

# **Sitka Community Gardens**

## **Jarvis Street Project Narrative**



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## Abstract

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In order to help improve our community's collective resilience to supply chain disruptions, and encourage the development of critical skills and practices necessary for individuals to become more self-reliant and food-secure, this project proposes the establishment of a community garden on currently unimproved municipal lands at the top of Jarvis Street.

The proposed garden site is approximately ½ acre in size and would include approximately 51 standard 10' by 20' garden plots, plus various covered areas and small enclosed structures for storing tools and bulk garden materials. The site would be fully fenced and gated, but largely open to the general public during the summer growing season. Individual community members, families, and social benefit groups/charities would be offered the opportunity to rent garden plots for a nominal annual fee.

Even though this Narrative describes plans for a single garden project in a single Sitka neighborhood, it is not intended to be the only such development in the community. Residents in other neighborhoods need to begin considering where best to locate additional gardens, large and small, for the purpose of growing food.

Community gardens are considered essential civic infrastructure in many towns and cities across the US, like parks and playgrounds. They are often developed and operated by departments within local government. This project, however, proposes to assign these responsibilities to NGOs, with the nonprofits Sitka Local Foods Network and Transition Sitka undertaking project development and funding, and a cooperative association of active community garden members (yet-to-be-established) undertaking the responsibilities of normal garden operations. Over the long-term, it is expected that the association of gardeners will assume full responsibility for managing and maintaining the proposed Jarvis Street and other future developments, with continuing oversight and only occasional direct assistance from the founding nonprofits.

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## I - Introduction

This project proposes to establish a community garden on undeveloped municipal property on Jarvis Street uphill from the U.S. Post Office on Sawmill Creek Road. Its location here would be most convenient to residents living in the Jamestown Bay neighborhood, but the site is also reasonably close to homes and apartments in the Indian River and Crecent Harbor neighborhoods. See Section III for garden location details and proposed layout design.

Gardening has been practiced for a very long time in the Sitka area, with potato cultivation being a part of Tlingit culture for centuries, stretching back to before first contact with Spanish and Russian sailing ships in the late 18th century. But the concept of community gardening as it is commonly understood and practiced today, has only come to Sitka fairly recently, and (so far) only with mixed success.

For more than ten years the City and Borough of Sitka (CBS) Parks and Recreation Department, in conjunction with a now defunct after-school activities program for kids called Sitka Community Schools, played host to a small ¼-acre community garden on municipal property on the Sitka Channel side of Blatchley Middle School. But due to challenges that could not be easily remedied at the time, a decision was made in late 2016 to close it down.

The main reasons for the closure were: 1) the site was not fenced and gated so complaints over such issues as produce pilfering and vagrancy arose, and 2) some gardeners chose to lodge their grievances with middle school staff even though these school personnel had little to do with the garden's operations. This confusion arose because the Sitka Community Schools program was operating at the time out of an office inside the middle school building. As a result, when issues needed addressing, some gardeners erroneously (but understandably) assumed that they could address them by speaking with school personnel.

Several other more minor issues arose as well, such as concerns over the improper handling and storage of garden compost. There was also confusion over whether gardeners were, or were not, technically on school grounds, and therefore whether they were subject to school rules. These issues led school officials to determine that the garden *as it was organized and operated at that time* was not a good fit for that location.

In hindsight, most of these problems could have been remedied by installing perimeter fencing and adopting clear and enforceable "guidelines for gardeners" that included provisions for regular self-evaluations, conflict avoidance, and dispute resolution. In future, there is every reason to expect that Sitka's community gardens, wherever they may be located, will become valued long-term civic amenities in which residents can take great pride.

Several official CBS attempts to promote community gardens have been made since Blatchley Community Garden's closure. For instance, Sitka's 2030 Comprehensive Plan, approved in May 2018, included a Parks, Trails and Recreation chapter that identified as a priority action (PTR 2.1g) to, "Allow community gardens in undeveloped municipal park space." Additionally, the

plan's Land Use chapter identified as a priority action (LU 7.8) to, "Review zoning code to explore changes to allow urban horticultural and agricultural uses more broadly in existing zoning districts." To date (five years after that plan's approval), no action has been taken by CBS and no serious effort has been made by private parties to materially advance these priorities.

At various times over more recent years, the Local Emergency Planning Committee, the Health Needs and Human Services Commission and the Planning Commission have all discussed ways to improve community food security. But the challenge of identifying lands on which to locate community gardens has remained elusive.

Most recently, the 2022-2027 Sitka Strategic Plan that was adopted in September of last year declared via Goal 1.5 the intent to "Convene community partners to develop an action plan that will address the challenges of food security."

With this most recent CBS declaration of commitment to addressing Sitka's food (in)security, and in the absence of any other formal direction on how to proceed with the development of an action plan, a small group of community members interested in sustainability and food security came together and decided that it may be appropriate at this time to advance a detailed independent proposal for the development of community gardens on municipal lands.

