

FOREST PRESERVE ADVISORY BOARD
REPORT TO COUNCIL

Report No. 2013-03

SUBJECT: Proposed community garden boundaries – Gardenway gardens
DATE: November 27, 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. However, in other areas adjacent to community gardens, the FPAB believes the buffer zone requirements might be flexible.

In its survey around the Gardenway gardens, it was clear to the FPAB that the Gardenway gardens are in the greatest immediate need of maintenance in and around the gardens. 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.

There are already existing buffer areas around the Gardenway gardens. In addition, there are trees growing immediately adjacent to garden boundaries, and there are some gardens where trees are growing and should be removed. There is an area along the northern edge where these gardens encroach into GHI property. There should be no city maintenance on GHI land unless there is an agreement between the city and GHI. On the southeast edge of the Gardenway gardens there is a large Willow Oak tree within the 8 foot maintenance buffer. This is a healthy tree of significant size. It should not be removed as part of the 8 foot Gardenway maintenance buffer. In addition, there are other significant trees within the proposed 8 foot maintenance buffer that should not be removed, and will be designated by the FPAB.

The Forest Preserve Advisory Board believes that the routine maintenance buffer around the Gardenway gardens, is clear, and the Board is prepared to make a recommendation. However, the width and extent of any proposed maintenance buffer around the community gardens at Hamilton Place or in Henry's Hollow is less clear, and requires greater study and consideration by the Board.

RECOMMENDATION: The Forest Preserve Advisory Board recommends as follows: *"...That Public Works begin the tree trimming and clearing within the staked areas at Gardenway gardens. Staked areas are defined as the area starting at the gardener's fence line and measuring out eight (8) feet. Public Works have placed a wooden stake at the 8 foot point. It is recommended that a*

permanent marker such as a concrete pipe be placed at this point so that both Public Works and community gardeners know exactly where this point is located. It is recommended that this 8 foot point where the stake has been placed (and later a concrete pipe should one be placed) be called the permanent boundary point for the gardens at Gardenway. No gardens shall allowed beyond this point. No gardener shall be allowed to do anything beyond this point including the cutting of trees, trimming of vegetation or spraying of pesticides. In addition the entire staked area as defined will be maintained by the city and is not to be maintained by any other entity. It is recommended that an 8 foot wide area be cleared of trees and other vegetation around all of the Gardenway gardens with the following exceptions:

- 1. There is an area of the gardens which borders/encroaches into GHI property, and that area should be left undisturbed for GHI to attend to.*
- 2. There are a few trees that should not be removed within this 8 foot area. These trees will be marked by the FPAB prior to Public Works undertaking its clearing. There is also a Willow oak (diameter 24") located on the southeast corner of the Gardenway gardens which had been flagged by Public Works and should be saved.*
- 3. An established Sweet gum tree (diameter, 15") located at northeast corner of larger garden plots at Gardenway should be preserved because of its location, as it is 8 feet out from the northeast corner fence line and provides no significant shade of the garden plots and does not hinder access to maintaining the garden fences.*

Public Works should also remove any trees growing within gardens and along the fence lines (as referred to as routine maintenance as set forth in the Management and Maintenance Guidelines) and free access within the gardens will be permitted by the gardeners for the removal of these trees.

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, Chair

The report was approved by a vote of 6-2.

APPROVED