



DATE: June 23, 2015

CATEGORY: New Business

DEPT.: Community Services

TITLE: **Proposed New Community Garden Site**

RECOMMENDATION

Approve the City-owned property at Shoreline Boulevard and Latham Street to become a future community garden location, as recommended by the Parks and Recreation Commission.

BACKGROUND

The City of Mountain View currently operates two community gardens, the Willowgate Community Garden located at the end of Andsbury Avenue and the Senior Garden located on the Hetch Hetchy right-of-way on the corner of Escuela Avenue and Crisanto Avenue. Both of the current community gardens provide individual plots (approximately 108 square feet at the Senior Garden and up to 396 square feet at Willowgate Garden) to Mountain View residents. The current waiting list for Willowgate is 97 people and 55 for the Senior Garden.

Council has a Fiscal Year 2014-15 Major Goal of “look for opportunities to add garden space to existing open space.” In furtherance of that goal, at the March 25, 2015 Parks and Recreation Commission (PRC) meeting, staff provided a report and presentation regarding the programming taking place at the City’s current community gardens and reviewed three types of community gardens (individual plot, urban shared gardens, and demonstration gardens). The PRC directed staff to review possible locations for additional community gardens, including 771 North Rengstorff Avenue and other City-owned properties. On June 10, 2015 staff returned to the PRC to review the rated sites. The PRC voted 3 to 1, with one Commissioner absent, with the following recommendations: (1) As plots become available at Willowgate Garden, they should be subdivided in half to allow for more gardeners; (2) Recommend plot-based gardens to be developed at Shoreline Boulevard at Latham Street property; (3) Provide up to 10 plots at the new community garden site as short-term plots in order to allow for gardeners to commit to the garden for a specific period of time; (4) Provide a way to

allow low-income families to receive financial assistance for garden plot annual fees; (5) Consider properties located on Wyandotte Street for urban shared gardens pending public input; and (6) Consider property located at West Middlefield Road and Sierra Vista Avenue as an alternate for additional community gardens.

Previous Parks and Recreation Commission and City Council Review Related to Community Gardens

In 2006, staff completed a review of all publicly owned parcels to locate a new community garden. Four sites were identified as potential locations based on several criteria, including size (at least one-quarter acre), accessibility, proximity to utilities, parking, long-term potential, exposure (six to eight hours of sun), elevation (flat with ability to amend soil and work below grade), security, and soil composition. Two Hetch Hetchy right-of-way locations were identified, one at Bonny and Beatrice Streets and another property on Stierlin Road. In addition, two City-owned parcels, one at Wright Avenue and another on Whisman Road, were also considered at this time. Based on sizes, future use, and other factors, direction was given to move forward designing a new community garden at the Bonny and Beatrice Streets location.

During the conceptual design of the Bonny and Beatrice Garden in 2007, concerns were raised by local residents. Comments included feeling of lack of public input on the project, a desire to keep the property as a pedestrian thoroughfare for the neighborhood, garden beds were being planned too close together and not large enough, perimeter landscaping was not being provided, and lastly, concerns about parking impacts for the neighborhood. At the conclusion of these public meetings in 2008, the City Council did not move forward with the Bonny and Beatrice Streets location or any of the other identified garden sites at that time.

ANALYSIS

A total of 11 sites were examined as potential new community garden sites in May 2015, including the property at 771 North Rengstorff Avenue. These were presented to the PRC on June 10, 2015. The criteria used to examine each of the 11 potential sites was similar to the previous examination in 2007 and included size, proximity to utilities, parking, exposure, elevation, ownership/long-term use, accessibility (in terms of public transportation), and finally a rating based on if the location of the potential new garden site is within a planning area in need of parks/open space. The staff report to the PRC dated June 10, 2015 (Attachment 1) describes the scoring system and further details the criteria staff used to examine each of the sites.

The size of the properties examined ranged from the smallest at 0.12 acre to the largest at 0.80 acre of land; the majority of those properties possess fairly flat open areas that would require minimal grading for purposes of creating a garden. Most of the properties will need utilities to be installed in order to provide for proper garden irrigation. All of the possible locations have the potential for very good sun exposure, but some would require the removal of existing trees. Parking ratings also ranged from each property; however, most sites considered are located less than one-quarter mile from a Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority stop/location. Of the 11 sites being considered, all but one of those are City-owned; the property located on the Hetch Hetchy right-of-way in Whisman Park is owned by the San Francisco Public Utility Commission.

Results of the analysis found the following properties to be highly rated as potential garden sites: 771 North Rengstorff Avenue, 2254 Wyandotte Street, Shoreline Boulevard at Latham Street, and West Middlefield Road at Sierra Vista Avenue.

771 North Rengstorff Avenue

During the community input sessions for the park design of 771 North Rengstorff Avenue, staff and landscape architects heard a strong desire from the community to leave the property in a natural setting and the recently approved drawings are moving forward with an area designated for “demonstration garden spaces.” City Council approved this conceptual design of the park on June 9, 2015 and provided approval to work with local community groups to assist with the maintenance of the property and garden areas and bees. The City has been approached by a group of residents referred to as “Soil and Water” which is currently supported by the Kiwanis Club of Mountain View and the Los Altos Community Foundation. This type of gardening model is designed to allow interested residents access to public land to grow fruits and vegetables.

