

**The Village Cooperative Homes, Inc.
2220 Pittsfield Boulevard
Ann Arbor, MI 49104**

D R A F T -- For Comments

Proposal for The Village Community Garden

Presented to the Village Board of Directors

by the

Village Community Garden Task Force

Date

Village Community Garden Task Force

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Summary	1
Purpose	1
Background	2
Scope	3
Design	3
Location	4
Sustainability	5
Management	5
Rules	5
Activities	6
Budget	6
Expenses	6
Revenues	7
Timetable	8
Acknowledgments	9
References	9
Exhibits	
Exhibit 1: Village Community Garden Survey	10
Exhibit 2: Village Community Garden Survey Statistics	11
Exhibit 3: Village Community Garden Survey Comments	12
Exhibit 4: Village Community Garden Planner Questionnaire	14
Exhibit 5: Diagram of Proposed Community Garden	11" x 17" Page
Exhibit 6: Photographs of Proposed Garden Site	17
Exhibit 7: Pros and Cons of Three Potential Sites	18
Exhibit 8: Possible Locations for the Proposed Village Community Garden	19
Exhibit 9: Cost Estimates	20
Exhibit 10: Potential Revenue Estimates	21
Exhibit 11: Summary of Written Estimates	22

Summary

The Community Garden Task Force was formed by the Village Board of Directors in June 2007. The task force's mission is to create a community organic garden to provide an opportunity to grow food, learn about gardening, and foster community spirit.

At the Village, there is very limited space for residents to have a vegetable garden, and often the areas next to the buildings do not receive adequate sunlight for a good harvest. There are many gardeners at the Village, with about half the residents planting flowers from the annual Flower Give-away. A community garden would allow residents to cooperatively share a large garden space in a sunny area within the Village. Based on a survey of residents, there is a high level of support for establishing a community garden—76% expressed strong or moderate interest and 96 residents said they want a plot.

The task force proposes to build The Village Community Garden at the open area on Whitewood Street. The proposed garden would have 50 plots averaging 100 ft² within ¼ acre, with room for future expansion. The main components of the garden would be a perimeter fence, water supply system, tool shed with tools, 4 elevated beds, 2 picnic tables, and a compost bin. To prepare the garden, the sod would be removed and the soil would be amended.

The task force requests approval of \$16,600 to fund the base-case capital project. Several options are presented for the fence and water supply for the Board to consider. The estimated annual cost to run the garden is \$700. The Committee would engage in fundraising activities to cover its annual costs and try to reduce the overall cost to the Village. However, if fundraising is unsuccessful, the full capital cost would amount to an average of \$39 per co-owner. Input from residents on the location, design, and cost of the garden would be obtained prior to the Board's vote. If the garden is approved and the project is fully funded by the Board, construction would begin in fall 2008 and the garden would open in spring 2009.

Purpose

Gardening is consistently ranked as a favorite American hobby. From a national survey, 83% of households participate in lawn and garden activities, with 36 million using some form of all-natural fertilizer and pest controls.¹ Gardening has many benefits to gardeners and the environment, including growing fresh and nutritious food, exercising, meeting other gardeners, enjoying the wonders of nature, and beautifying the environment. Gardening is popular at the Village, and our attractive landscaping is often cited as a reason for moving to the Village. At the 2007 Flower Give-away, 52% of residents (220 of 422 units) picked up flowers for their window boxes or garden beds. However, the limited common area associated with each Village unit typically provides inadequate space and sun exposure for residents who wish to grow a bountiful vegetable garden.

The Village Mission is *"To provide an exemplary living experience through the continual improvement of service to our members while enhancing our buildings, grounds and community spirit."* The goal of the Community Garden Task Force is to start a community garden on

Village property to help fulfill this mission. A community garden would foster community spirit—it would provide a place to celebrate the diversity our residents—as old and young, students and empty-nesters, new and long-term residents, and experienced and inexperienced gardeners could come together in a safe environment to share their common interest. In addition, a properly sited, maintained, and managed community garden would enhance the natural beauty of our grounds, providing another amenity for prospective co-owners who are considering the Village. Thus, the garden could potentially increase the value of the Village property. A community garden would also offer a service to members: an opportunity to learn about environmentally-sound, sustainable, organic growing methods.