After studying examples of successful community gardens elsewhere and determining that the Juneau Community Garden Association model might be the best fit for Sitka's particular circumstances and community character, the group developed suitability criteria for site selection, and came up with the following:

1. Sites in general—and certainly an initial site—should be at least a half-acre in size.
2. Sites must have good southerly exposure.
3. Sites must not be overly steep or irregular.
4. Sites must be reasonably accessible to neighborhoods.
5. Preferably, sites should have access to city water, sewer, and electricity, though other options could include rain catchment systems, porta-potties and solar panels.
6. And, finally, the community-at-large must be generally supportive, and willing to consider community garden sites as permanent civic improvements.

Over the last several months, project proponents have been broadly distributing Sitka Community Gardens project concept materials throughout the community, and have received several letters of support from key organizations and official advisory bodies. These letters are included as attachments to this narrative.

Public outreach thus far suggests that there is broad support for establishing a community garden in the Jarvis Street neighborhood. An opinion survey of residents in the Osprey Street area has indicated that there is significant resistance to establishing a garden on unimproved lands adjacent to the Vilandre Ballfield. As a result, proponents have suspended consideration of a garden at that location.

## II - Proponent Profiles

**Sitka Local Foods Network (SLFN)** is a well-established 501(c)(3) nonprofit that was founded in 2008 by Sitka Health Summit participants who saw the need for a new organization that could focus on two initiatives: 1) organizing and managing a Farmers Market, and 2) designing and developing a community greenhouse. The Sitka Farmers Market has been a success now for 15 years, with SLFN preparing to hold yet another season of market events in 2023. A Sitka Community Greenhouse & Education Center business plan was developed by SLFN and presented to the City in 2014 seeking to locate and operate a facility on municipal lands, but the proposal failed to gain approval and the effort languished.

Throughout its history, SLFN has organized numerous projects and offered many programs aimed at enhancing the production and distribution of local foods, including the development of St. Peter's Fellowship Farm, which is a communal cooperative garden (not a community garden, because plot rentals are not provided) located behind St. Peter's by the Sea Episcopal Church on Lincoln Street. This garden is now producing at capacity, and residents are able to purchase vegetables grown there through the Sitka Farmers Market.

The goal of creating one or more community gardens has been a priority of SLFN since the closure of the Blatchley Community Garden site in the fall of 2016. But progress has been slow, with the greatest challenges being location, location, and location.

**Transition Sitka (TS)** founders began meeting in late 2021 when members of the Sitka Chapter of Citizens Climate Lobby, a local branch of a national organization primarily focused on a national legislative agenda, decided to apply some of their energies toward addressing climate and sustainability issues at the local level in Sitka. TS is loosely aligned with the Transition Town movement which started in a Sitka-sized community in the U.K. in 2005, and has since spread rapidly to communities in countries around the world. The movement is dedicated to working for a low-carbon, socially just future with greater local food security and economic self-reliance.

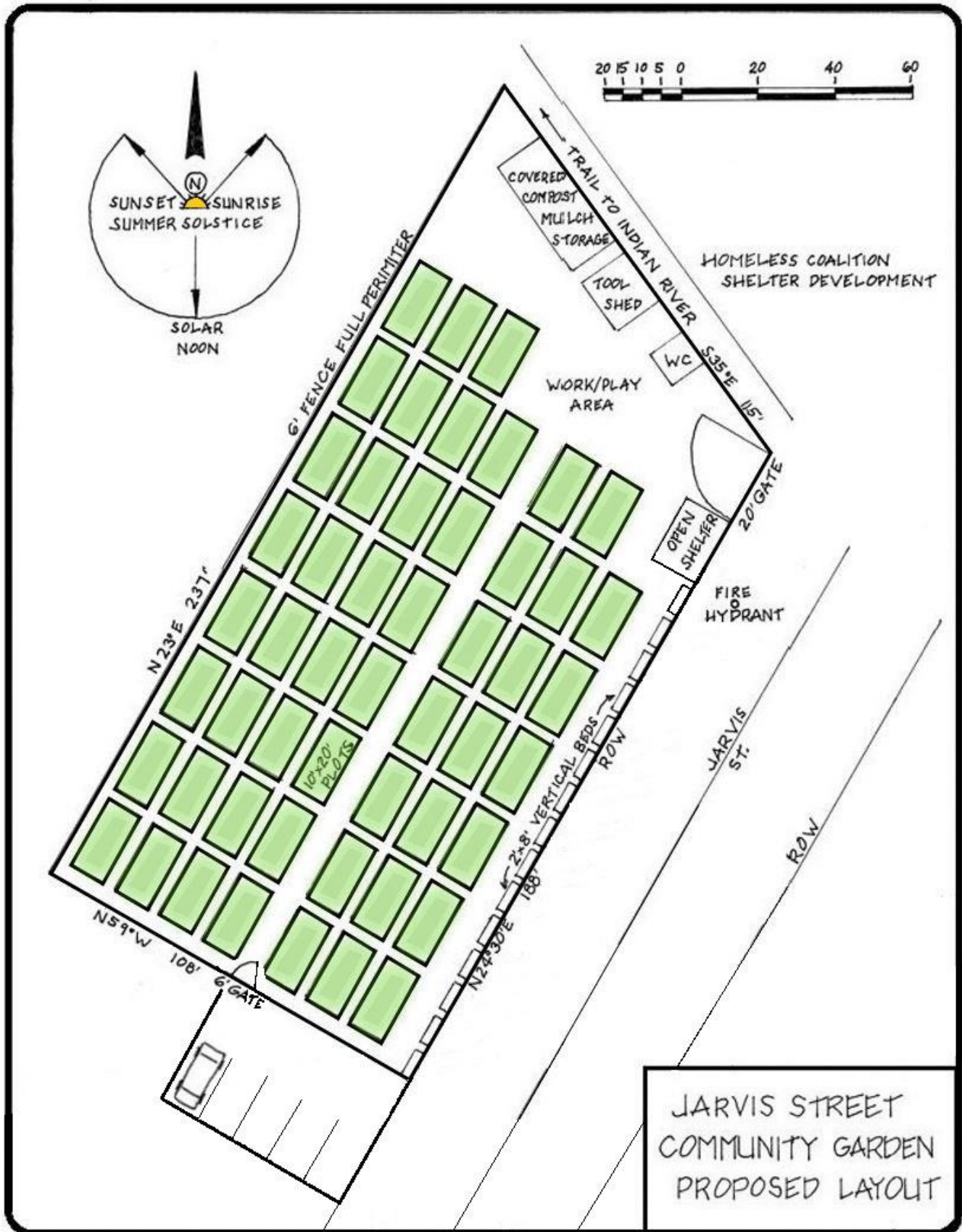
TS has adopted two initial goals: 1) to help Sitka adjust to the coming inevitable shift away from fossil fuel dependency as an energy source, and 2) to increase Sitka's food security. TS was recently granted IRS tax exempt status under Section 501(c)(3).

