

Town of Boonsboro Proposed Community Garden at Shafer Park

Prepared by the BEC Chairperson, Cassandra Ladino on 03/07/2022

The Boonsboro Environmental Commission (BEC) has had a long time goal of establishing a community garden. A community garden represents a significant upfront cost investment however and needs to cater to gardener needs to maintain a thriving membership for long term sustainability. The BEC plans to construct a garden in the Fall of 2022 and the inaugural growing season will be Spring 2023. This year the BEC has two excellent opportunities to raise the funding necessary to construct a high quality community garden space featuring onsite amenities and volunteer participation from several local organizations. The first opportunity is the Washington County designated use of American Rescue Plan Act funds for their Community Investment Grant Program. The Washington County sponsored Community Investment Grant Program will provide a matching funds opportunity and will be available to apply for in May. The second opportunity is the annual American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) Organization's 2022 Community Challenge grant. The AARP Community Challenge provides small grants (75% of grants are 15k or less) to fund quick-action projects that can help communities become more livable for people of all ages. This year's grant specifically, has a focus on projects to improve public spaces and pursue innovative ideas that support people age 50 or older such as a community garden.

A community garden brings together a group of people to garden in the same location. Community gardens can take many different forms. How people grow in the garden, how produce is used and who decides are all key decisions. The BEC will be the long-term managing body of the community garden, however the BEC plans to invite other community members to become subcommittee members and garden managers. The BEC will advertise for this participation in upcoming Town newsletters once funding is secured for garden development. The community garden in Shafer Park will adopt an "Individual plots" model of operation where each participant is assigned their own plot to grow and harvest for themselves. Individuals will be charged membership fees to cover annual maintenance and cost of the town supplied water source. The BEC obtained approval by the Town Manager and Park Board for the designated location in Shafer Park. Shafer Park is the ideal location for the community garden because of the plethora of facilities including large shaded pavilions, restrooms, parking, ample lighting, regular police patrols and security cameras. The exact garden location was determined based on current plans to extend the existing park drive which will include a large parking area making the garden highly accessible in the future. An extension from the closest existing water main will be needed to provide an onsite water resource. Preliminary plans were discussed and developed with the Town Manager and Public Works Superintendent. The waterline extension is not foreseen to require disturbance of any existing park infrastructure such as walking paths. Though there are many more potential cost considerations for a community garden, some of the basic essential infrastructure components are the following:

- FENCING: Keep out deer and other pests.
- TOOLS: Needed for seasonal maintenance and a resource for gardeners.

- STORAGE: Tools and supplies must be kept in a safe and dry place.
- WATER: A water source must be provided onsite, otherwise the barrier to participation may be too challenging for community members.

America's aging population is one of the fastest growing segments of society. By 2030, the population of people 65 years of age and over is expected to double, growing from 35 million (in 2008) to 72 million, and representing nearly 20 percent of the total U.S. Population. In the Town of Boonsboro, the median age according to the 2019 U.S. Census Community Survey is 40.1 years old, meaning that by 2030 a large portion of the population will meet the 50+ AARP focused age group. The current median income for householders 65 years and over is 25,000 in the Town. 6.5% of the total population of Boonsboro meets the Census defined poverty threshold and specifically 2.8% of the total population below the poverty threshold is 45 yrs or older. Additionally the composition of housing within the Town boundary has a significant percentage of rental units (31%) according to the Census and lots that are under ¼ acre (40%) according to Washington County parcel information which are indicators that many residents may not have access to install gardens themselves. The combination of these characteristics support the need and long-term utilization of the community garden in Shafer Park. These characteristics also align Boonsboro with the AARP mission and focus on livability for all ages, especially the 50+ age group.

A key goal of the community garden in Shafer Park is to provide accessibility for all abilities and levels of participation. Elder-accessible gardens create opportunities for older volunteers to contribute their time and expertise to grow nutritious foods, socialize with one another, and pass on cross-generational knowledge to younger community members. Gardening is also a great way to engage people of all age groups in physical activity. Done correctly, gardening can provide non-strenuous exercise and quality time outdoors. Increasing accessibility to these benefits is a priority for the community garden in Shafer Park to make it a successful cornerstone of community interaction. The BEC plans to dedicate 55% of the garden area to accessibility primarily targeted for 50+ age groups. The garden design includes raised beds, wheelchair accessible pathways, several benches, varied work surface tables, hanging planter pots, and consideration for drip or timed irrigation to raised beds. In addition, lower income seniors will benefit from subsidized access to raised beds, community donated seed bank, and opportunity to start seeds in the greenhouse.

The BEC will seek to apply for funding to cover major infrastructure costs. The AARP Community Challenge application is due March 22, 2022 and the BEC will be asking for costs to cover a 6ft high vinyl coated chain link fence with two gates (opposite ends) that is estimated at \$24,000 to enclose the entire 0.42 acres. The fence provides a layer of security and controlled access and is the most critical infrastructure to establish the community garden in Shafer Park. The vinyl coating was not a huge cost increase over galvanized plain metal. It provides a nicer aesthetic in the highly visible park location and reduces the potential for scrapes or snagging of clothing while in or near the garden. If the AARP grant is unsuccessful, the BEC will utilize funding resources available through the matching funds Washington County sponsored

Community Investment Grant Program. The BEC plans to match these funds with its special projects budget estimated to be \$12,500 this year. If both AARP and Washington County funds are received, the BEC will utilize all funds to purchase as many high quality infrastructure items as possible such as commercial quality picnic tables with umbrellas (examples by the playground at the Police Station), irrigation (contracting with local businesses) to control water supply costs directly related to membership fees, and an 8x10ft greenhouse. The community garden will not rely on funding alone. To accomplish key features and make it a community space, several community groups will need to participate. The BEC has reached out to several groups such as the Boy Scouts, Lions Club, American Legion, Potomac Edison (Green Team and FE Foundation), and University of MD Extension - Washington County, College of Agriculture and Natural Resources Master Gardeners program. Each group has a part to play. The Boy Scouts will help with manual labor needed to fill raised beds and shovel the stone path. Eagle Scouts may be interested in more challenging innovation projects such as DIY compost bins, rain barrel water collection and irrigation systems, and greenhouses. The Lions Club and American Legion are two great ways to engage a 50+ age group in garden tasks that are not labor intensive and that can be highlighted in the AARP grant application. Potomac Edison can provide funding for purchase plants to be distributed for free to community gardeners in the first growing season planned for Spring/ Summer 2023. The UMD Master Gardeners will provide educational seminars to educate gardeners at important points in the year to maintain garden health. Below is a basic layout of the BEC's proposed garden needed for budget formulation that is in accordance with Town requirements and the AARP grant purpose. Garden plots will be developed in phases to accommodate actual community demand and allow opportunity for community input on available features and design.



For questions or other information, please contact Cassandra Ladino, BEC Chairperson by email at cassandra.ladino@gmail.com