There are alternatives to the new community garden, although they do not provide the same benefits for our residents. For example, Village residents who are interested in growing vegetables can rent a plot at a Project Grow community garden such as County Farm Park. Established community gardens have the benefits of well-worked soil, reliable water supply, and a chance to meet gardeners from outside the Village. However, they are not as convenient as having a garden within the Village, they are more costly, and they are not practical for growing a smaller garden. If there was a garden at the Village, members could walk to the garden, the fees would be reinvested in our cooperatively-owned property, and members could choose from a small garden to grow just a few tomato plants to a larger garden to grow a cornucopia of vegetables. The proposed garden would also have several elevated beds for gardeners with limited mobility, a feature not present in all existing community gardens.

Another alternative is to use the small beds in the limited common areas in front and back of our units to grow vegetables. Vegetable gardens in front beds can become unsightly and are not encouraged by the Landscape Committee. The building or trees can shade the garden area, which cannot be expanded beyond two feet from the rear deck. Furthermore, some residents have a concern about potential lead contamination in the soil near the foundations from old paint scrapings. The proposed garden location is not adjacent to any buildings, and soil testing would be conducted to confirm that lead is not a health hazard.

Background

The Village Landscape Committee began considering the idea of starting a community garden on January 16, 2007. An initial proposal was presented to the Village Board on February 23 and received an enthusiastic response. The initial proposal outlined the purpose, benefits, conceptual scope, potential locations, and timetable for a garden. Additionally, it requested Board approval for the Landscape Committee to explore the level of community interest in a garden. If at least 12 residents wanted a garden plot for 2008, the Landscape Committee agreed to develop a more detailed proposal including the garden design and cost estimates and present it to the Board for final approval.

The Landscape Committee began conducting a survey (Exhibit 1) during the May 2007 Flower Give-away to see how residents felt about having a community garden at the Village. The survey was also mentioned in *Around the Village*, posted on the Village web site, and copies were available at the Village Office for residents who did not fill out a survey at the Give-away.

If a resident at the Give-away had no interest in a community garden and did not want to fill out a survey, survey-takers were instructed to fill out a survey for the resident marked “no interest.”

A total of 161 surveys were received by June 30. To evaluate the results, the surveys were divided into two groups: residents who said they were willing to pay a deposit to reserve a plot for 2008 (96) and residents who do not want a plot for 2008 (65). For residents who do not want a plot, 18% had a strong interest in the garden, 26% moderate interest, 14% not sure, and 42% no interest (Exhibit 2). For residents who want a plot, the results were 70% strong, 27% moderate, and 3% not sure. Overall, the interest level was 49% strong, 27% moderate, 7% not sure, and 17% no interest. Looking only at residents who want a plot, 18% wanted 200 ft², 24% wanted 100 ft², 40% wanted 50 ft², and remainder other/not sure. This size distribution was used in the garden design. The average plot size desired is about 100 ft². The survey had space for resident comments; these comments, including the address and whether the resident wanted a plot for 2008, are compiled in Exhibit 3.

A Community Garden Planner Questionnaire (Exhibit 4) was sent to the 60 residents who said on the survey that they want to help or might want to help plan the garden. Of these residents, 26 confirmed that they want to volunteer in starting up the garden. Nine agreed to be members of the Community Garden Task Force. At its first meeting, the task force developed a Mission Statement: *“To create a community organic garden for the Village Co-op members to provide an opportunity to grow food, learn about gardening, and foster community spirit.”*

Scope

Based on the survey, 96 Village residents said they would sign up for a garden plot, but the actual number of members would probably be lower. This scope assumes an initial size of 50 plots averaging 100 ft² within an area 66' x 192' x 33' x 195' (about 9,500 ft² or ¼ acre). If approved by the Board, deposits would be collected to determine how many residents want a plot before beginning construction of the garden. The task force believes the garden and plot sizes could be modified to accommodate as many residents who wish to have a plot, and the garden plot configuration could change each year if needed.