TS and SLFN are collaborators in the development of this project, and expect to continue working together to promote additional such projects in future.

### III – Jarvis Street Site Description

Located at the top end of Jarvis Street uphill from the U.S. Post Office on Sawmill Creek Road, this half-acre site is adjacent to the Homeless Coalition Shelter Cabin development and close to neighborhoods along Indian River, around Jamestown Bay, and in the Crescent Harbor vicinity. It will include 51 standard 10' by 20' plots, 15 standard 2' by 8' vertical garden beds for climbing or tall plantings, one teaching plot, onsite water, and toilet facilities. The garden perimeter will be fenced and gated.





### III – Goals and Objectives

The overarching goal of this project is to launch the establishment of a neighborhood community garden in Sitka to help combat food insecurity. Coincidentally but importantly, we expect many other public benefits to derive from the project, including:

- Teaching sustainable gardening practices to youth and novice growers.
- Facilitating connections between neighbors.
- Promoting healthy outdoor activities.
- Encouraging volunteerism and leadership.
- Developing intergenerational and cross-cultural collaborations.
- Building civic pride and community cohesiveness.
- Advancing equity and inclusion.

One major objective is to provide Sitka residents with access to garden spaces at very low cost. The ability to purchase or cultivate fruits and vegetables is not just a health issue; it is also an economic justice issue. The Sitka Health Summit's 2014 Sitka Community Food Assessment Indicator Report will soon be updated with new survey information, but the report's now 10-year-old data suggests that 20% of Sitka households were receiving food assistance of some kind during the last decade. We expect even more troubling numbers to come out of the new survey in this decade.

Despite Sitka residents' current ability to access sources of wild foods to supplement purchased groceries, our food security situation is not as robust as it needs to be, and future prospects are troubling:

- The June 2023 (most recent) Consumer Price Index indicates that the US rate of food price inflation for those who purchase groceries to eat at home is 4.7% year-over-year, with the subcategory for fruit and vegetable products at 3.0% y/y.
- The US Department of Agriculture is forecasting an increase of between 5.0% and 6.6% in overall food costs for 2023, which when combined with the 9.9% price increase in 2022 means that consumers at the end of this year could be paying as much as 16.5% more for the same food purchases compared with 2021.
- The prospects for more global supply chain disruptions caused by fuel price spikes and geopolitical conflict are increasing.
- Shortfalls in US domestic foodstuff production due to drought conditions in key growing regions are becoming more common.
- International trade of essential foods in all categories (cereals, vegetable oils, dairy products, sugar, and meat products) is being threatened by protectionist export controls, procurement restrictions and harsh sanctions.

It is clear that the development of a network of community gardens will not be able to meet all of our community's essential fruit and vegetable needs. But the main objective of this project proposal is to do the best we can, as soon as we can, to grow as much as we can.



