

Manhattan Community Gardens

Minutes of the May 18, 2011 Special Board meeting

Members present: Dick Green, Ron Downey, Cybil Perkins, Chris Feit, Pat Butler, Linda Teener, Susan Oviatt, Erika Huber, Chuck Marr and Dale Stearns.

Dick called the meeting to order at 5:45 p.m.

In review of the minutes of the May 4th meeting, Cybil provided Dale with some additions on the report that she and Susan gave. Dale will add the report detail to the May 4th minutes. The minutes were approved with the additions by unanimous consent.

Dick presented a document with 5 alternative plans for responding to Howie's Trash Service's plans to purchase the north gardens from the City.

Dick stated that he would like to Board to select one or two alternatives that can be recommended to the garden members as a whole. The Board members reviewed the 5 alternatives provided below:

Alternative One: Accept Howie's Land

We can accept Howie's offer of land and installation of a well on Temple Road. We could give every returning gardener in 2012 the right to one plot at our current south side main site. Early registering new gardeners would also get one plot at our main gardens depending upon availability. We would make basic but not expensive improvements to the Temple Road land. Every 2012 gardener that wants more than one plot will get their additional plots at Temple Road (these people will be "pioneers"). We will also ask the City for additional compensation from the proceeds of the land sale to Howie's. We will continue to look for a permanent new home for all the community gardens and raise money toward that end.

Alternative Two: Reject Howie's Site, acquire a lease from another landowner

We can oppose Howie's plans to purchase the north gardens, but we must have a relatively inexpensive replacement land available if we fail to block the land sale. I would suggest pursuing the Thowe land assuming that they have a well with the land. If we win our opposition then we don't follow through with leasing the Thowe land. If we fail in our opposition, then we make basic but not expensive improvements to the leased Thowe land. We would give every returning gardener in 2012 the right to one plot at our current south side main site. Early registering new gardeners may also get one plot at our main gardens. Every 2012 gardener that wants more than one plot will get their additional plots at the Thowe land (these people will again be "pioneers"). We will ask the City to compensate us for our loss from the proceeds of the land sale to Howie's. We will continue to look for a permanent new home for all the community gardens and raise money toward that end.

Alternative Three: Consolidate all gardeners to the South garden while exploring future alternative

We can oppose Howie's plans to purchase the North Gardens and in the event Howie's prevails we would consolidate all North Gardeners to the south side of the railroad tracks. In lieu of searching for an interim site we would assemble a select committee to research and locate a permanent site that could be used either to supplement the existing gardens or to replace the existing gardens if needed in the future. Any interim site we secure now can be subject to cancellation of that lease by the owner and MCG could be forced to obtain another interim site. MCG should attempt to secure an alternate site that could either be purchased by MCG or long term leased from a governmental unit. This would allow MCG to secure a more 'permanent' alternate location. This alternative would require the limiting of plots to current South Garden gardeners along with the reassigning of the plots that are currently leased by those MCG gardeners. The timeline for Howie's actions are beyond the control of MCG and the uncertainty of knowing when we will need to obtain an interim site could result in dilution of our already limited resources of both time and money. It may be more prudent to take our chances with Howie's and the City. In the event Howie's prevails we would consolidate, with all the issues that causes, and take the required amount of time to obtain a permanent alternate site. This alternative would also be worked in conjunction with our request for the City's financial support due to the loss of the North Gardens by MCG.

Alternative Four: Reject Howie's land, acquire long term lease with the County

Present the City with reasons for keeping the garden at the current site as is. However, also be prepared with a plan for relocation along with costs and a request for reimbursement of relocation costs.

A promising option is county land. Begin negotiations immediately with the County for the use of county land on Collins Lane. We would request enough land to eventually move the entire garden to that site. We would request county assistance in clearing the land for tilling. Request a long term lease for the property. Immediate county negotiations might result in having some land cleared and the well dug for gardening next season.

Alternative Five: Strategy with the City Commission

1. In order to try to keep the gardens, we must first involve the MCG membership.
 - Board identifies the top 2-3 alternatives.
 - Notify membership of Howie's plans and top alternatives via newsletter and email.
 - Have a planning meeting with the entire membership. Ascertain the political connections, expertise and interest of the membership to advocate for keeping the land for Community Garden use. To have any chance of prevailing, we must take advantage of the expertise, energy, and connections of the 100+ gardeners and friends of the MCG, rather than rely on just nine Board members. (Board members, as per the rules, will have final vote and be ultimately responsible, but it's important to harness the passion of the membership.)
 - Create an action plan regarding how to approach City staff and Commissioners to advocate for the importance of keeping the MCG intact. (This would be done after

the membership meeting, in order to utilize the assets of the entire garden community.)

