

**Commentary to Accompany Design Review Application P2010-024
Novato Community Garden Project
885 Sutro Avenue, Novato, California**

The Novato Live Well Network's research has found that almost 40% of Novato residents live in apartments, condominiums or other housing that lack an area where the residents may garden. The Novato Live Well Network's plans for a community garden address the critical need to provide land for vegetable and flower gardening to these residents. While there are some communal gardens scattered around Novato, there are none available to the general population. As such, Novato is also the only significantly sized city in Marin County that lacks any community garden facility.

The Novato Live Well Network was instrumental in the grassroots effort to bring Trader Joe's and Whole Foods Market to Novato in answer to the need for vendors offering improved food options over traditional grocery stores. Now the Novato Live Well Network is continuing with a grass-roots effort to bring a community garden to Novato in response to the needs of those whose living arrangements deny them an opportunity to experience the joy and health benefits of growing their own produce and flowers. The NLWN is submitting this application to construct and operate a community garden on the northwesterly, unimproved, corner of O'Hair Park.

SITE

The proposed garden site consists of about 2 acres of land lying immediately of the west of the Dogbone Meadow Park and abutting the south side of Novato Boulevard. This land is a part of the O'Hair City Park.

Prior to selection of this site, NLWN looked at several possible sites throughout the city including several at local churches. While the churches were initially receptive to adding a community garden to their facilities the efforts became frustrated by the Novato City Code which requires Community Gardens located in residential zones to first secure a Conditional Use Permit. In these cases, church elders were concerned that this would be too restrictive a burden to let them agree to provide land for a community garden.

The proposed community garden site at O'Hair Park consists of previously farmed or agricultural lands sandwiched between Dogbone Meadow Park on the east, the westerly Novato City Limits on the west, Novato Boulevard on the north and trees, dense brush and Poison Oak on the south. The site slopes gently downward at approximately 5% away from Novato Boulevard toward the creek. The site has a layer of topsoil about 3 feet in depth and is covered with native grasses, some coyote brush and a cluster of magnificent Oak trees in the south west quadrant. While not ideally located near the city center, these conditions make this site ideal for a garden.

UTILITIES

The site lacks utility improvements including water, electricity and sewage connections. The adjacent Dogbone Meadow park has water service provided by NMWD but the nearest water line to the garden site is located 300 feet east of the site near the Dogbone Meadow Park entrance.

There are no utility connections or services proposed for the community garden use.

WATER

In order to have a garden we must have an abundant supply of water. Due to recent policy changes by the Sonoma County water agencies it appears that Novato will not be able to rely on any increase in the allotment of Russian River water provided from Sonoma County. NMWD also has a moratorium on new irrigation water meter connections.

Considering these water restrictions the NLWN, through the generosity of Gary Soden and Clear Heart Drilling of Sonoma County, has drilled an eighty-foot deep well on the site. This well has proven to have an adequate supply of water for the garden's irrigation needs. The North Marin Water District has sampled the water from this well and determined that the water quality is suitable for irrigation use in a community garden setting. The NMWD has generously agreed to provide future periodic sampling and testing of water from the garden's well.

NLWN has developed a plan to install a solar-powered well pump and gravity-fed irrigation system to provide an adequate supply of irrigation water to the garden. The solar-powered well pump will deliver the well water to a 3,000 gallon storage tank mounted in a proposed "Water Tower" building to be located on the high side of the site. Water stored in this tank will be gravity fed to a series of faucets and hoses located throughout the garden area where individual gardeners will irrigate their crops with garden hoses (See Sheet 3). Manual irrigation has been found to be more desirable in community garden environments than drip irrigation systems because it "forces" gardeners to watch that they do not over or under water their crops. Gardeners will also be taught sound watering practices and the value of mulching their crops.

WATER TOWER DESIGN

The solar powered water well will provide a steady flow of well water to the water storage tank at a relatively low flow rate. Gardeners will draw down this water at higher flow rates of shorter duration. Due to the lack of electrical service to the site, and the NLWN desire to create the "greenest" garden possible, we have elected to use a gravity fed irrigation delivery system. This requires that the water storage tank be located at the highest elevation possible above the garden to have enough water pressure, or head, to operate properly. To accomplish this we have designed the Water Tower building to conceal a 3000 gallon water storage tank that will provide a reliable supply of water for the garden. This Water Tower building raises the water tank about 20 feet above the

highest garden elevation to provide the required head to maintain pressure for the garden hoses. The water tower is sited at the highest site elevation. Relocating the Water Tower building at a lower site elevation would require and commensurate increase in the height (and cost) of the water tower to maintain reliable water pressure throughout the garden.

Architecturally, the Water Tower building has been designed in the style of the many old water towers that dotted the Novato landscape in prior years. Today many of these heritage structures have in lost to development. Our proposed design, while using a modern steel support frame, will use salvaged and recycled old, unpainted lumber as building siding to make the structure look as if it has been part of Novato for the last 100 years. Similar design and materials are proposed for all other accessory buildings that may be added as the garden grows.