## IV – Procedures and Work Plan

The garden site identified in this proposal is intended to be a permanent community facility that depends primarily on a cooperative association of active gardeners to contribute both financially and physically to the operation and maintenance of the site and immediate surroundings. Though this association has yet to be established, we will refer to it here for convenience as the Sitka Community Gardens Association, or simply the “Association.”

It is intended for the site to be leased by CBS to SLFN for low or no cost, possibly with competitive bidding requirements waived. The site will be developed according to conditions and stipulations detailed in a lease agreement between the two parties, and will be managed (initially by SLFN and eventually by the Association) according to standards established in a detailed garden operating procedures manual titled Guidelines for Community Gardeners in Sitka. This document will control garden operations. A sample version is attached to this Narrative.

Garden spaces (plots) within the proposed site will be offered to the public for a small rental fee through a seasonal application process. Successful applicants become members of the Association for a one-year term and sign an agreement to abide by the rules and conditions outlined in the Guidelines manual, which includes a requirement for members to perform a certain amount of work (in ‘service hours’) for the benefit of the Association. Membership is not intended to be limited exclusively to individuals. Organizations such as Southeast Alaska Independent Living (SAIL) and the Sitka Tribe’s Kayaaní Commission will be welcome to join.

The developed site is also intended to be a demonstration garden. Association members are expected to welcome non-members who wish to enter, explore, and enjoy the garden. However, to avoid risk of misuse or unauthorized harvesting of produce, the site will be fenced and gated so that non-members cannot generally gain access unless Association members or recognized member partners with gate access privileges are also present onsite. It is expected that Association members will be working on their garden plots or performing service hour obligations regularly during the growing season, so the garden is therefore expected to be open to the public much of that time. Of course, another reason for fences and gates is to keep the deer, bears and other critters out!

SLFN, as parent organization of the Association, will periodically offer or otherwise make available community education workshops for both Association members and the general public, typically using a designated ‘teaching plot’ for hands-on experience.

It is expected that, over time, there will be a cadre of gardeners who have become regular plot renters, and it is from among this group that the Association Steering Committee will emerge to take over most of the gardens’ management responsibilities, relieving SLFN from much of its direct involvement. SLFN will continue to be responsible for ensuring that the terms of the lease agreement are upheld, including the maintenance of liability insurance coverage.

As with any garden development project in this region, site preparation is important. The Jarvis Street site will require significant tree and brush removal, trenching and burying hundreds of feet of drain pipe, erecting hundreds of feet of fencing, and hardening some limited areas with rock fill to accommodate vehicular traffic and small structures. Additionally, utilities available nearby will need to be accessed. Overall, however, improvements necessary for project completion may be considered fairly minor compared to other public amenity development projects like ballfields. Certainly, it is *not* anticipated that there will be any need for deep excavation of overburden or extensive placement of rock and gravel resurfacing.

Project proponents will take on the responsibility of obtaining necessary permits from such entities as the US Army Corps of Engineers. They also expect to engage the services of a geotechnical/hydrological analyst to study the potential impacts of a garden development, and will obtain professional engineering recommendations for surface drainage and storm water runoff management.

A major challenge to project completion will be obtaining suitable soil to fill garden beds. Typically, this challenge is addressed over time when gardeners gradually build the health of their soil with compost, mulch, and various amendments. In recent years, CBS has generously made compost and mulch available to the gardening community for free from materials collected in various ways through public works and other projects. It is hoped that the city will see fit to direct a portion of these materials to this project in order to help overcome the dearth of dirt dilemma. Otherwise, garden soil will be sourced from commercial suppliers.

Sometime in the future, it is hoped that Sitka will launch a community composting project. This will help reduce municipal solid waste disposal costs and should benefit local gardeners by providing them with a good local source of garden bed building materials—an unbeatable two-fer.

Milestones and timelines for completion of this project are difficult to assess at this time for many reasons, not the least of which is the extreme uncertainty as to whether an application for lease of municipal lands for the development of community gardens will garner Planning Commission and Assembly approval. It's hard to plot a firm course, when you don't know if there are reefs over the horizon or open water.

In a perfect world, CBS would have acknowledged the need for establishing a new a community garden after the closure of Blatchley, and would have issued an RFP for the development of one or two half-acre sites of its own choosing. Under such circumstances, it would be reasonable to expect potential developers to provide CBS with detailed timelines and budgets. But such was not the case. The possible trajectory of this project proposal is currently unknown and unknowable, so development details are to some degree unplannable.

Notwithstanding the many uncertainties, it is safe to assume that if the project is approved for the Jarvis Street site as proposed, completion is likely to take at least two years following initial groundbreaking.

Once the Sitka Assembly conditionally approves the project, and City staff have been given the opportunity to develop suitable contract terms for the lease of municipal lands, proponents may finally have a good-enough understanding of the scope of the project to allow for the development of detailed work plans, timelines, and budgets. Until then, attempting to develop estimates may be more misleading than helpful.

## V - Evaluation

It is important to provide CBS and the general public with opportunities to evaluate garden performance in comparison to expectations. Evaluations should take place periodically during project development, as well as later during normal operations.