2. Short-term action items (Search for alternate site, lobby for keeping gardens intact):
 - Assemble a committee to research possible land in the event we lose the North Gardens. I would like to see this committee include some gardeners who are not on the board, (but approved by the Board) in order to broaden our search. Although the Thowe land and county land have possibilities, I believe it is too early to limit our options to only those that have been identified to date...let's see if further possibilities are discovered.
 - Implement lobbying action plan to advocate keeping the MCG intact.
 - Do not present alternative sites immediately to City, because that makes it appear easier to take the North gardens. (It's almost like we're tacitly agreeing that we don't belong where we are.) Continue to seriously search for a place to re-locate, but do not say up front to the City that we have another place to go. *Our position should be to advocate the value of the Community Gardens and why it should remain intact where it is.*

3. Intermediate-term action items (alternate site, requesting assistance, consolidate for 2011)
 - If it appears, after our lobbying efforts, that we will lose the North gardens, the Board, with advice from the Site Search committee, will identify and procure a replacement site. (Rather than an interim site, I would rather see a site that is at least as big as the current gardens, maybe 3 acres, so that it can be developed if we lose the south garden in the future.)
 - At this time we request from the City and or County help with relocation. (They will hopefully be supportive, since we have kept our advocacy pro-gardens, not anti-City or anti-Howie).
 - If there is no time to prepare land for 2012, all current gardeners will consolidate to south gardens, with one plot each. Current south gardeners will be given the opportunity to identify the one plot they wish to keep. (This could be a good opportunity to teach intensive square foot gardening techniques rather than the farm-based row technique that many gardeners now use.) The hardship of this consolidation could be a motivating factor for the membership to help with all that needs to be done to identify, lease/purchase, and prepare an alternate site.
 - If we are able to keep the north gardens, throw a party!!

4. Long-term goals:
 - If we are able to remain in the North Gardens, explore options to make the site more secure for the future: long-term lease, re-zoning, etc.

- Regardless of what happens to the North Gardens, explore options to make the south gardens safe from buy-out.
- If it appears that both sites will eventually be lost (the hand-writing is on the wall), work towards securing and developing a new site with a very long-term lease or purchase agreement.
- Alternate site should be as close to town as possible to maintain accessibility.

Linda added additional information to Alternative Four, indicating that a knowledgeable source has stated to her that the water in the Hunter's Island area is suitable for vegetable crop irrigation. Chuck and Dick had also received the same verification of the water quality for irrigation. Linda received guidance from Karen Davis with the City that a negotiation plan for support from Howie's Trash Service and the City to compensate for the loss of the north garden area is advised. There is little hope in voicing opposition to Howie's purchase plan with the current City Commissioners. Linda also talked with County Commissioner Chair, Karen McCulloh, about the use of county land on Hunter's Island for expansion of the community gardens in the future. Karen McCulloh was very supportive and encourages the Board to contact Rod Meredith, County Parks official, about the idea and to also get on an upcoming County Commissioners meeting agenda with the request. The county land on Collins Lane off of South Manhattan Avenue is currently not in use and can only be used for park and recreation purposes. A long-term lease with the county could be expected. The land would need to be cleared but the county may be able to assist with the work. Chuck stated that the soil quality on Hunter's Island is excellent for vegetable gardening, which is not the case in most other areas outside of Manhattan. Linda also added that the zoning status of the current south gardens is for residential and the area should be safe from other acquisition. Chuck noted that part of the north gardens is private property owned by Lowell Regier. If they sell to Howie's that will dislocate some north gardeners for next year.

After extensive discussion, Dick called for a straw vote to rank the alternatives for further discussion and possible action. Alternative Four was the top vote getter with Alternative Three second. The Board discussed a combination of Alternatives Three and Four. The Board unanimously selected a combination of Alternative Three and Four. The Board decided to prepare and send a letter to all the gardeners after the June 1st Board meeting to alert them to the situation and to explain the Board's recommendation. The recommendation moved by Dale and seconded by Ron reads as follows:

We will educate the City Officials, City Commissioners, County Officials and County Commissioners on the value and importance of the Community Gardens. We will negotiate support from Howie's Trash Service, the City of Manhattan and Riley County to develop a new site for expanding the Community Gardens if the City sells the North gardens to Howie's Trash Service. If sold, Howie's use of the North Gardens would not begin until December 2011. If a new garden site can be identified, leased and developed in 2011, then new garden plots may be available to replace the north gardens for 2012. A promising option is County land on Collins Lane south of Manhattan in the Hunter's Island area. However, the timeline for Howie's actions and the response of the City and County are beyond our control and the timeframe to develop

new garden space is short. It may be necessary to consolidate all gardeners to the South Gardens in 2012 until a new garden site is ready. It may limit returning gardeners to one plot for 2012. New gardeners for 2012 may also be able to lease one plot depending on availability.

Motion carried unanimously.

Chris asked about the amount of money needed to develop new gardens. Dick's research into well digging, pumps, water distribution, equipment building construction and parking lot development put the costs at \$20,000. Financial and/or in-kind support from Howie's, the City and the County will be necessary along with money from the Community Gardens' treasury will be needed. Linda projected some target goals for support from each entity mentioned.

Cybil stated that she is uncomfortable with the Board going ahead and taking action to contact and negotiate with Howies and government officials before we notified the entire membership of the situation, and gave them an opportunity to provide feedback. Ron responded that the gardeners will have the opportunity to give feedback but the Board needs to make the decision so that the issue is not drawn out too long.

Chuck stated that the North Gardens would be hard to retain in the future even if Howie's wasn't seeking to purchase the land. It has commercial value due to its proximity to Fort Riley Boulevard.

Linda will time her formal contacts with the County Officials and Commissioners until after all the gardeners are notified of the issue and the Board's recommendation.

The Board will plan to approve a notification letter for the gardeners at the June 1st Board meeting at 5:45 p.m. at UFM.

Meeting adjourned at 6:50 p.m.

The next meeting will be Wednesday, June 1st at 5:45 p.m. at UFM.

Respectively submitted,

Dale Stearns