



# Support Surfaces for Community Garden’s Purchase

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By Allison Jarrell, Special to the Independent

Not only kale and tomatoes sprout in the South Laguna Community Garden. Now hope for its acquisition as a public park does, too.

South Laguna Community Garden draws a crowd at a recent potluck and memorial for one of the garden’s founders, Morrie Granger. Small steps are being taken towards its purchase.

The City Council voted unanimously Tuesday, May 8, to attempt to initiate formal **purchase negotiations** with the unresponsive **owner** of parcels along South Coast Highway that were acquired in 2013, but years ago underwent a transformation by green-thumb volunteers.

To pursue such a purchase, city staff will undertake procedural steps, including obtaining an appraisal and an environmental assessment of the property.

Operated by the South Laguna Civic Association, the garden took root on the privately-owned property in 2009 and is open to the public. Residents from across Laguna cultivate vegetables and herbs from its 51 raised plots and pay annual fees for water use. Since opening, the garden has become South Laguna’s plaza, a venue for potluck dinners, memorials and workshops.

Mayor Pro Tem Rob Zur Schmiede and council member Steve Dicterow presented their goal to eventually purchase the land from the property owner, who resides in Saudi Arabia.

Dictertow said he supports resorting to the eminent domain seizure of the corner if the owner remains unresponsive.

Thus far, the council has contributed **\$500,352** for the potential acquisition of the property. A vote to extend the Council’s financial commitment to 2021 from 2019 resulted in a 3-2 split, with council members Bob Whalen and Kelly Boyd opposed.

Whalen said he was uncomfortable talking about eminent domain, and Boyd voiced skepticism over the ability of the civic association to raise matching funds or potentially pay the city back if the money was fronted.

“We’re not making a commitment to do anything, just shifting our stance,” Zur Schmiede said, later adding that eminent domain would be the last step of a lengthy process.

Nine residents stayed until about midnight to speak about the garden, the majority in favor of the city’s continued support.

“It’s a marvelous, unique citizen-based project that I would like to see the city continue to help us with,” said Ann Christoph, South Laguna Civic Association board member.

Christoph acknowledged that the association has amassed just \$175,000 in fundraising, which she says is hampered by lack of specific financial goal. “Since there is no deal and no response from the owner, we’re limited,” Christoph said.

Sally Coffey said that since many families share plots, the garden actually serves more than is reflected in 51 plots. Over 350 people have participated in the garden since its inception, she said.

Even so, resident Jennifer Zeiter said she opposed the use of taxpayer funds.

Judie Mancuso, **who’s running for council**, urged city staff to consider 40 acres of undeveloped land at Atlantic Way and Skyline Drive for its potential use as a garden. “It’s a pipe dream to think this owner is going to sell this property for \$1 million,” Mancuso said.



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## One Comment



**BD** *May 13, 2018 at 6:54 am*

Just curious if they have permission from the current unresponsive owner and if threatening eminent domain will backfire? The property is being cared for so what’s the reasoning for eminent domain, sounds like another lawsuit and more wasted tax dollars? Plus if he sold it at \$1.3M he would loose money and prices are going up.