We expect that coordination with the staff of Public Works, Department of Building & Grounds, will be critical to the success of this project in the development stages. It would be useful, therefore, to institute a regular schedule of meetings between staff and developers, as well as a reporting process so that staff findings may be transmitted to city authorities for evaluation.

Gardening is widely viewed as a recreational pursuit, so it seems logical for evaluations to also be conducted periodically by the Department of Parks and Recreation once the garden is in normal operation. We hope and expect that the garden will provide many opportunities for organizing youth gardening groups and other educational offerings, and these kinds of activities align closely with both Parks and Rec's mission and its technical capacity to facilitate the scheduling of recreational and educational outdoor programs.

Periodic inspections of the garden sites and evaluations of operational procedures will help maintain public appreciation for the services provided, and can help in the discovery of ways to improve.

## VI - Sources and Uses of Funds

Funding for site preparation and development will come from government grants, as well as from corporations and philanthropic institutions. Support for food security programs is currently a high priority for many government and private funders, and we believe Sitka's current high degree of food insecurity will make this project quite compelling to funding agencies and charitable organizations. Also, the degree of generosity shown by local individuals and businesses within the Sitka community for projects like this which promise to provide multiple benefits never ceases to amaze.

An initial dialogue has already begun between project proponents and Rasmuson Foundation, and we expect that funding may be made available from this organization to cover costs associated with project pre-development such as geotechnical analysis (as required) and site surveys.

As the project moves into development, sources of funds include:

- USDA Micro-Grants for Food Security Program, which distributes funds to State Government agencies like the Alaska Department of Agriculture for redistribution, specifically to projects that promise to increase the quantity and quality of locally grown food through such projects as small-scale gardening.
- USDA Urban Agriculture and Innovation Production Competitive Grants Program, which can award grants from \$50,000 to \$250,000.
- USDA Community Food Projects Competitive Grant Program, which can award grants for projects not to exceed \$125,000 in any single year or \$400,000 over four years.

If grants require some level of non-federal matching, then we anticipate use of the estimated value of the land under lease from CBS to meet at least a portion of the matching requirement.

Once site preparations have been substantially completed, community members will begin to rent garden plots, so income generated from this source will begin to provide revenue for ongoing maintenance and improvements. Because gardeners are required to perform a certain number of service hours per season, labor will also be available for these purposes. Coincidentally, such labor may be characterized as “contributions-in-kind” to the project, which allows a dollar value to be attached to them and that value to be applied toward matching requirements for further grants.

The Juneau Community Garden Association (JSGA) has generously shared with us the outlines of their sources and uses of operating funds. They currently receive plot rental income from about 165 standard 10’ by 20’ plots annually at approximately \$35/plot, plus about 30 small beds for climbing plants at \$5/bed. This income plus the income generated from holding a spring plant sale event, one Mid-Summer Festival, and one Fall Harvest Celebration where garden produce is sold to benefit JCGA has been meeting much of their maintenance and operations budget needs for a number of years.

Although a future “Sitka Community Gardens Association” cannot initially expect to generate the same level of plot rental income as JCGA, we will enjoy similarly low maintenance and operations costs due to the benefits of adopting a similarly efficient cooperative association model, using “service hour” membership labor to accomplish most maintenance and management needs, eliminating the need to hire paid staff.

## Attachments

- ✓ Detailed elevation maps of proposed garden sites (digital files only)
- ✓ Sample Guidelines for Community Gardeners Handbook
- ✓ Letters of support

# Sitka Community Gardens Proposal

## Q&A

**Q:** Who is organizing this effort?

**A:** Two tax exempt 501(c)(3) nonprofit groups in collaboration: the long established Sitka Local Foods Network (SLFN), and the recently established Transition Sitka (TS) which was formed in 2022 with help and support from the Sitka Chapter of the non-partisan national advocacy group Citizens Climate Lobby.

**Q:** What is the main reason for this proposal?

**A:** Sitka's food security situation is not what it should be. The May 2023 (most recent) US Consumer Price Index indicated that the rate of food price inflation for Americans who purchase groceries to eat at home is 5.8% year-over-year. The risk of food supply chain interruptions in Sitka currently has a low likelihood of occurrence, but a high likelihood of severe impact. Community garden developments will help raise the level of food supply resilience.

**Q:** Why is this proposal being put forward now?

**A:** The City and Borough of Sitka (CBS) recently adopted its 5-year Strategic Plan which identified several priority initiatives. Goal 1.5 directs municipal leadership to, "Convene community partners to develop an action plan that will address the challenges of food security." This proposal establishes SLFN and TS as key 'partners' committed to addressing food security. It also puts forward the argument that a key component of any 'action plan' must include planning for the development of a network of community gardens.

