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FEATURED

City funds community garden at Johnston House

Project is contingent on county's approval

By Libby Leyden

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The city of Half Moon Bay has earmarked money to begin a community garden near the trail depot on Higgins-Purissima Canyon Road. Clay Lambert / Review

A proposal to establish a community garden in Half Moon Bay is finally planted.

At the April 7 Half Moon Bay City Council meeting, the city approved \$20,000 for Coastside Friendship Organic Garden or c-FOG, as the

newly formed nonprofit will be known, to create a garden on the Johnston House property.

The recently formed nonprofit seeks to “cultivate healthy soils, food and community on the San Mateo County coast.”

Evelyn Erickson, executive director of c-FOG, also serves on the city’s Parks and Recreation Committee and is a certified master gardener. She proposed the idea of starting a community garden using the example of Pacifica Gardens. Unlike some community gardens that divide up individual plots for residents, this model focuses on a collaborative approach, allowing people to work from one garden. The food grown is shared among the community and any excess is donated to food banks or other nonprofits.

Last year the city worked to identify a usable plot of land that could be turned into a community garden. The city and c-FOG settled on a 15,000-square-foot portion of property near the Johnston House. The site is near a public parking lot and restrooms and it’s a large enough location that the garden could eventually expand in the future.

While the Johnston House Park property is owned by the city, it is outside of the city limits, therefore the site for the garden is under the jurisdiction of San Mateo County. A condition of the agreement with the city is c-FOG must first acquire all land use authorizations before developing the property.

“It is important to note the Johnston House was surrounded by farms, so there is a history of that,” Deputy City Manager Matthew Chidester said. “In the long-term planning for that site, it’s always included a garden somewhere on the property.”

The project is proposed as a two-year pilot, and c-FOG will be the sole organization responsible for maintaining the garden. The public can access the garden seven days a week during daylight hours and the garden will be locked in the evenings.

In addition to the funds from the city, c-FOG has already been issued a \$20,000 grant from the county’s Office of Sustainability. The money will be used for fencing and construction of the garden.

“I think it is a great idea, now more than ever,” Councilwoman Debbie Ruddock said. “We need to think about food security, and I think, in this post-COVID age, people want to grow their own food.”

Since the Johnston House neighbors farms, Councilwoman Deborah Penrose said she wants to make sure there is no pesticide runoff in the soil before starting the garden on that site.

“I am hoping we can determine early that there is no pesticide leakage from adjacent agricultural land,” she said. “If pesticides have contaminated the soil, it is a no-go.”

Mayor Adam Eisen, while in favor of the project, cautioned city staff to be wary of extra spending considering the current circumstances regarding impacts from the coronavirus.

“This is a great use of our funds and I do not take this money lightly,” he said. “So I think this is a good investment, but at some point we do have to do some reining back on spending.”