



CITY OF SANTA BARBARA

PARKS AND RECREATION COMMISSION REPORT

AGENDA DATE: October 23, 2013

TO: Parks and Recreation Commission

FROM: Recreation Division, Parks and Recreation Department

SUBJECT: Community Gardens

RECOMMENDATION: That the Commission hear a report on the Community Gardens operated by Neighborhood and Outreach Services.

BACKGROUND:

Throughout the nation, there is a movement towards educating families and organizations about the health benefits of community gardening. Community gardening provides fresh produce and plants, improving the health of its users through consumption of these goods as well as the health benefits of exercise. It has the added benefit of building a social community and fostering neighborhood pride and spirit. It could be a focal point for community organizing, leading to community-based efforts to deal with other social concerns.

Similar to the variety of gardens throughout the world, in Santa Barbara our four community gardens are all unique and distinguished by their neighborhood characteristics. Located conveniently for residents throughout the City and managed by the Neighborhood and Outreach Services (NOS), our community gardens include Pilgrim Terrace Garden, Rancheria Garden, Yanonali Garden and the children's garden, Parque De Los Niños Garden Orchard. In general, neighborhood residents are able to rent available plots at a low-cost annual fee. (Non-city residents are also able to rent at a slightly higher fee). Some of the plots are also made available to organizations and non-profit groups.

DISCUSSION:

Each year, NOS solicits and receives applications for community garden rentals. There are 178 plots available in the three family gardens—Rancheria, Yanonali, and Pilgrim Terrace, and another 11 plots in the children's garden. For the family gardens, the applicants complete the application form, agree to terms of use, pay the fee, attend orientation, and then begin seeding, planting and harvesting their individual gardens. This year, slight but significant changes were made to the process, including offering a three-year versus one-year contract to the applicants. This term change was welcomed by the gardeners, since many of them expend hours and hours of time building up their gardens, and were then subject to possible loss of their plots at year's end due to a

lottery process. Other changes, based on conversations with gardeners, included changes to the number of allowable plants of certain types, inclusion of a compost plot in each community garden, storage shed for each garden site, height of trellises and a change from keys to a combination lock at each of the gardens. The input from the gardeners was invaluable and resulted in the creation of a community garden group, which is still being formulated, but will include volunteer representatives from each of the respective gardens. The group will meet periodically to have an interchange of ideas, suggestions, and recommendations to staff. The 2013-14 application process was just completed and to date, there are 121 rented spaces, including rentals by four non-profit organizations.

Our non-profit organizations include an elementary school, County Mental Health, a youth program, and an independent non-profit that is working with Casa Esperanza. All of our non-profit groups, like our families, expressed the tremendous benefits from use of the community gardens. Currently, NOS is sharing the children's garden with a volunteer youth group, providing participants not only with the experience of gardening, but providing the education behind gardening. In the past, the garden has hosted inter-generational events, Fall Festival events and garden education in a joint afterschool activity with the Franklin and McKinley A-OK programs. The children have been educated by a master gardener, who takes them through planting to harvesting curriculum. The program was successful on both the east and west sides of town, even being featured in the KEYT TV "What's Right in Your Community." The volunteer youth program currently sharing the children's garden is exposing older children to gardening and empowering them with the ability to create a new look for the children's garden and to learn how to share their produce with their neighbors. This included a clean-up day with 10-15 neighborhood youth, and soon a collaborative of new raised garden beds, landscaping, and identifiable walkways. The students have been working diligently with parents and other adults.

The growing success with our community gardens is made possible by the open communication developing between our gardeners and staff, and the information exchanged between neighboring gardeners. The success is also due to the contribution from our Parks Maintenance section. Of particular note is Antoine Kyle, assigned about a year ago to maintain our gardens common areas. Antoine, along with in-training job apprentices, continues to provide the highest level of support in the upkeep and beautification of our gardens as well as training to our young apprentices.

This year, we have challenged ourselves to provide outstanding and responsive customer service throughout the garden year. We continue to be challenged to keep the pathways free of weeds, provide answers to problems that support our gardeners success, and to bridge the gap between the cultural differences between our gardeners. Moving forward, however, we see the garden community bonding, and with our

aggressive efforts of marketing promotions, we hope to fill the remaining plots with new gardeners and continue to grow Santa Barbara's community gardens.

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