



**CITY OF MONROVIA
COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMISSION
AGENDA REPORT**

DEPARTMENT: Community Services

MEETING DATE: June 9, 2020

PREPARED BY: Heather Gibson, Management Analysis

AGENDA LOCATION: AR-3

TITLE: Monrovia Community Garden Pilot Program Update

OBJECTIVE: Provide the Community Services Commission with an update on the Monrovia Community Garden Pilot Program and request feedback prior to updating the City Council.

BACKGROUND: Following an increased call from the Community, coupled with the findings of the Parks Master Plan process, which identified Community Gardens to be the third highest priority of survey respondents; in early 2018 the City Council directed staff to study the possibility of establishing a Community Garden Program.

Within that process, staff mentioned the Community Garden efforts with representatives from Mountainside Communion Church (Mountainside) located at the northwest corner of Colorado and Magnolia. Mountainside shared that they were hoping to develop a Community Garden on their property for the community's use. Both parties came together with a similar vision; to launch a community garden pilot program that would incorporate private raised beds for rent, educational workshops, and public demonstration gardens for all of the community to enjoy.

Incorporating feedback from both the Community Services Commission and the City Council, a pilot program was designed and on November 20, 2018, a contract with Mountainside was approved for \$30,000 in one-time construction costs, and authorized an expenditure not to exceed \$15,000 per year for use towards maintenance and administrative costs, thru through June 30, 2022.

The contract with Mountainside includes the following components:

- Site preparation including clearing, grubbing, and grading
- Installation of a water-wise irrigation system
- Construction of the Community Garden facility to include:
 - Private Raised Beds; including ADA raised beds
 - Raised Beds for a Public Demonstration Gardens
 - Public Small Space Container Demonstration Gardens
 - Benches for community use in the Public Demonstration Garden
 - Fencing around Private Gardens
 - Community Compost Hub
- Establishment of a tool shed to be used by gardeners as well as supply various tools for communal use.

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- Administrative support and oversight of the Community Garden, including but not limited to the development of Community Garden Guidelines, Membership Information, and
- Facilitate up to seven (7) free community educational workshops on gardening annually.
- Coordinate and establishment of a volunteer group to support various garden activities, mentor novice gardeners, and aid with weeding and cleaning as needed.
- Provide ongoing maintenance for the Community Garden.

Construction on the garden began in January 2019 and was built in under six months with the help of numerous volunteers and gift-in-kind donations. Further, unique partnerships and community partners came together to help the garden take shape; from donated labor and organic soil, to the Volunteer Center of San Gabriel Valley sending volunteers weekly contributing over 300 hours of community service to help build the garden, to the nonprofit LA Compost partnering with us to build and host a community compost bin onsite which is open to all Monrovia residents.

A robust public outreach campaign began in March 2019 to inform the community about the upcoming garden pilot program. Community meetings included application information on renting a raised bed, demonstration garden and workshop activities, while also providing residents with other ways to get involved. In addition to the launch of the Community Garden website, print materials, and electronic messaging; outreach also included presentations to groups such as, the Monrovia Coordinated Council, Senior Program Clubs, and Monrovia Area Partnership (MAP).

In July of 2019, the Community Services Commission and City Council held a ribbon cutting ceremony to mark the official opening and launch of the Community Garden Pilot Program.

ANALYSIS:

The initial intent of building a Community Garden was aimed at answering the call heard from residents to build a community garden, where garden beds could be rented for private use, along with creating a space for community building. In fact, one of the goals of creating a pilot program was to gauge the participation and need for gardening activities, such as private bed rentals, educational workshops, and overall community engagement.

