

DATE: November 16, 2012
MEETING OF: November 27, 2012
FROM: Staff
RE: **ACTION ITEMS X.4 – Community Gardens Partnership**

BACKGROUND

Exploration of a three way community garden partnership has resulted in the Agricultural History Project contacting Mesa Verde Gardens about developing a community garden project on part of the site next to the reservoir that AHP now uses for a hay field.

During site exploration, it was agreed by all that a better location is the property along the fence line next to Community Bridges school.

FISCAL IMPACT

All ongoing operational costs associated with this community garden project including reimbursement for water used will be born by the Mesa Verde Gardens and their participants.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

That the Board approves a motion to execute a contract with Mesa Verde Gardens to operate a community garden on the ½ acre site along the highway frontage next to the day care center commonly called Community Bridges School.

ATTACHMENTS

- Community Garden Proposal
- Community Garden Rules

Community Garden Proposal
from
Mesa Verde Gardens
to
Agriculture History Project
and
Santa Cruz County Fair Board
October 26, 2012

The staff and supporters of the small non-profit Mesa Verde Gardens (MVG) are grateful and so pleased to have the opportunity to join with the Agriculture History Project (AHP) and the Santa Cruz County Fair Board (SCCFB) as we come together to create this unique community garden project on the beloved Santa Cruz County Fairgrounds, a venture honoring both the legacy of Pajaro Valley's agricultural heritage and the people who work it. Together with the community gardeners themselves we have the opportunity to create a living, productive, family-oriented testament to our shared values of land stewardship, healthy food, and thriving communities.

In collaboration with AHP and SCCFB, MVG proposes to install and manage a community garden on property owned by SCCFB at a specific site determined appropriate and acceptable by all three parties. MVG requests a one year lease. Roles and Responsibilities for each party include:

SCCFB

- preparation of site, including leveling, removal of poplars
- assess adequacy of water system and repairs/upgrades needed, if any
- access to site
- access to water
- access to bathrooms
- promotion of Community Garden Project to larger SC County Fair Community

AHP

- promotion of Community Garden project to AHP membership and participants
- co-create community events for garden members and AHP members
- consult with MVG program director regarding local agricultural practices, materials, equipment, etc.

MVG

- oversee development of project, including tractor work, irrigation system readiness, sowing and cutting of cover crop
- recruit families—with a focus on low-income families and others who do not have a place at home in which to grow food; conversations have already begun with staff at Fairgrounds Preschool and Watsonville Charter School of the Arts; member families will turn the land into a garden (delineate plots, expand irrigation system throughout garden, erect fence) on work days next spring
- get signed, written agreement of requirements and expectations from each gardener
- provide project materials, including: cover crop seed, soil amendments, irrigation system components, fencing
- provide garden materials, including: drip irrigation system components (required by all gardeners), a tool shed, some tools, some seeds and seedlings, hoses
- provide liability insurance for program participants

Community gardens thrive when participation, involvement and ownership is shared by many. Opportunities for AHP and SCCFB members and participants to support the community garden project include: volunteering, leading workshops, in-kind or material donations, financial contributions, community outreach, and promotion. We welcome your involvement however you are inclined.

We look forward to a relationship of good will and collaboration as we come together to create the new Fairgrounds Community Garden.

Submitted by:
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A Brief History of Mesa Verde Gardens

The mission of Mesa Verde Gardens is to empower low-income residents of Santa Cruz County to meet the immediate and basic need for food security by increasing their access to pesticide-free fresh fruits and vegetables through the creation of small organic gardens.

Mesa Verde Gardens' programs assist low-income people to achieve equal access to fresh, healthy food by joining with them to build and maintain their own year-round organic edible gardens, thus improving health and lowering food costs.

All of our projects are designed to have a positive impact on the health of participating children by increasing their access to and consumption of healthy organic produce while reducing their risk for obesity, diabetes, and other diet-related health problems.

Mesa Verde Gardens was begun in December, 2009. Since that time, we have:

- installed and provided ongoing garden and nutrition support for edible gardens at 10 Pajaro Valley preschools serving low-income children
- started and maintained 3 community gardens in Watsonville serving a total of 80 families, the majority of which are low-income and live in housing without space for a garden
- grown a demonstration garden using organic agriculture practices; all produce grown in this project donated to Loaves and Fishes Food Pantry

In 2013, in addition to the new Fairgrounds Community Garden, Mesa Verde Gardens is also starting Pajaro Community Orchard on a beautiful half acre of land leased from the Lutheran Community Church.

Mesa Verde Gardens is extremely fortunate to be under fiscal sponsorship* of Second Harvest Food Bank. MVG receives mentoring and technical support from Second Harvest; we do not receive funding from them.

*Fiscal sponsorship refers to the practice of non-profit organizations offering their legal and tax-exempt status to groups engaged in activities related to the organization's mission.

Beginning with 50 apple and pear trees planted this winter, we will eventually add plums, citrus, avocado, and nut trees, as well as walking paths, benches, and other restful areas in the orchard. The orchard will be maintained by members of Mesa Verde Gardens' four community gardens. Community gardeners will be the eventual recipients of fruit from this orchard

Mesa Verde Gardens

Community Garden Rules

- I will pay \$5.00 per month to cover water and other garden expenses.
- I am responsible for keeping my garden planted and cared for throughout the growing season.
- I will use water responsibly and will only water with a drip irrigation system.
- I will keep my garden free of weeds and will maintain the areas around my garden.
- I will be responsible for my children at all times and teach them to be respectful of our garden and the gardens of others.
- I will keep trash and litter out of my garden as well as out of the Community Garden.
- I will only pick fruits, vegetables, and flowers from my own garden. I will only pick from other gardens with permission of the gardener.
- I will attend garden meetings.
- I will work 2 hours per month on bettering the Community Garden. A list of garden tasks and projects will be posted.
- I will put garden waste in the designated compost area.
- I will put any extra produce in the community box for others to share.
- I will use tools responsibly and return them to the toolshed when I'm done using them.
- I will care for my garden at least once each week. If I do not care for my garden for 2 weeks, the Garden Coordinator will call me regarding this agreement. If I still do not care for my garden for a third week, I will receive a letter letting me know that my garden has been reassigned to another family. Any leftover dues will be returned to me.
- At the end of the growing season, I will clear my garden of all plants and other materials and leave it ready for the next season.

The following are not permitted in the Community Garden:

- Leaving water on when not present
- Smoking
- Drinking alcohol
- Pets
- Pesticides, fertilizers, weed killers, or other chemicals harmful to people or the environment
- Planting of trees
- Planting of illegal substances