Design

The design of the proposed garden is shown in the attached 11” x 17” drawing (Exhibit 5). The garden includes the following features:

- 4'-high perimeter fence, approximately 472' (galvanized chain link)
- 4'-wide main entrance gate (north) and 10'-wide vehicle entrance gate (south)
- Water supply system from fire hydrant, including 4 double spigots in garden
- Compost bin, tool shed, 2 picnic tables, bulletin board/sign in common area
- 4 elevated beds (16 ft²)
- 50 plots (50, 100, and 200 ft²)
- 15' x 30' market/herb/berry garden for “mini-farmers’ market”
- 8' x 100' “Village Shrub Nursery”

This garden drawing was used to obtain cost estimates for the perimeter fence, water supply system, and soil preparation. This proposal includes cost estimates for three water supply options: (1) fire-hydrant (base case); (2) tie into the City water main that runs parallel to the garden's western boundary; and (3) irrigation well.

The water main tie-in is considered the most reliable (but most costly) long-term source of water. A dialogue with the City requesting permission for the tie-in began on June 15, 2007. Hutzel, the Village's plumbing contractor, sent a fax to the Village on November 21, 2007 stating that the City would allow the tie-in and giving a cost estimate. As an alternative, the City's Water Department Field Supervisor suggested using the nearby fire hydrant as the source of water. The hydrant would have a water meter, underground hose, above-ground street crossing, and connection to an underground piping system to provide spigots at the garden. It is important for the Board to consider that, while least expensive, the hydrant is not the most desirable source of water. In the future, the City could revoke the permit to use the hydrant or there may be a problem with the "speed bump" across Whitewood requiring a switch to a more costly option.

Another alternative is installing a new irrigation well on Village property. Based on a review by Brown Drilling, the depth to a useable groundwater aquifer is predicted to be between 36' and 400' in the vicinity of the garden. A well-based system would require drilling a well and installing an electric meter, circuit breaker, submersible pump, surge tank, and associated piping and controls. Annual water testing would be advisable to assure its quality. The estimate included in the Budget assumes the well is 130' deep. Since the depth to groundwater could be deeper and other problems could be encountered, the cost could be significantly higher than the estimate.

Location

The preferred location for the proposed garden is the east side of Whitewood, the open area along the existing fence south of Norwood. Photographs of this area are included in Exhibit 6. This location was selected by the Landscape Committee (7-0 vote) due to several advantages compared to two alternative sites:

- Visible to community
- Ample parking (although members would be encouraged to walk to the garden)
- Not near Village neighbors
- Expandable
- Good sun
- Flat, good drainage
- Not used for any other purpose

The maximum available space on Village property for a garden at this location is approximately 66' x 246' x 28' x 246' (about 11,500 ft²). The western boundary parallels Whitewood and is 20' from the curb to allow for the right-of-way. The northern boundary is about 110' from 2657 Whitewood, with three trees between the garden location and this unit. The eastern boundary is on Village property that adjoins a sliver of Sylvan Park land; east of the park land is a fence belonging to the Forestbrooke neighbors. The eastern boundary is 75' from this existing fence at

the north end of the garden and 12' from the fence at the south end. The southern boundary is near a utility pole and is about 280' from 2829 Whitewood and about 120' diagonally across the street from 2816 Whitewood. Swift's Run is located northeast of the site. Any objections by co-owners adjacent to the location would need to be carefully considered.

Two other potential locations considered by the Landscape Committee are the large common area between Pittsfield and Fernwood, south of Norwood and the large common area between Pittsfield and Whitewood, south of Norwood. The pros and cons of all three locations are shown in Exhibit 7. While a central location would be ideal, no such location was identified. The three locations are shown on a Village map in Exhibit 8.