**Q:** Sitka had a community garden behind Blatchley Middle School a few years ago that was closed. What happened?

**A:** Blatchley Community Garden operated for more than ten years but was closed in the fall of 2016 for several reasons. Probably the biggest single reason was that the garden was not fenced and gated, so issues arose regarding produce pilfering and vagrancy. Contributing to this, the garden was officially a project of the now defunct Sitka Community Schools, an after-school activities program which operated out of an office inside the middle school building. When gardeners had concerns or complaints, they sometimes erroneously assumed that they could raise their issues with the middle school office staff and principal who actually had little connection to the garden's operations. Gradually, minor grievances and misunderstandings led to the conclusion that the garden *as it was organized and operated at that time* was not a good fit for that location.

**Q:** Is there sufficient interest in community gardening to warrant establishing a network of garden sites?

**A:** We think so, but until such time as CBS demonstrates some level of commitment to allowing the creation of one or more long-term community gardens in one or more locations around town, it is extremely difficult to accurately determine how many members of the community might be willing to participate as plot renters. Two assumptions, however, can be made with confidence: 1) when the old Blatchley garden was closed it had developed a long waitlist for plot rentals, so we can assume a not insignificant level of continuing interest; and, 2) well-established and efficiently operated community gardens all around the state and all around the country typically have long waitlists. This demonstrates that community gardens, in general, are very popular public amenities wherever they are located.

**Q:** How much will plot rentals cost?

**A:** First and foremost, plots are meant to be affordable. The Juneau Community Garden Association, which this proposal is modeled after, has set its standard 10' by 20' plot rental rate for the 2023 gardening season at \$35.

**Q:** How does the plot rental application process work?

**A:** New applications must be submitted by all interested gardeners every year by early February. All applications are reviewed and plot assignments awarded according to a process that provides an initial screening designed to favor those applicants demonstrating the greatest need for garden space, while also allowing prior-year gardeners the ability to keep their prior-year plots. Unsuccessful applicants are put on a waitlist and may be awarded space during the season if space should become available.

**Q:** Do gardeners have other obligations besides just paying a plot rental fee?

**A:** Yes! Every successful applicant automatically becomes a member of the Sitka Community Gardens Association for the term of one year, which carries with it a requirement for the performance of a modest minimum number of service hours. Association members must fulfill their service hour obligations in order to maintain their membership in good standing. New gardeners may choose to serve by helping with the maintenance of the garden's buildings and other infrastructure, while more experienced gardeners may choose to serve by helping to lead work parties or provide guidance to garden visitors to ensure that acceptable rules of conduct are observed.

**Q:** What other provisions will there be for making sure that established gardening rules are followed?

**A:** Initially, oversight will be carried out by either a designated representative of the SLFN Board of Directors or an employee hired by the Board for this purpose. Over time, it is expected that a cadre of more experienced gardeners with consistent Association membership will form an Association Steering Committee to help make sure that gardening rules are followed. And, in addition to these provisions, the terms established in the land lease contract will provide for onsite inspections of garden operations by city officials on an 'as necessary or appropriate' basis.

**Q:** For half the year, active gardening won't be taking place. What then?

**A:** Gardeners will be required to put their plots to bed in the fall and leave them in an orderly condition. Non-compliance with this requirement may affect a gardener's future application approval. Onsite water supplies will be turned off by October 31<sup>st</sup> and only turned on again after the threat of a hard freeze has passed sometime in April.



To whom it may concern:

This letter is to express UAF Cooperative Extension Service Sitka District's support of the conceptual development of a Community Garden in Sitka, as proposed by community member Joel Hanson, representing a collaborative effort of the two local organizations: Sitka Local Foods Network and Transition Sitka.

The community garden project fits with the Extension Service's program goals to increase knowledge and adoption of agriculture and horticulture best practices for northern climates as regards to planting, pest management, harvesting and other major grower concerns. We see potential in the community garden as both an educational site for the community and an equitable way to provide support to growers in the state who do not have current land access to gardening.

Signed,

Jasmine Shaw

UAF Cooperative Extension Service Sitka District

(907) 747-9440

To whom it may concern,

The Sitka Homeless Coalition would like to express our strong support for the proposed development of community gardens by Transition Sitka and Sitka Local Foods Network. One of which will be located near the future site of the Hitx'i Saani (Little Houses) Community.



We want to emphasize the importance of these gardens in addressing food insecurity in our community. As you know, access to healthy and nutritious food is essential for the overall health and wellbeing of our community. Unfortunately, many members of our community, including those experiencing homelessness, struggle with food insecurity and lack of access to fresh produce.

The development of community gardens by these groups will not only provide an opportunity for individuals to grow their own food but also offer a source of healthy produce for those in need. We believe that this project aligns with the goals of our community in promoting sustainable and equitable practices.

There are many additional benefits that can be reaped from the establishment of community gardens. Besides being a source of fresh fruit and vegetables, community gardens also facilitate a sense of community and establish engagement and cooperation that can lead to increased stewardship for the land, enhanced feelings of belonging, and a sense of purpose from working towards a common goal.

