

WORK SESSION OF THE GREENBELT CITY COUNCIL held Wednesday, July 11, 2012, for the purpose of meeting with the Greenbelt Community Garden Club (GCGC) and CHEARS/Three Sisters Garden Group .

Mayor Davis started the meeting at 8:01 p.m. It was held in the Multi-Purpose Room of the Community Center.

PRESENT WERE: Councilmembers Konrad E. Herling, Emmett V. Jordan, Leta M. Mach, Silke I. Pope, Edward V.J. Putens, Rodney M. Roberts and Mayor Judith F. Davis.

STAFF PRESENT WERE: Michael P. McLaughlin, City Manager; Lesley Riddle, Assistant Director of Public Works and David E. Moran, City Clerk.

ALSO PRESENT WERE: Maggie Cahalan & Kim Walsh, CHEARS, Robert Trumbule, Martha Tomecek & John Henry Jones, GCGC and many other GCGC members.

CHEARS/Three Sisters

Ms. Walsh explained that CHEARS was a community non-profit group. She discussed the group's Food Forest Demonstration Garden plan. Ms. Walsh distributed a handout to Council and noted a partnership with the University of Maryland. She requested City approval to plant on the site.

Ms. Mach asked if everything was edible. Ms. Walsh responded yes.

Mr. Roberts asked about plans to plant fruit trees all over town. Ms. Walsh responded that this was under discussion and may be part of a later plan.

Mayor Davis asked if they were willing to enter into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) for the food forest project. Ms. Walsh responded yes.

Mr. Jordan asked about maintenance of the food forest area in future years. Ms. Walsh responded that the hope was to use students and Franklin Park residents as volunteers to maintain it in the future. Mayor Davis suggested some of these details could be included in the MOU.

Mr. Putens noted that there were peach and mulberry trees in a wetlands area in Schrom Hills Park.

Council expressed a desire to have this item on the August 13 agenda

Greenbelt Community Garden Club (GCGC)

Mr. Jones provided some historical background. Mr. Trumbule presented slides of aerial photos showing changes to garden plot areas over time. He noted that available garden plots had declined over the years and if anything the forest and city uses had encroached on the gardens. Mr. Jones stated there were 350 plots at one time.

Ms. Tomecek stated there were 82 plots currently. She noted some plots had been divided into smaller plots. Mayor Davis noted this was an increase from 2008.

Ms. Mach recalled some gardeners having multiple plots. Mr. Trumbule reported there was a small waiting list for plots. He stated some gardeners “drop out” so there is ongoing turnover. Mr. Trumbule indicated there were very few people with larger plots. Ms. Tomecek noted that the garden club tries to address the waiting list through networking and cooperation.

Mr. Herling asked how mid-year plot requests are accommodated. Mr. Jones noted that some people had shared their larger plots and allowed use of an individual row.

Mayor Davis noted that there had been some past concerns that GCGC was an exclusive group. Mr. Jones responded that the group had come a long way over the past few years.

Mr. Roberts asked how many people want a 50 X 50 plot. Mr. Jones responded that most people can’t handle a plot that large. Ms. Tomecek responded that they don’t have any 50 X 50 plots available.

Ms. Pope asked who keeps up with membership. Ms. Tomecek responded that this was the role of the GCGC Coordinators.

Mr. Phelan provided some examples of people who share their large plots with other gardeners. He indicated that utilizing a small plot was problematic because of weather conditions, lack of water in the area, etc. Mr. Trumbule suggested the City create additional garden plots on existing open space or grassy areas.

Mr. Jordan asked how GCGC deals with people who may use unorthodox practices. Mr. Jones responded that he is usually able to talk with folks. He stressed the value of composting. Ms. Tomecek noted there were some issues, but generally gardeners can work things out informally. Mr. Jones stated GCGC distributes information provided by University of Maryland and others. Ms. Tomecek distributed survey results.

Mayor Davis asked about a listserv. Mr. Jones responded that GCGC did have one.

Mr. Putens described his experience as a former gardener and that people always shared. He asked about the residency of gardeners. Mr. Trumbule responded that all of the plot holders were City residents.

One resident noted that gardening was a very social experience and that information is shared among gardeners.

Some GCGC members expressed the need for tree removal to maintain plot boundaries. Mr. Putens expressed the need to define the garden plot area. There were different ideas about what date/point in time should be used to determine the garden plot boundaries. Mr. McLaughlin indicated this is the type of direction that City staff needed in order to move forward.

Ms. Rosenthal noted the Museum had done an exhibit on gardens. She expressed the desire for more garden plots and suggested that the City needed to identify additional land for plots.

One resident suggested the plots needed to be marked. She suggested a berm to identify the plot area. Another resident asked about immediate solutions. Mr. James expressed dissatisfaction with the City bureaucracy. He stated that GCGC was being asked to sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) referencing a “sustainable land use policy” that the City hadn’t approved yet. Mr. McLaughlin responded that the MOU and the policy were drafts and the purpose of tonight’s work session was to address this.

Mr. Phelan expressed a desire to have the Hamilton family homestead and cemetery areas restored. Ms. Riddle expressed agreement and noted she was working with a M-NCPPC historian to achieve some of this.

One resident asked about the Council’s vision for the garden plots. Mr. Roberts stated that both the garden plots and the Forest Preserve were part of the City and both were wanted. Mr. Jordan believed the policies need not contradict each other. Ms. Mach stated that gardening was another service that the City supports.

Ms. Riddle described the reasons for the draft sustainable land care policy. She suggested different guidelines for the garden plots than landscaped areas. Several residents expressed concern about the policy and its statements prohibiting use of pesticides and herbicides.

Mayor Davis asked about fencing and access. Mr. Trumbule responded that most of this had been removed. Mayor Davis asked about the condition of the access road and use of wood chips. Mr. Trumbule believed this had been addressed as well.

Mr. Stevens noted an area that used to be a path which was now overgrown. Mr. James reported a tree down and an area that need to be mowed. Ms. Riddle agreed to investigate these areas.

Mr. McLaughlin explained the permit process for disposing of yard waste at Northway. There was discussion of how GCGC could utilize the Northway site and obtain a group permit. Mr. McLaughlin suggested the provision of 25 copies of the guidelines that could be distributed to GCGC members.

Other Business

Mr. Roberts noted he had examined the tree in front of the Municipal Building and believed it had too much mulch. He stated that mulch should only be 2 inches thick and never in contact with the trunk of the tree. He cited an article from a Dr. Akers who is an expert on trees.

Ms. Mach reported on a conversation with Franklin Park about a pre-school cooperative.

Mayor Davis mentioned a Tree City bulletin, a Franklin Park calendar, an MWCOC document, and prison program that she would share with Council.

Mr. Putens expressed the desire for a tracking report on a monthly basis and a status report of particular projects.

The meeting ended at 11:01 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

*David E. Moran
Assistant City Manager*