two years due to rising utility costs. In two years, the water cost has increased by 83 percent. In Fiscal Year 2017-18, the garden program reached a cost recovery of 36 percent. After review of current fees, current expenditures, and benchmarking fees of other agencies, staff recommends a change in the garden fee structure. A fee increase of 3 percent was implemented in 2015. No fee increases have been implemented since that time.

Below are the current and proposed fees for the three gardens to be effective July 1, 2019. Willowgate members would be increased from \$139 per year to \$150 per year. Willowgate senior members and Senior Garden members would be increased from \$43 per year to \$50 per year. The Latham Community Garden member fee is recommended at \$100 per year and senior member fee is recommended at \$50 per year.

*Figure 1 – Proposed Fee Changes for Community Gardens*

|                                   | <b>Current Fee</b> | <b>Proposed Fee</b>                           |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------|---|
| Senior Garden                     | \$43               | \$50  |
| Willowgate Member                 | \$139              | \$150   |
| Willowgate Senior Member          | \$43               | \$50  |
| Willowgate Existing ½ Plot Senior | \$22 senior        | Year 1: \$31<br>Year 2: \$40<br>Year 3: \$50  |
| Willowgate Existing ½ Plot Member | \$70 member        | Year 1: \$80<br>Year 2: \$90<br>Year 3: \$100 |
| Latham Member                     | N/A                | \$100   |
| Latham Senior Member              | N/A                | \$50  |

As stated, existing gardeners at Willowgate with a half plot have been paying half the garden fee. Through the review process, it was determined that those with a half plot will have an equivalent square footage garden plot or more as those at the new Latham Community Garden. Staff is recommending increases to the fees for existing gardeners with a half plot. The increase will be gradual over three years and eventually lead to an annual fee of \$100 for regular members and \$50 for senior members. Those that are new to Willowgate Garden will pay the proposed base fee of \$100 for regular members and \$50 for seniors, as all plots will be split in the future.

Staff has scheduled meetings with current gardeners for annual garden meetings to provide an update on aligning garden guidelines and proposed fee structure. The Senior Garden meeting is scheduled for March 7, 2019 and the Willowgate Garden meeting is scheduled for March 9, 2019. Due to timing of the staff report and the meetings, staff will provide the Commission with a summary at the PRC meeting.

### **Financial Assistance Program**

Additionally, as part of Council's approval of the new community garden, staff was directed to provide financial assistance to gardeners that are in need. Historically, the established Financial Assistance Program (FAP) has been made available for youth recreation programs. Community Services Agency (CSA) currently helps screen families to determine if they are eligible based on Housing and Urban Development (HUD) guidelines.

Staff is recommending utilizing a similar screening process. Once qualified, a gardener would pay the same senior discounted rate. The garden financial assistance would be available to adults under age 55. The garden financial assistance program would not be applicable to senior garden fees as this rate is already subsidized.

### **FISCAL IMPACT**

The new fees would generate approximately \$6,100 in revenue at Latham garden, and approximately \$2,250 in additional revenue at the two existing gardens. Increases would bring the cost recovery for gardens to approximately 51 percent. Staff will review cost recovery again after a full year of implementation and operations.

### **NEXT STEPS**

Following Commission consideration, the PRC recommendations will be forwarded to the City Council on Tuesday, March 26, 2019.

### **PUBLIC NOTICING**

In addition to agenda posting, staff sent a notification to the current Willowgate Garden and Senior Garden members.

SC/3/CSD  
211-03-13-19M

Attachment: 1. Draft Community Garden Guidelines and Procedures