

Sowing plans for a community garden

Written by KRISTYN HALBIG ZIEHM
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Comments on creating public growing space next to Interurban Trail in Port to be accepted at Aug. 3 meeting

Port Washington gardeners may have a new place to plant flowers and vegetables next spring.

A community garden with 65 plots is proposed to be created on one-half acre of city-owned land next to the Ozaukee Interurban Trail, south of Hales Trail and kitty-corner from Kaiser Park.

A public meeting on the proposal will be held from 5 to 7:30 p.m. Wednesday, Aug. 3, at the Niederkorn Library's community room.

Organizers are seeking input on the location, advice and looking to create a list of people who may be interested in renting a plot or helping with the garden.

Information gathered at the meeting will be presented to the city's Parks and Recreation Board at 6:30 p.m. Thursday, Aug. 11.

"They (board members) are very interested in the idea," said Derek Strohl, who is organizing the community garden effort. "They just want more community input."

Strohl, who has been working on a community garden "on and off" for six years, last year worked on plans to develop the garden near Dunwiddie Elementary School.

Those plans were derailed, he said, when the Port Soccer Club, which developed the site about a decade ago as a soccer field but hadn't used it in about five years, decided it needed the space.

Strohl reviewed a number of other sites before settling on the current area.

The garden would be fenced, in large part to protect it from deer that live and feed in the area, he said.

Several years ago, Strohl noted, he proposed creating the garden on a site northeast of this one but people in the area overwhelmingly rejected it because of the deer population.

A small path will have to be built for handicapped accessibility, as will a couple raised garden plots. The remainder of the garden will be in-ground.

The fence will be the biggest part of the expected \$3,000 in start-up costs for the garden, Strohl said. Grants and donations will be sought to cover the cost.

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The garden plots are expected to cost gardeners about \$25 annually.

“We’re very optimistic we can raise the money this year so we can open the garden next spring,” Strohl said.

He would like to till the ground this fall and incorporate large amounts of compost into the soil. In spring, the fence would be built.

The biggest challenge, Strohl said, will be water.

“We could spend many thousands of dollars putting in water pipes,” he said, or much less to install two 250-gallon tanks and filling them from a nearby hydrant. Gardeners would then use a spigot to fill watering cans.

In time, he would like to convert the tank spigots so a hose could be attached.

Strohl said he and three others have been working on the project, but would like others to join them.

“We need a board,” he said, noting rules for the garden need to be drawn up. “We’ll need help with the construction. There’s a lot of work to be done.

“But we’re overdue for this. Our community needs this. We need our children to grow up knowing where their food comes from. People need to be able to grow their own food, even if they live in an apartment and don’t own land. People who don’t have land think, ‘I can’t have a garden.’ There’s no reason why we can’t have that. We have plenty of public spaces.”

Playgrounds and concert venues are widely accepted uses for public lands, Strohl said, and gardens should also be.

“It’s a worthwhile activity for a community,” he said. “I get a lot of comments from people who say they’re excited about this.”