Under the leadership of Dr. Kristin Ritzau, Garden Director and Deborah Smith, Project Manager, along with City Staff, the first year of the Pilot Program has been a tremendous success; yielding valuable information on the community needs and interests. Moreover, the pilot program far exceeded the initial scope of work, in order to meet those needs, and foster active participation. In the first year, the pilot program encompassed:

- Over 800 hours of community service by volunteers
- 21 Raised Beds Rented by Monrovia residents
- 4 ADA accessible raised beds for differently abled and elderly
- 8 Raised Beds for public education
- 8 Communal Container Gardens
- 15 Communal Stone Fruit Trees
- Over 1,100 ft of Deodar Cedar Urban Rescue wood used for raised beds instead of being wood chipped
- 500 lbs of produce grown

- 2 tons (4,000 lbs.) of food waste composted, diverted from the landfill
- 6 Educational Workshops
 - 135 community members attending workshops and education events
- Established a Garden Leadership Team (age ranging 28-62yrs old)
 - Over 400 volunteer hours
 - Garden Pop-Ups every 3 weeks to answer gardening questions
- Attended 6 Community Events
 - Over 200 children made garden crafts and planted seeds at community events
- Developed a Monrovia Community Garden Monthly Newsletter
 - 111 Subscribers
- Conducted a School Tour – with several requests pending
- Developed a Garden Website, Instagram and Facebook page
 - 271 Facebook Followers
 - 372 Instagram Followers
- Developed Virtual Programing
 - Community Garden Blog
 - 307 views (since March 2020)
 - Social Media Education – Gardening and Recipe Video Tutorials
 - 5,200 video views (since March 2020)

In addition to the activities listed above, the Monrovia Community Garden was awarded the Award of Merit in the Green Region category from the Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG) and the Garden Leadership Team was selected as California Parks and Recreation Society (CPRS), District 13 Community Services Award winner.

The general feedback and input from the community has been overwhelmingly positive. We have received numerous testimonials from plot holders and residents alike. We have heard stories of those who have been inspired to start their own garden in their backyards, and from those that have been empowered to eat healthier with their own grown food. Furthermore, the first year of the program has created sense of community for many. As one of our gardeners submitted, “The Monrovia Community Garden has finally given me an opportunity to be involved with the community.”

Along with the goals achieved in the first year of the Pilot Program, we also learned valuable lessons that will inform the program going forward. For example, the MAP program had expressed interest in having a couple of Garden Beds for their members. At first, this worked well to have a group rent a bed, but over time proved to be difficult to have many residents care for a shared bed. In the end, MAP expressed interest in staying involved, through the Garden Leadership Team, but preferred not to maintain a private bed as a group.

Although our communication and outreach has worked well to inform the community of garden bed rentals, workshops, and educational opportunities, we have learned that we could improve our communication around the Public Demonstration Garden. This Communal Garden space is open to the public and can be picked when ripe by anyone would like it. However, we have learned that many residents aren't aware of this, as evidenced by those who thought visitors to the garden were stealing food.

The most significant lesson learned comes within the active community participation in all of the program elements that are above and beyond the private raised bed program. While we have maintained a short

waitlist for garden beds, the overwhelming response from the community has been interest in educational gardening activities and workshops, and communal activities. The survey results at the end of the workshops are testament to the desire for more. The workshop surveys; on a scale of 1-5, 1 being strongly disagree and 5 being strongly agree, reflect the attendee's response has averaged above 4.5 in positive responses on content, usability, and presentation on every single survey. Further, the majority of survey respondents listed additional workshop topics of interest, citing the need for more.

This feedback and the desire for additional educational opportunities are all items we will need to consider for the program going forward. Moreover, building on the high participation levels in online learning opportunities will need to be considered as well.

As the second year of the Garden Pilot Program begins, activities will include the next round of applications for renting private beds (including renewals), orientation for new gardeners, scheduling of workshops, and informational outreach regarding the demonstration garden. In addition, staff will need to take an in-depth look at those educational opportunities and activities requested by the community, that go above and beyond the original scope of work, and develop a sustainability plan for those components.

RECOMMENDATION: Staff recommends the Community Services Commission provide feedback and move to recommend staff provide an update to City Council.

COMMISSION ACTION REQUIRED: If the Community Services Commission concurs, the appropriate action would be motion to provide an update to City Council on the Community Garden Pilot Program