



DATE: April 2, 2019

CATEGORY: New Business

DEPT.: Community Services

TITLE: **Community Garden Program
Procedure Standardization and Fee
Modifications**

RECOMMENDATION

1. Adopt a Resolution Amending the City of Mountain View Master Fee Schedule to Incorporate New Garden Fees, to be read in title only, further reading waived (Attachment 1 to the Council report).
2. Approve a maximum of 10 plots at Latham Community Garden to be short-term plots for a maximum term of one year.
3. Approve the implementation of a financial assistance program for gardeners 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 Garden vary in size and can be as large as 396 square feet.

Citing a need for additional garden space to accommodate the wait lists, Council supported a Fiscal Year 2014-15 Major Goal to “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 June 2015, when additional garden spaces were being considered, the wait list for Willowgate Garden had 97 people, and the Senior Garden

wait list had 55 people. 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.

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 May or June of this year. 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 the garden program to create consistency for all three locations and to further meet cost-recovery goals 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 created an updated set of guidelines for all three gardens which include eligibility and registration requirements, community responsibilities, general rules and expectations, emergency procedures, and more. These guidelines have been reviewed with existing gardeners at the annual garden meetings in early May. The guidelines will continue to be reviewed each year at the annual garden meetings and can be updated to stay current with garden needs.

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 of the wait list, staff began splitting the existing plots at Willowgate Garden 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 one-half plot have been paying half the fee of a full plot. This process has not decreased overall revenue because 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. Existing gardeners will be given priority 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 up to 10 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 City Council Policy for Recreation Cost Recovery establishes cost-recovery levels based on the type of service, population services, and the level of benefit to the community. The target range for senior programs is 0 percent to 50 percent cost recovery, and adult programs are 80 percent to 120 percent. The cost recovery of the garden program has decreased over the past two years due to rising utility costs, particularly water. In Fiscal Year 2017-18, the garden program reached an overall 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. The last fee change was a 3 percent increase in 2015.

Proposed fees are outlined below and in more detail in Attachment 1. As stated, existing gardeners at Willowgate Garden with a one-half plot have been paying half the garden fee. Through the review process, it was determined that those with a one-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 one-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 to match Latham Garden. 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 will continue to monitor the budget for garden programs as a whole and, if necessary, recommend future fee increases to maintain cost recovery (Attachment 1 – Resolution).

Figure 1 – Proposed Fee Changes for Community Gardens

	Current Fee	Proposed Fee
Senior Garden	\$43	\$50
Willowgate Member	\$139	\$150
Willowgate Senior Member	\$43	\$50
Willowgate Existing One-Half (1/2) Plot Senior	\$22 Senior	FY 19-20: \$31 FY 20-21: \$40 FY 21-22: \$50
Willowgate Existing One-Half (1/2) Plot Member	\$70 Member	FY 19-20: \$80 FY 20-21: \$90 FY 21-22: \$100
Latham Member	N/A	\$100
Latham Senior Member	N/A	\$50

Financial Assistance Program

As part of Council's approval of the new community garden in June 2015, staff was directed to provide financial assistance to gardeners that are in need. Historically, the established Financial Assistance Program has been made available for youth recreation programs. The Community Services Agency currently helps screen families to determine if they are eligible based on Housing and Urban Development guidelines.

Staff is recommending utilizing a similar screening process. Once qualified, a gardener would pay the 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 discounted.

Recent Public Outreach

Staff recently scheduled meetings with current gardeners as part of the annual garden meeting to provide an update on aligning garden guidelines and proposed fee structure. The Senior Garden meeting was held on March 7, 2019, and the Willowgate Garden meeting was held on March 9, 2019. Overall, existing gardeners have accepted the fee increase and streamlined garden guidelines.

The PRC reviewed the proposed guidelines and fee increases on March 13, 2019. The Commission voted 4-0-1, with Commissioner Mendez absent, to forward staff recommendations to City Council.

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 operation of all three gardens.

ALTERNATIVES

1. Adjust the fees by a different amount.
2. Do not adjust the fees.
3. Adjust other aspects of the program.
4. Provide other direction.

PUBLIC NOTICING

Agenda posting and copy of report provided to existing community garden members.

Prepared by:

Shaun Chilkotowsky
Recreation Supervisor

John Marchant
Assistant Community Services Director

Approved by:

Daniel H. Rich
City Manager

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Attachment: 1. Resolution