

Discussion / Direction / Decision

on whether to proceed with a lease of municipal property on Jarvis Street for use as a community garden.





CITY AND BOROUGH OF SITKA

A COAST GUARD CITY

MEMORANDUM

To: Mayor Eisenbeisz and Assembly Members

Thru: John Leach, Municipal Administrator 

From: Amy Ainslie, Planning & Community Development Director 

Date: September 6, 2023

Subject: Community Garden Lease – 101 Jarvis Street

Background

The applicants for this request are two nonprofit organizations, Transition Sitka and the Sitka Local Foods Network. The applicants would like to be the host organizations supporting the proposed community garden, serving the overlapping interests of the two organizations to promote local food security and sustainable food systems.

The applicants had a set of criteria they used to select prospective sites, ultimately leading to their request for Jarvis Street site. The criteria were that sites must be at least a half-acre in size, have good southerly exposure, not be overly steep or irregular, be reasonably accessible to neighborhoods, ideally have access to municipal utilities though alternatives could be pursued, and that the community-at-large must be generally supportive, and willing to consider community garden sites as permanent civic improvements. While their original proposal as reviewed at a community Townhall as well as by the Planning Commission included an additional site off of Osprey Street, the applicants have decided to pursue only the Jarvis Street site at this time.

The approximately half-acre site at 101 Jarvis Street is uphill of the solid waste transfer station and the animal shelter. Its southern side abuts Jarvis Street which serves public facilities and industrial properties. There is vacant, undeveloped land to the north owned by CBS and the Raptor Center. The property to east is the site of the Homeless Coalition's proposed development. The lot is heavily vegetated, appearing to be almost entirely muskeg.

The property is zoned in the Public lands district which generally allows uses that are cultural, recreational, educational, and/or public service oriented. Horticulture is an allowed use in this zone.

The applicants have developed a conceptual design of this site in order to help paint the picture of what the garden development could look like and operate as. However, given that this site is undeveloped and may have some challenging conditions, significant investment on the part of the applicants is needed before a final design can be evaluated. The applicants need reasonable certainty that they will be able to develop and use the site before making this investment. Therefore, staff's perspective is that it is too soon to evaluate specifics of the design.

The applicants are interested in a long-term lease, preferably close to a total of thirty years broken into five-year renewal options at low/no cost. If the Assembly decides to move forward with the lease, staff recommends that the initial term of the lease be short-term with a list of deliverables that must be completed within the initial term before renewal terms can be exercised.

Generally, properties are leased by competitive bid unless the Assembly finds that competitive bidding is inappropriate given the nature of the property or the disposal itself. Given that the property is large, undeveloped, accessed by a public right-of-way, and not currently leased, staff's evaluation is that competitive bidding is likely appropriate for this case.

Analysis

Staff needs direction from the Assembly on the following points:

1. Should staff proceed with the leasing process for this property?
2. Are there any factors that would make competitive bidding inappropriate for this lease?
3. If the lease is competitively bid, should the bid be specifically for community garden use, or are there other uses that should be considered?
4. If the lease is competitively bid, should price be the only deciding factor (indicating a bid process is most appropriate), or are there other factors that should be considered (indicating a request for proposals or RFP process is most appropriate)? Should price be a consideration at all?

If the Assembly directs staff to proceed with the leasing process and competitive bidding is needed, staff will come back to the Assembly to discuss evaluation criteria for the bid/RFP as well as any terms and conditions of the lease that should be outlined for bidders/proposers.

Fiscal Note

Most expenses to facilitate a lease such as surveying, permitting, development, etc., are borne by the lessee. CBS does incur expenses to advertise a bid or RFP that can range from approximately \$400 - \$1000 depending on how widely/frequently it is advertised, as well as the use of staff time throughout the entire leasing process. The more tangible expenses such as advertising could be reimbursed by the lessee if so desired.

At this time, the revenue resulting from leasing this property is unknown and undetermined.

Recommendation

Staff recommends that the Assembly consider and determine whether to proceed with a lease of the property, and if so, provide direction to staff regarding competitive bidding, use of the property, and general guidance on evaluation criteria for a bid/RFP.

Encl: Planning Commission Materials (Aerial, Staff Report, Pictures, Excerpt of Meeting Minutes)
 Applicant Materials (Narrative, Q&A, Letters of Support)