2254 Wyandotte Street

Based on the data compiled, the newly acquired property at 2254 Wyandotte Street rates highly among the 11 surveyed properties. While there may be potential for community gardens on part of this property, it is too early to determine the future use of this parcel. Staff anticipates this location will be reviewed by the PRC in the future and any suggested use of the property would be fully discussed in the normal public outreach process.

Shoreline Boulevard at Latham Street/West Middlefield Road at Sierra Vista Avenue

The next most highly rated site based on the data compiled is located at the corner of South Shoreline Boulevard and Latham Street. Staff recommends this site be considered as a new plot-based community garden. This site is approximately 0.80 acre in size, with good sun exposure, elevation, parking, and accessibility to public transportation. Staff believes that approximately 80 to 100 individual plots, similar in size to the Senior Garden plots (6'x18'), can be placed on this site. The PRC recommended this property be considered as a new individual plot-based community garden at their June 10, 2015 meeting.

Another site that rated similar to the property on South Shoreline Boulevard was the small property located on West Middlefield Road and the corner of Sierra Vista Avenue. The PRC would like this property to be considered as an alternate location for additional community garden space if the Council does not support the development at Shoreline Boulevard and Latham Street. This property is relatively flat and does possess good sun exposure, proximity to utilities, and is close to public transportation. The size of the property would limit the amount of individual plots that could be constructed to approximately 35 total plots. At this time, staff recommends the South Shoreline Boulevard and Latham Street property over the West Middlefield Road at Sierra Vista Avenue property in order to serve the greatest number of Mountain View residents.

Due to the vast difference in sizes of the properties that were considered, staff believes there is an opportunity to expand a variety of types of community gardening. Working with Soil and Water as well as other community groups to maintain the garden areas of the new park located at 771 North Rengstorff Avenue will help address a community desire to garden in a group setting, and the proposed new plot-based gardens at Shoreline Boulevard and Latham Street will assist to increase the total number of plots available to those interested in individual gardening.

Recent Public Comment

As noted during the two public input meetings (PRC meeting and City Council meeting) regarding the 771 North Rengstorff Avenue Park project, many residents are in favor of increasing the ability to garden in Mountain View in a variety of ways. There was some opposition to gardens as well. Staff will soon begin to work with local groups to draw up agreements regarding the property at 771 North Rengstorff and the volunteer support envisioned for the property.

In addition to the public meetings where gardening has been a focus, staff utilized the new software available through the City website and hosted an “Open City Hall” topic related to community gardens. The question “Should Mountain View provide additional community garden space? If so, suggest where” was asked. The question was available to answer for approximately 18 days and resulted in 34 comments generally in support of wanting more community garden space in Mountain View.

Comments from the June 10, 2015 PRC meeting included 10 speakers who generally spoke in favor of additional garden space in Mountain View, highlighting the long waiting lists for the current community gardens, and wanting priority to be given to Mountain View residents and seniors.

FISCAL IMPACT

A preliminary review of costs for the property at South Shoreline Boulevard and Latham Street was completed. The early estimated cost of design and construction is estimated at \$530,000. This cost includes perimeter fencing, construction of plots, access to utilities, installation of new garden beds (similar in size to current Senior Garden plots—6’x18’), and grading. Should Council approve a new community garden location, an additional 130 hours of hourly staff time would be requested to assist with the regular garden oversight, which averages to 2.5 hours per week at an estimated cost of \$1,800 annually. Additionally, based on current water usage at the Willowgate Community Garden, the number of gallons of water to be utilized is estimated at a total of 31,000 gallons of water each month for the entire garden, at an estimated cost of \$260 per month. If Council provides a recommendation for a new community garden location, a more detailed review of costs would be completed and the project would be included for consideration with other City capital improvement projects next year.

CONCLUSION

Staff has analyzed 11 potential properties to be considered for new community gardens and received a recommendation from the PRC as follows:

1. As plots become available at Willowgate Garden, they should be subdivided in half to allow more gardeners;
2. Recommend plot-based gardens be developed at Shoreline Boulevard at Latham Street property;
3. Provide up to 10 plots at the new community garden site as short-term plots in order to allow for gardeners to commit to the garden for a specific period of time;

4. Provide a way to allow low-income families to receive financial assistance for garden plot annual fees;
5. Consider properties located on Wyandotte Street for urban shared gardens pending public input; and
6. Consider property located at West Middlefield Road and Sierra Vista Avenue as an alternate for additional community gardens.

ALTERNATIVES

1. Provide other options as determined by City Council.
2. Do not recommend any locations as additional community gardens.
3. Request staff to return with additional information.

PUBLIC NOTICING

In addition to the standard agenda posting, the residents and property owners within 300' of the 11 potential project sites, current community gardeners, those currently on the wait list for the Willowgate and Senior Garden, attendees of the previous public meetings, and interested parties related to community gardens received notices. The notice was also posted at the Willowgate Garden, the Senior Garden, the 11 properties being considered, and on the City's website.

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Attachment: 1. [Staff Report June 10, 2015 – Parks and Recreation Commission and Urban Forestry Board Meeting](#)