Furthermore, it has the potential to foster community engagement and social connections. In light of these benefits, we urge you to approve the lease of land for the development of these community gardens. Thank you for your consideration, and we look forward to the positive impact this project will have on our community.

Sincerely,

*Andrew Hinton*

Andrew Hinton  
Executive Director  
Sitka Homeless Coalition





# SITKA FIRE DEPARTMENT

CITY AND BOROUGH OF SITKA  
A COAST GUARD CITY

209 Lake Street | Sitka, Alaska 99835  
www.cityofsitka.com  
907-747-3233



May 8, 2023

To Whom it may concern:

The Sitka Local Emergency Planning Committee (LEPC) was informed of a proposal to create a community garden. This proposal was brought to our attention by LEPC member Joel Hanson, who is also the project lead for the community garden in Sitka.

The Sitka LEPC would like to extend its support to this project and believe that this will provide help towards the city's strategic plan for food security. As most know, food security and the reliance on a barge from Seattle twice a week are of concern to the LEPC. This type of project should be encouraged by the whole community.

We wish the Sitka Local Foods Network, Transition Sitka, and Joel Hanson the best of luck in completing this project.

Sincerely,

Craig M. Warren, Fire Chief  
Chair, Sitka LEPC

To Whom it May Concern,

The City of Sitka Parks and Recreation Committee would like to voice our support for a community garden. We recognize any garden project using city-owned land will go through a public process when it's reviewed by the Sitka planning & zoning commission. Setting aside the issue of a specific site, we believe the joint proposal by Sitka Local Foods Network and Transition Sitka is in keeping with the mission of this committee and goals set out in the most recent long-term plan for Sitka.

A community garden will benefit Sitkans in a number of ways. Among other things, it improves our food security, fosters outdoor activity and builds community. Since we live in a town where land is expensive and not easily made productive for growing, it makes sense to set aside public space to allow residents to join forces to grow food.

As outlined by the joint proposal, we agree the site selected should meet the following criteria:

1. It is at least a half-acre in size.
2. It has good southerly exposure.
3. The lot is not too steep or irregular.
4. It is reasonably accessible to neighborhoods.
5. It should have (but not necessarily must have) access to city water, sewer, and electricity.
6. The community-at-large must be generally supportive and willing to think of the gardens as permanent public amenities, no different than parks or baseball fields.

With an agreement and contingency safeguards in place the site should be made available through a non-competitive lease to the nonprofit organization for a nominal fee.

Sitka is fortunate to have active non profit organizations that could take charge of maintaining a public garden, so the cost to the municipality will be minimal.

The 29-year-old Juneau Community Garden Association's 2.5-acre community garden in the Mendenhall Valley could be a model for Sitka's.

The current proposal has already received letters of support from the Sitka Homeless Coalition, which leases land in the Jarvis Street area, the Tree and Landscape Committee and the Sitka Tribe.

Sincerely,

Sitka Parks and Recreation Committee



201 Lincoln Street, Room 4, Sitka, Alaska 99835  
(907) 747-7509 | info@sitkawild.org | www.sitkawild.org

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Protecting the natural environment  
of the Tongass National Forest and  
supporting the development of  
sustainable communities within  
Southeast Alaska

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May 16, 2023

To Whom It May Concern:

The Sitka Conservation Society Board of Directors unanimously supports the conceptual development of community gardens in Sitka, after hearing from community member Joel Hanson at our May 15th, 2023 board meeting. The community gardens initiative is a collaborative effort between two Sitka based non-profit organizations – Sitka Local Foods Network and Transition Sitka.

As an organization our mission includes supporting sustainable, thriving communities across the Tongass. An important part of community sustainability involves food security. We recognize that in addition to living within balance with our natural food sources in the Sitka area, we are very dependent on food imported from the Lower 48.

Sustainable thriving communities include residents working collectively to help each other in various ways. Working toward that end, our staff helped create the Sitka Mutual Aid Network Project and worked to organize and deliver food to Sitkans who needed food for a number of reasons during the difficult Covid-19 shelter in place time. Staff also worked with local partners to implement the USDA Summer Food Service Program to provide free lunches for children. Currently, SCS is working with Pacific High School, partnered with Barth Hamburg for design and Andrea Fraga to support the expansion of PHS's greenhouse and gardening program, which supplies the school with some of its own food while empowering students by providing education about gardening and sustainable food for them.

The development of community gardens within Sitka, as proposed by Transition Sitka and the Sitka Local Food Network, is another piece in completing the puzzle of providing food security in Sitka. This project can also benefit the community by facilitating a sense of community cooperation and interpersonal connection between people, an essential component of healthy, sustainable communities. As the project comes to fruition and details are clarified, we look forward to seeing the development of a clear, long-term management plan so that this community asset can be successfully stewarded for years to come. We would also like to acknowledge the planning that has gone into minimizing bear-human interactions and reiterate that the implementation of bear mitigation measures is of the utmost importance for the Board, as we seek to live in balance with the broader environment of the Tongass National Forest that surrounds us.