RAINWATER HARVESTING

The garden operation is intended to use rainwater harvesting to supplement the water well supply. At a later date, as funding becomes available, a pergola structure is proposed to cover the parking spaces. This pergola will also be constructed of old and recycled wood and will support a series of solar panels and rainwater catchment panels. From these water will drain to a future on-ground water storage tank. The solar panels will provide the additional power needed to pump the rainwater to the storage tank in the water tower or a future pressurized distribution system.

SITE IMPROVEMENTS

Originally the NLWN had proposed using a gravel parking lot and driveway to reduce the amount of land covered with impermeable pavement. The Novato Fire Protection District disallowed the use of gravel and requires that we provide a hard, all-weather surface for the parking lot and driveways. We redesigned out parking lot to minimize the proposed paved areas enough to comply with NFD requirements. The parking lot will direct surface water to our gravel covered overflow parking south of the main lot which will slow the flow and allow water a chance to seep back into the ground naturally.

A 10 foot minimum swath of land immediately south (downhill) of the entire improved site will be graded and planted to create a bio-swale that will capture any site run-off and give it time to seep into the ground instead of running on down to the creek.

VARIANCE REQUESTED

This site is located in a rural park and agricultural setting and we propose to continue this theme with a minimum of developer type improvements. Therefore we are asking the Design Review Committee to recommend a Variance e granted from the city ordinance requirements for developed parking lots including:

- 19.30.070.B-3 – Waiver of the 14 foot clearance requirement of the future

Pergola structure above parking spaces'

- 19.30.071.E-1 – Waiver of the requirement to provide curbing around the parking lot and entrance driveway. Note that there is no curbing at the Doggone meadow parking lot.
- 19.30.070.E-2 – Variance requested to permit wheel stops. Note that wheel stops are existing in DBM parking lot as well as many others in Novato. Our Variance request is based upon level gradient (no step) between parking lot and adjacent walkway/trail. We propose using wood wheel stops made of reused timbers, power poles or logs to maintain a rural feeling, maximize recycling in construction, and reduce costs. Wheel Stops will be anchored to ground with concealed rebar stakes.
- 19.30.070.G – Site cross slope is about 5% and parking lot will be grades at 5% maximum except in handicap parking and loading zone which will be reduced to 2% maximum. Site driveway areas may have an increased gradient as need. No Variance required.
- 19.30.070.H.6 – Variance requested waiving requirement for “finger planters” and trees between parking spaces.
 - Note that the Dogbone Meadow parking lot does not have finger planters. One finger planter is proposed between paved parking lot and overflow parking area.
 - Note that majority of site is garden area which should be considered as “landscaped area”.
 - Vines and climbing plants will be provided at the columns of the proposed future Pergola at the parking area.
 - Tree planting was prohibited by preliminary lease conditions given to garden project. “Native” Street Trees can be provided along road frontage planter strip if desired. A tree can e provide in the finger planter between the paved and gravel parking lot areas if the city council agrees.
- 19.30.070.I – Variance requested. Since there is no electrical service to the garden site proving lighting is impractical. The site is restricted to daylight use. The adjacent DBM parking lot also unlighted.
- 19.30.070.M – Parking lot and entry driveway will be paved and permanently maintained in accordance with Novato Fire Dept. conditions. Variance requested for “overflow” parking area to permit permeable gravel surface.

GARDEN OPERATION

Garden operation will administered and run by the NLWN, a 501(c)3 non-profit . Preference will be given to Novato residents with a percentage of the garden plots reserved for low or moderate income households. Fees will be charged based upon the amount of land used and ability to pay.

All gardening will be 'organic' and the use of pesticides and herbicides will be prohibited. All green waste will be recycled and composted on-site and gardeners will

encouraged to take any trash they generate home with them. Dumpsters will be provide for trash removal and recycling of non-compostable materials.

FUNDING

This project is proposed to be a self funded operation entirely off of the city budget. We only ask that the city determines that creation of a community garden in Novato is in the public interest and allow us the opportunity to create this garden space in our midst with the minimum of obstacles.

So far, all expenses for design and well development have been funded y local donations or in-kind donations of services. Construction expenses are anticipated to be significant and the NLWN is soliciting corporate donations, materials donations by local business, and labor donations from community service organizations, activists and the gardeners themselves. We believe that this can be accomplished.

Operational funding for the garden will come from participant's dues and rental of plots. We have already received a \$5000 grant from Kaiser to subsidize low income participants.

SUMMARY

The NLWN has created what we consider to be the “greenest” community garden design in Marin County. The operation will be entirely self sustaining and off of the grid for all electrical and water needs.

We ask that the Design Review Committee endorse the concept a community garden in Novato and move to recommend final approval, with any conditions that you may suggest, of this sumittal at staff level without an additional hearing.