



Town of Merrimack

PARKS & RECREATION DEPARTMENT

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TO: Paul Micali, Town Manager

FROM: Matt Casparius, Director of Parks & Recreation

DATE: March 17, 2022

SUBJECT: Community Garden

Per your request, I have developed a plan on how Parks & Recreation could take over the management of the Community Garden at Wasserman Park and the Farmers Market from the now disbanded agricultural committee. I had a chance to sit down with Ron Miner and review how both of those programs work and what's involved in managing them.

Community Garden at Wasserman Park

The Community Garden at Wasserman Park was first created in 2010 and individuals wishing to purchase a plot currently pay \$10 per year if they are a Merrimack Resident and \$15 a year if they are a Non-Resident. For that fee, they receive a 10 x 10 plot and have the ability to purchase additional plots if they so desire. Over the last few years; approximately half of the garden plots have been purchased. This is up from one third of the plots reserved when the garden was first created in 2010 and so it is slowly growing in popularity.

According to Ron Miner, it historically took 3 people 3 days to setup and prepare the garden for the season which included things such as rototilling the soil, seeding with rye grass (in the fall) and then building the grid of all of the individual 10 x 10 plots.

The agricultural committee would hold monthly clean ups of the garden to clean up the pathways; pulling weeds along the pathways and cleaning up trash and randomly discarded equipment. They would also ask the gardeners to help with these clean ups but I suspect that it was largely the committee doing this work.

For Parks & Recreation to take this over; the registration part is the easy part as we are already set up to handle registration; which can be done online vs. the paper form that the agricultural committee used. For us, the challenge is the setup and ongoing maintenance of the community garden. As part of the 2022-23 budget I have increased the hours for the Part Time Year Round Maintainer that I have from 18 hours per week to 25 hours a week. In addition I have included a request for an additional part time (20 hour per week) summer seasonal maintainer position to help maintain things like Community Garden, the Dog Park, trails and other aspects of Wasserman Park which are constantly overgrown and we struggle to keep up with the maintenance of them.

I'm told that Bob McCabe used to use his own personal tractor to plow and rototill the field in the spring and fall. Parks & Recreation does not own any equipment currently to do this type of work. I have spoken to Lori Barret who has the tractor, and currently is willing to rototill it.

Currently we have \$190.77 leftover from prior years. At the current rate; the garden generates roughly \$300 per year in plot rentals, but looking at past expenses, it appears that they have been historically spending about \$500 per year to manage the garden and so we should probably increase the rental fee from \$10 for residents and \$15 for non-residents up to \$20 and \$25 so that we are at least covering the cost of the supplies being purchased for the garden (seed, rye grass, string, stakes and flags.)