

Dear Assembly, Managers, and Mayor Cremata,

(Apologies if some of this letter repeats parts from my previous correspondence to the Parks & Rec committee)

Thank you for allowing public process to guide your steps toward designating a use and oversight plan for the newly available, publicly-owned lot north of 7-pastures. **I hope that this area can be developed with community food security as the goal foremost in mind.** I believe this piece of property will prove to be an incredibly valuable asset in our community's future —especially as food shortages and supply chain issues are becoming more prevalent, and with suitable land for growing local food being scarce in our valley. I see other communities in the region taking decisive steps in this direction and I feel Skagway is falling behind in this important pursuit. **An expanded community garden and/or small farm business incubator site, perhaps in combination with an open space for public use, would all be appropriate and excellent uses for the area. It's a large space, so can likely accommodate multiple related uses with good planning through public process.**

It is also my hope that the city will seriously consider retaining oversight and maintenance of the area. The reasons are many, why this would be a better choice than handing it off to another entity, so I will list some of the most important below.

Retaining city oversight of a community garden will help:

1. ensure that the garden is governed by a fair, inclusive, and transparent process
2. ensure that Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) standards are met when designing the layout of the grounds (something our current community garden lacks).
3. ensure that a consistent level of care be maintained equal to the quality of the rest of city grounds.
4. ensure that other potential uses within the garden are subject to public process
5. ensure that the city's pesticide ordinance is understood and adhered to by garden participants or users
6. ensure awareness and consideration of U.S. Fish & Wildlife's guidelines to protect nesting birds
7. allow for an inclusive public process for any design considerations and plans that might need to be undertaken to adapt the area, or part of the area, into a community garden
8. ensure appropriate steps are taken in determining whether water and soil quality standards are acceptable for growing food
9. address any need for, and implementation of, wildlife mitigation practices
10. tie in nicely with the city's new composting program
11. provide an additional outdoor recreation option, in a vicinity that is next to other recreational areas the city owns, oversees, and maintains.
12. facilitate accurate record-keeping of garden use (information which may be useful for grant writing)

Additionally, I'm concerned that if oversight and maintenance were given over to another entity, it would be difficult to revert back to city management should problems or other needs arise, so I recommend that the city begin oversight and maintenance of the property at the onset. If long-term city oversight proves unfeasible, then contracting to another entity through a RFP could be considered. Any individual or entity granted the opportunity to manage public lands should be held accountable to ensure that community interests are being met and that public lands aren't being exploited for private business.

To summarize, if this piece of publicly owned property is to be designated as a community garden, then the opportunity to contribute to or comment on how this property is overseen and maintained ought to belong to and remain with the community of Skagway, not given away to another entity. A community garden has potential to be a valuable asset, to be viewed with pride, similar to a Rec Center, ballfields, parks, trails, or any other city amenity that enhances the "quality of life" of its citizens and should not be arbitrarily viewed as a burden to give away.

To this end, I recommend that a part-time seasonal staff position be created and hired for the oversight and upkeep of the property. Judging from my experience organizing and overseeing a similar-sized community garden (in Haines), a position consisting of 15-20 hours per week during the gardening season, should provide adequate time to keep the grounds looking good, garden bed structures in good repair, attend to organizational tasks, as well as find and help write grants for additional infrastructure to enhance the garden. This employee could also help tend to the city's other garden plots, during any slow times at the community garden. Skagway is still considered the "Garden City of Alaska", so it is entirely reasonable for the Borough to employ a part-time seasonal garden caretaker to oversee and maintain this new area, and perhaps other garden plots throughout our town. Hiring an employee would not preclude volunteerism by citizens interested in the garden.

None of this is meant to diminish the most recent contributions to the property made by Charlotte Jewell—she created a beautiful show and food garden, visited and loved by tourists and locals for many years—however it's important also to look further back to remember that the property had other important caretakers who should not be overlooked—it was established as Clark Farm during the Gold Rush era, and even further back was used by indigenous people. An appropriate way to remember all of these contributions and land connections would be to acknowledge them with a plaque or monument within the garden.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Kim Burnham