We are grateful for the planning and dedication that volunteers have put towards making community gardens a reality in Sitka. We believe that the Planning Commission review will address input from the neighborhood and affected property owners, and we are hopeful that this project will move swiftly and smoothly through the permitting process and into a reality.

Regards,

Deb Bruschafer  
*Board President*



# Sitka Tribe of Alaska

Tribal Government for Sitka, Alaska

April 5, 2023

To Whom It May Concern,

I write on behalf of the Sitka Tribe of Alaska (STA), tribal government in Sitka, Alaska, with over 4,500 tribal citizens. As a tribal government, STA is responsible for the health, safety, welfare, and cultural preservation of its tribal citizens. STA would like to express its support for the community gardens proposed by Transition Sitka and Sitka Local Foods Network.

STA has been a strong advocate for the access to and consumption of healthy traditional subsistence foods. While most of the community has access to a variety of subsistence resources, there is still a reliance on agriculturally grown foods. Unfortunately, access to non-indigenous fruits and vegetables is expensive and inconsistent due to shipping produce into Sitka.

Living in a community that is surrounded by state and federal lands limits the amount of land available for residential housing. This land shortfall has led to high-density housing that is not conducive to gardening on a meaningful level.

The proposed gardens would provide residents access to space they normally wouldn't have to grow their own produce. This new space won't solve all of the community's food security issues, but it will increase food resiliency and augment existing subsistence food diets.

If you have any questions regarding this letter of support, contact STA's Resource Protection Director, Jeff Feldpausch, at (907)747-7469 or email [jeff.feldpausch@itkatriben-sn.gov](mailto:jeff.feldpausch@itkatriben-sn.gov).

Sincerely,



Lawrence Widmark  
Council Chair



# CITY AND BOROUGH OF SITKA

A COAST GUARD CITY

May 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2023

To Whom It May Concern:

The Sustainability Commission of the City and Borough of Sitka expresses our unanimous support for the conceptual development of Community Gardens in Sitka, as proposed by community member Joel Hanson at our regular April meeting. This is a collaborative effort between two Sitka based non-profit organizations—Sitka Local Foods Network and Transition Sitka.

The concept of a community garden project fits squarely into the commission's intent and goals, as codified by Sitka's General Code 2.15.060.B. Creation of a community garden directly reflects four goals of the commission, including diminution of Sitka's supply-chain fragility, food security enhancement, solid waste consumption, reduction, composting, recycling, and re-use, and robust and healthy local ecosystems and natural communities (SGC 2.15). This project aligns with these goals, as well as the city's five-year strategic plan and the comprehensive plan.

A community garden would have a variety of benefits, including wellness through gardening, provision of locally sourced, healthy foods, and increased food security for Sitka residents. It presents the potential to increase composting through structured programs and designated sites. It also increases equity among Sitka residents by providing land space essential to gardening to renters and apartment dwellers who lack resources and legal right to self-start gardening. Land is the essential resource to provide food to Sitka, and this project cleverly leverages city land resources to provide a plethora of diverse social and environmental benefits.

The Sustainability Commission is a newly formed city commission. In March 2023, our annual priorities were proposed and voted on by commissioners, then approved by the Sitka City Assembly. We acknowledge the value of a community garden and its potential for positive impacts on community members and the environment; further, we recognize the fervor and initiative that this project and its creators embody. The benefits from a community garden, coupled with the clear alignment with city goals led us to our full support for the concept and proposal of Development of Community Gardens in Sitka.

Signed,

Katie Riley

Chair, on behalf of the Sustainability Commission



March 23, 2023

To Whom it May Concern,

As members of the Tree and Landscape Committee, we are writing this letter in support of the Proposal for the Development of community gardens in the City of Sitka. This endeavor is being spearheaded by project lead, Joel Hanson and supported by two local groups, Transition Sitka and Sitka Local Foods Network. The Tree and Landscape Committee (TLC) is a volunteer group dedicated to the beautification of our fine city through rendering hours of free labor enhancing and maintaining the grounds of city properties.

Development of community gardens is an important first step in tackling one of the main challenges facing all of us of living on an island in Alaska—food insecurity. Community gardens can be an essential resource for providing fresh, healthy food for our community.

There are many additional benefits that can be reaped from the establishment of community gardens. Besides being a source of fresh fruit and vegetables, community gardens also facilitate a sense of community and establish engagement and cooperation that can lead to friendships, enhanced feelings of belonging, and a sense of purpose from working towards a common goal.

Community gardens promote healthier lifestyles by encouraging exercise and by offering an opportunity for people to get out of the house and connect with one another. Gardening can reduce stress and result in increased feelings of wellness just from being outdoors and connecting with others.

Community gardens are found in many cities across the country, and as members of the Tree and Landscape Committee, we believe that Sitka would benefit immensely by the establishment of community gardens. We fully support this endeavor.

Sincerely,

Deb Miller, Chair

Joe D'Arienzo

Lisa Moore

Liz McKenzie