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Mayor's Office

Community Farming Proposal for the Fernald Re-use Committee

Introduction – Community farming has seen a spike in popularity in recent years. Families and individuals are taking advantage of Community Farms for a number of reasons. First and foremost is the opportunity to produce fresh locally grown vegetables, herbs, and flowers. Also, people are taking advantage of the economic benefits to growing and preserving vegetables. Further, Community Gardens preserve Open Space and use organic gardening concepts which benefit the environment. Also, in a city such as Waltham that has many small yards, a Community Garden gives residents a small plot with the opportunity to garden. Last, there is a tremendous educational benefit for our youth to learn about gardening and the rich history of farms that had been located on the Fernald property and around Waltham.

There is a need in Waltham for another Community Farm. GROW, which is located at the University of Massachusetts Field station has had a growing waiting list of 48, which means it could be 3 to 4 years until a plot becomes available. According to the Boston Area Natural Network and other communities around Waltham there are also waiting lists.

Location – One of the advantages of a Community Garden is that they do not require a large amount of space. Many plots range in size from 10 feet by 10 feet to twice that size. The plots at GROW are 15 by 15 and some gardeners at that location have double plots. The individual plots do not all have to be in the same location. Another advantage to the Community Gardens on the Fernald site is that they can be designed in several smaller locations and incorporated into other uses of the property. A couple of considerations are that the garden should be near a water source. They also need to be on fairly flat and in sunny areas. There are many areas of the Fernald site that fit these criteria. As some of the other major components and priorities of the Fernald site plan develop, the Community Gardens can be added in. The total acreage needed may be about 1 acre. To give this some perspective there are 142 plots at the GROW Gardens at U Mass. They occupy approximately 1 acre.

Time line – The time needed to create a Community Garden could take several months according to discussions with GROW coordinators and the Boston Area Natural Network. The process would start now with discussions and then as the major components of the site are decided, the community gardens can be laid out. One of the biggest components of a Community Garden would be the irrigation system which would include a design of the pipes and hoses and include the installation of backflow valves. The size of the Community Garden area would dictate the amount of irrigation needed.

Capital sources – Many of the Community Gardens that are run by municipalities are also funded initially by the municipality. It is common that an annual fee be charged to the tenants of the plot. Most plots range in a \$15 to \$30. Some in Boston do have a larger cost to tenants. Both GROW and Rock Meadow Community Gardens which is run by the Town of Belmont ask for a \$25 annual fee. This year GROW asked the gardeners for an additional onetime fee to help with the installation of the new

irrigation system. The cost of the new system for the 142 plots at GROW was approximately \$2,300.00. This cost was kept at a minimum due to the many volunteers who helped with the installation. Other possible sources of funding could be the Community Preservation Fund, grants from organizations such as Associated Grant Makers of Massachusetts and Grassroots Funds, or private donations. Also, as projects are built by private entities on the site, they are often encouraged and willing to incorporate a Community Garden as part of the project.

Summary - There are many considerations to creating a successful Community Garden. To help with that planning there are many models of community Gardens that are already in place. For example, the Boston Area Natural Network (bostonnatural.org) has a web site with complete instructions for organizing and coordinating a Community Garden. There is also a tremendous camaraderie and sharing of information among those involved with Community Gardens. In closing, Community Gardens have seen a tremendous surge in popularity with many associated benefits. The Fernald site has a history of small gardens and orchards. Community Gardens are flexible as far as placement and size and would be a great addition to any planning for uses of the historic Fernald Property.

I want to thank everyone who is taking part in this important community process and those who shared information regarding this proposal. If there should be any further discussions on this proposed aspect of the Fernald Property, or if I can help in any other way, please feel free to contact me.

Regards,

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