

## **Council OKs community garden plan**

**By Jeanne Davant**

A portion of Higginbotham Flats soon could be a green space where residents can grow food on their own plots.

Manitou Springs City Council gave its blessing Tuesday night to the plan for a community garden sponsored by Save the Flats.

"Our vision is to create a space that enriches and celebrates the community of sustainability, local food, art, wellness, beauty and the economics of Manitou," said Dinah Mann of Save the Flats. "A community garden is a real easy way to do that."

The portion of the Flats owned jointly by the city, Save the Flats and Mann "is well suited for community gardening," Mann said. Water is accessible because of the nearby storage units, and plenty of parking is available for gardeners.

According to Save the Flats' plan, the garden would have 15 to 20 plots each 20 feet by 20 feet for family use, with the potential for 10-by-10 plots for single residents. Wind breaks, berms and fencing would screen the garden, prevent noise and help keep animals away. Eventually art installations could decorate the fence and an overlook area.

Manitou Springs Community Garden Organization would solicit bids for installation of a water service line for the garden, Mann said. Membership fees would pay for water use.

Brian Fritz told Council that the soil would be developed through permaculture.

"The idea is to build up the soil from the top with different organic matter—straw, leaves and a top layer of soil," Fritz said. "Over time, the layers will decompose. Basically, the whole thing will be raised."

The plans includes a trail alongside the property that connects the parking area to an existing access trail.

Mann said artist Steve Wood has done a preliminary design for the fence, which, together with the berms, would be 12 feet high.

Jim Yount, chair of the Open Space Advisory Committee, said the Open Space Advisory Committee, said the committee would like to review final plans for lighting and the fence to gauge the visual impact.

"We want to avoid reflective material on the fences," he said. "Height is an issue in terms of visibility."

Interest in a community garden by citizens has been high, and Council members applauded the work of community members who have brought forth the plan.

"I think it is so awesome that people like yourselves are so involved in this," said Councilman Matt Carpenter.

Council unanimously approved the plan and a zoning change so it can be accomplished.

The next step, Mann said, is a community meeting at 7 p.m. Jan. 27 at Community Congregational Church, 103 Pawnee Ave. The public is invited to attend and learn more about the plan.

## Appeal of HPC decision denied

Council on Tuesday also unanimously denied an appeal by Clint Lewis of a Historic Preservation Commission. Lewis was seeking to erect a temporary "fabric tension structure" as a place to work on his historic property. The Planning Commission on Dec. 2 voted 4-3 to deny Lewis' proposal for the structure.

Lewis told council he thought a problem with the voting lights could have "tainted" the vote, and that he did not think the Historic Design Guidelines were applicable to his proposed structure. He also said the HPC, which found that his structure was not consistent with the guidelines for secondary buildings, did not state why his structure did not fit the guidelines.

"Many kinds of structures are not covered in the guidelines," Lewis said, adding that he did not think the guidelines for secondary structures were followed.

Carpenter said he did not think the structure fit the guidelines.

"I feel this structure is a tentlike carport at best and a garage at worst," Carpenter said. "Calling it a temporary fabric tension structure just does not work for me." He cited a provision that temporary carports are not permitted.

Council members unanimously denied Lewis' appeal, but some were obviously troubled by the decision.

"I think this is the same challenge as at the Green Willow (Motel)," Councilwoman Ingrid Richter said. "It is unfortunate that we're frequently brought guidelines to interpret that don't address the meat of the issue." (Council on Oct. 7 denied the Green Willow owner's request to remove their property from the Historic District.)

"The difficulty in this case is demonstrated by the 4-3 (HPC) vote," Mayor Marc Snyder said. "The question is, does it fit the guidelines for a secondary structure?... I'm more concerned with, should these guidelines even be applied to this structure?"

Councilwoman Aimee Cox noted that new materials and technology exist, but "we don't really have clear guidelines on materials.... If this was a permanent structure, I'd be much more concerned." She added, "I think we need to do more work in that section (of the guidelines)."

## Council also...

- Unanimously approved a bid form requesting bids for a citywide trash hauling and recycling service for all single-family homes and multifamily dwellings with seven units or less.
- Granted a waiver of the \$100 use fee for Soda Springs Park for Clayfest on June 19 and 20 but required a \$100 damage deposit that is to be returned when the park is cleaned after the event. The vote was 5-1, with Carpenter dissenting.
- Heard a report from Finance Director Mike Leslie, who said that sales tax revenues for November dropped 11.9 percent from November 2008. For the year to date, sales tax collections are now running 1.1 percent below last year.
- Passed a "housekeeping" ordinance in connection with the city's stormwater utility. The ordinance does not change the stormwater fee residents currently pay.
- Heard a report on the 2010 Census from Snyder, who said, "We're having a really hard time finding people to be Census takers." Snyder urged people to apply for the job, which requires passage of a simple test and training, and pays \$13.50 an hour plus mileage.

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