

Community food garden proposed for Bijou park

By Kathryn Reed

Anyone who has tried to grow produce in the Lake Tahoe Basin has at least one story of failure to tell. But if gardening advocates have their way, more positive stories are about to be told.

“The whole purpose is to teach how to grow in an alpine environment,” Gerri Grego told the South Lake Tahoe City Council last week.

Grego and other members of the Lake Tahoe Sustainability Collaborative want to turn a 30-foot-by-80-foot plot of land in Bijou Community Park into a community food garden.



Proposed location for a community garden in Bijou Community Park. Photo illustration/Provided

While the council embraced the idea, it did not want to give the go-ahead when there is no policy on the books for how non-government groups can use the city's land.

Peter Fink, who is on the city's Parks and Recreation Commission, said that group is in the process of devising such

a policy that would then be approved by staff. It's expected to be completed at the commission's October meeting.

The commission did approve a trial run for the food garden at its September meeting, but that is on hold for now.

The council directed the sustainability collaborative to go back to the parks commission once the public use policy is completed. Then the parks commissioners will rehear the proposal.

Grego said she didn't want the agreement entered into until April 1 to give her group the time needed to get insurance and other details settled. The goal is all the paperwork will be done by the spring so planting would begin next season along with 2014 being the first harvest.

The garden is proposed to go between the circle of roads before the snack shack.

Brian Hirdman, a certified permaculture design consultant, is working with the group.

"A garden is needed in Tahoe to demonstrate how you can grow food here," Hirdman told the council Sept. 17. "The location is perfect because it is a central location."

The plants will be in containers, so no digging is involved. And no permanent structures will be built. Water for the drip irrigation system will be paid for by the collaborative. Minimal temporary signs will be installed.

It will be an organic garden – meaning no pesticides or herbicides.

To begin with, the food would be given to low-income people in town through various charities. As the harvest grows, the distribution will grow to include alternative food sources, Barton Memorial Hospital, schools and restaurants.

Rebecca Bryson, who is part of the collaborative, said the group is working with the schools when it comes to nutrition standards. She pointed out how studies show kids who are involved with knowing where their food comes from tend to eat more healthy foods.

Throughout the growing season the goal is to teach people how they could have a garden in their yard or develop a garden for particular neighborhoods.

Hirdman also teaches at Lake Tahoe Community College. He plans to incorporate the garden into his curriculum.