

FOREST PRESERVE ADVISORY BOARD
REPORT TO COUNCIL

Report No. 2013-05

SUBJECT: Proposed community garden boundaries – Hamilton Place gardens
DATE: December 19, 2013

BACKGROUND: In the September, 2013 work session between the Forest Preserve Advisory Board and the City Council, city staff presented a conceptual proposal for future maintenance in and around the community gardens.

The staff proposal called for the establishment of an 8 foot wide cleared buffer around the community gardens, which would be the zone or area of routine city maintenance. The purpose of the routine maintenance buffer zone would be to maintain a clear area around the gardens for ease of edge maintenance, as well as to provide a clear zone to reduce shading of the gardens from surrounding forest growth.

The Forest Preserve Advisory Board has been asked to comment on the city staff proposal as presented to the City Council at the worksession of September 30, 2013.

DISCUSSION: In drafting the Forest Preserve Management and Maintenance Guidelines in 2005, the Board recognized the importance of the community gardens to the historic, social and cultural integrity of Greenbelt. As the gardens are within the areas designated by city code as forest preserve, the guidelines were written to recognize the gardens, and to provide for the maintenance of the gardens by providing for clearing of trees and tree limbs within and above the gardens.

Since the time the Management and Maintenance Guidelines were adopted, interpretation and application of the provisions of the Section 11 contingency for the gardens has been difficult, because the guidelines do not address managing the garden/forest preserve edge. Trees that are outside the gardens, but do not overhang the gardens, can cause shading that compromises the utility and productivity of the garden plot. Over time, some garden plots have gone fallow due, in part, to excess shading. In addition, the incident in late 2012 during which there was unauthorized clearing near the gardens, demonstrates that flexible interpretation of the forest preserve regulations and guidelines is not acceptable. This relationship between the garden/forest edge needs to be clarified to ensure balanced and consistent maintenance of each to the other.

In an effort to determine the extent of tree and groundcover growth into, around and over gardens, city staff, FPAB members, and Greenbelt Community Gardens members walked the boundaries of all the gardens. Specific areas of

concern were identified by garden club members. Following that field survey, city staff developed its proposal for garden boundary maintenance, and this was discussed at the September 2013 Council/FPAB work session.

City staff was directed to place stakes and flags around the gardens showing the general dimensions of the proposed routine maintenance boundaries. City staff has proposed an 8 foot buffer zone as it is contemplated the equipment used by staff to clear the buffer area would have an 8 foot path.

After city staff completed staking the proposed 8 foot buffer area, the FPAB walked and inspected the limits of the proposed cleared area. While the FPAB recognized the need for maintaining a cleared buffer of 8 feet in some areas, in other areas adjacent to community gardens, the FPAB believes the buffer zone recommendations should be modified from the proposed 8 foot depth.

Recognizing that the buffer zone dimensions for routine maintenance may differ between garden areas, it is the FPAB's belief that the discussion of specific maintenance zones, or special maintenance needs should continue based on each garden area. The FPAB has submitted its recommendation for a maintenance zone around the Gardenway gardens in FPAB Report. No 2013-03.

RECOMMENDATION: The Forest Preserve Advisory Board recommends as follows: *"(T)hat Public Works begin the tree trimming and clearing within the 8 foot staked areas of Hamilton Place community gardens. The staked areas are defined as the perimeter areas outside of the gardens starting at the gardener's fence line and measuring out eight (8) feet.*

It is recommended that a permanent marker (at least 1 foot in height) be placed at the 8 ft. buffer lines so that both Public Works and the community gardeners know exactly where this boundary line is located. The entire staked area is NOT to be considered additional garden area and the application of pesticides is prohibited in this area by both gardeners and Public Works staff. This 8 foot buffer area is to be maintained by the city and is not to be maintained by any other entity.*

This 8 foot area is to be cleared of trees and other vegetation all around the perimeter of Hamilton Place gardens with the following two (2) exceptions:

1.) The north side of garden plots has an established Sweet gum tree (11" dia.) within this 8 foot buffer area which does not need to be removed (and several trees in the 3" to 5" dia. range); these would not hinder access to the garden fence lines for maintenance and does not shade the garden plots here. These trees will be flagged by the FPAB prior to Public Works undertaking the clearing. Trees should be trimmed/pruned to garden plot fence lines to eliminate

overhanging branches. (Public Works should advise on proper pruning techniques of these overhanging branches). The under story is to be cleared here.

2.) The west side of garden plots, adjacent to GHI boat/RV storage lot, (though staked at 8 feet) should be re-staked at 6 feet out from garden plots fence lines to provide access to maintain the garden fence lines. Containing no trees, there are no shade issues pertaining to the garden plots. This area is approx. 16 to 18 feet wide (and 100 feet long) and is underbrush, tall grasses, wild flowers, native blackberry, and is a habitat for rabbits, birds, American box turtles, bees, butterflies and other pollinators. Existing stakes at 8 ft. should be re-positioned to 6 ft. from the garden plots fence line here.

Trees will not be permitted to flourish in this wildlife habitat area (above) and Public Works should remove any tree seedlings as part of the routine maintenance, however, no other vegetation should be disturbed in this area. This area had been undisturbed for many years prior to the unauthorized clearing in Nov., 2012. It is an important area for wildlife habitat, particularly migrating birds and American box turtles which are in decline. The Forest Preserve guidelines (page 6) state, "The primary goal of these guidelines is the preservation of the Forest Preserve wooded areas and the wildlife habitats within its boundaries."

Furthermore the Forest Preserve Greenbelt city code states, "Natural resources within a Forest Preserve area are considered protected and may not be harmed... Resources of the forest preserve area shall include all forms and species of wildlife,..." [Sec. 12-157]

The FPAB recommends that this wildlife habitat be protected, therefore it is recommended that a 6 foot buffer area be cleared along the gardens fence line.

Public Works should remove any trees growing within the garden plots and that are growing along the fence lines (as referred to under routine maintenance as set forth in the city's Management & Maintenance Guidelines) and access within the gardens will be permitted by the gardeners for removal of these trees.

* Recommended, as it will mark a clear boundary mark. It needs to be visible and easy to locate.

Since the best time to prune large trees is in the late winter, it is recommended that the cutting of the upper portions of the trees (whose trunks are within the preserve but upper branches are leaning over the gardens) be scheduled in late January or February; and that such limbs and branches be pruned or trimmed consistent with the ANSI 300 standard.

RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED,

Robert Snyder, Chairman

The report was approved by a vote of 5-4.

Attachment:

Hamilton Place tree survey of 8 foot area (buffer)

APPROVED