Sustainability

For the garden to be successful for a long time, certain measures are needed. The garden must be carefully managed, rules must require members to maintain their plots, and members must be retained with the aid of educational programs and fun events.

Management

The American Community Gardening Association's guidelines for starting a community garden² are being used as a framework. A Community Garden Task Force was formed by the Village Board of Directors to develop this proposal for the community garden. At least 5 active members are required for the task force to initiate the garden. If the garden is approved and built, a Community Garden Committee would be formed. This committee would appoint one of its members to serve as the Community Garden Coordinator, the person for residents to contact for all issues related to the garden. The Coordinator would seek advice as needed from other Community Garden Committee members, the Village Community Manager, the Landscape Committee, landscape contractor, and master gardener. One or more Community Garden Committee members would be available to back up the Coordinator. The Community Garden Committee, not the Coordinator, would have the authority to revoke a resident's gardening privileges.

A web site has been developed for the proposed community garden. Currently in beta form, the site has general information on the garden as well as photos and documents. The site can be accessed at <http://www.geocities.com/villageco-opgarden@sbcglobal.net>.

Rules

Detailed rules would be developed by the Community Garden Committee with input from garden members. All gardeners would be required to use accepted organic growing methods. Rules would specify:

- Responsibilities of gardeners, Community Garden Committee, Coordinator, Village staff, and landscape contractor
- Schedule of garden activities

- Types of structures gardeners can build
- What plants cannot be grown
- Garden safety requirements
- Minimum expectations to contribute to overall community garden maintenance
- Consequences for gardeners who do not maintain their plots or fail to follow other rules

Users would be required to sign an agreement to follow garden rules when they pay their fees; this agreement could include indemnification of the Village for liability reasons.

Activities

Gardeners would be required to work a certain number of hours each month for the general upkeep and improvement of the garden for everyone's benefit. Garden members could also help with projects such as a mini-farmers' market, plant sale, grant proposal writing, and other fundraisers. The Community Garden Committee would offer educational programs such as lectures on environmentally-friendly, sustainable, organic gardening. The Village Events Committee and Community Garden Committee could work together to host annual events, for example a potluck for garden members. Other ideas for activities could be generated by brainstorming with the members.

Budget

The Community Garden Task Force requests that the Board approve \$16,600 in one-time capital funding for the garden. Expenses and revenues are summarized below.

Expenses

Start-up costs (capital project):

- Perimeter fence
- Water supply system
- Compost bin, tool shed, 2 picnic tables, bulletin board/sign in common area
- 4 elevated beds for gardeners with reduced mobility
- Sod removal, plowing, roto-tilling, and soil amendment
- Soil testing
- Garden hoses
- Miscellaneous supplies, plot markers, publicity materials
- Garden tools (two of each) for shared use: wheelbarrow, shovel, fork, rake, and hoe
- Surveyor (to ensure garden is on Village property)

On-going annual costs:

- Water (fire hydrant or water main tie-in options)
- Water testing (irrigation well option)

- Electricity (irrigation well option)
- Maintenance of water supply system, fence, and all equipment
- Replacement hoses, tools
- Plowing or roto-tilling (if required)

The capital project cost is estimated to be \$16,600, with a breakdown of the expenses tabulated in Exhibit 9. Costs would be reduced by a do-it-yourself approach to building some features of the garden (burrowing animal deterrent screen, elevated beds, compost bin, and tool shed kit) as reflected in the budget line items.

The type of fence material has a direct effect on cost. The least expensive of 3 bids (Allied Fence) for uncoated chain-link fencing was chosen as the base case. Possibly a decorative façade could be built to adorn portions of the chain-link fence. Other fence materials were rejected by the Board due to high costs: pressure treated picket (\$8,200), red cedar picket (\$9,400), and plastic picket (\$17,700).

As described in the Design section, the hydrant water supply appears to be the lowest cost option and is thus used as the base case. Additional design work would be needed for the irrigation well and water main options. Of the two bids for the irrigation well, Brown Drilling was chosen as the more realistic estimate. Sole-source estimates were obtained from Hutzler Plumbing & Heating Co. and Superior Mow & Snow for the water main tie-in and hydrant water supply system, respectively, due to the Village's long-standing relationships with these companies.

Annual expenses are estimated at \$700 for the hydrant and water main options. The irrigation well option would eliminate the estimated \$400/year cost of water and the one-time cost of \$350 for the water meter, but would add estimated annual costs of \$130 for electricity and \$290 for chlorination and water quality testing.

Revenues

Fees would be adjusted to generate revenue to cover the routine annual costs to operate the garden if other revenue sources are insufficient. To suit a variety of gardeners, plots would be offered in several sizes with different fees. Residents who use the garden would pay a proposed annual fee of \$20 per 100 ft² of garden space (i.e., \$10 for 50 ft², \$20 for 100 ft², and \$40 for 200 ft²). The fee for elevated beds would be \$15 each, with the fee waived for residents with a documented physical disability. Charging a nominal fee would encourage a feeling of ownership in the garden. Residents would also pay a \$30 refundable deposit each year to reserve a plot. For comparison, Project Grow's community garden at County Farm Park charges a \$20 one-time membership fee and \$72 annually for the smallest available (375 ft²) plot.³

Revenue sources are tabulated in Exhibit 10. While fees would be a reliable source of annual revenue, the other sources are not assured, developed, or estimated. After the start-up costs, the intent is for the garden to be completely self-funded with the possible exception of unexpected maintenance costs such as vandalism or other major damage to the fence or water supply.

Several ideas have been suggested for fundraising. Community grants could be researched and applied for to potentially offset a portion of the capital cost after the project is approved. Large home supply retailers (Home Depot and Lowe's) have been contacted and seem receptive to donating materials or assisting in other ways for community projects. The proposed Village Shrub Nursery would save money by purchasing small plants and growing them before planting at buildings; this idea could also be used to grow perennial plants for sale to Village residents. An annual plant sale, featuring surplus perennial plants donated by residents and plants donated from local nurseries, could be conducted during the May Flower Give-away as a fundraiser. The design includes a market garden area that could be used to grow vegetables, herbs, and berries for sale to Village residents at a "mini-farmers' market." When members do not maintain their plots, they would forfeit their deposits, generating revenue. While these fundraising activities seem feasible, it is unlikely the members could raise enough funds to repay a loan for the entire cost of building the garden. Any member fees not used for annual expenses would be amassed as reserves for unanticipated costs.

Timetable

If the community garden is approved by the Board by April 2008, work is scheduled to begin fall 2008 with a planned opening date of spring 2009. The original schedule called for the garden to open in spring 2008, but was delayed while identifying a water supply. The tentative timetable is shown below.

Task Description	2007			2008			2009		
Review proposal with Board									
Survey residents for interest		done							
Request input-newsletter article		done							
Invite residents to join task force		done							
Do design, estimate, proposal									
Develop garden rules									
Stake area and stop weed killer									
Collect deposits from residents									
Plow area, test/amend soil									
Install underground water lines									
Install fence									
Buy garden tools/equipment									
Buy/install shed/compost bin									
Build elevated beds									
Stake individual plots									
Hook up hose from hydrant									
Open garden to residents									
Prepare garden for winter									

Acknowledgements

Community Garden Task Force Members:

Larry Joh (Chair)
Linda Darby (Secretary)
June Escara-Wilke
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Village Board of Directors
 Brian Rice (President)
 Maureen Burns (Co-Vice President)
 Kris Heinzman (Co-Vice President)
 Laurie Howland (Secretary)
 Jack Rowe (Treasurer)
Superior Mow & Snow
 Les Crots (Owner)
 Barb Schommer (Master Gardener)

References

1. National Gardening Association (<http://assoc.garden.org/>)
2. American Community Gardening Association (<http://communitygarden.org/starting.php>)
3. Project Grow's community garden website (www.projectgrowgardens.org)