

Some digging in for a fight

Draft ordinance limits growing of vegetables in front yards.

By **Ralph Montañó**
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A draft ordinance about what can and cannot be grown in front yards across Sacramento has some local gardeners ready for battle.

"If I want to grow cucumbers, tomatoes and squash in my front yard, that should be my right," said Dian Costanza of east Sacramento. "I want to have food on my plate that I know what went into it – how it was grown, how it was loved."

About 65 people met with city officials June 13 at the Hart Senior Center to discuss proposed updates to a front yard landscaping ordinance that calls for "primarily low ground cover or turf."

The call for changes to the ordinance began two years ago after east Sacramento resident Karen Baumann received a written warning from the city after a complaint about her front yard garden. The city initially threatened Baumann with fines and fees totaling \$800, but she has never been billed, and the garden is still there.

Since then, gardening advocates and officials with the city's code enforcement division have held infrequent meetings to try and find a compromise. The city's latest proposal includes some language that the garden advocates applauded but a limitation on space that drew protests.

The new proposal allows "grass, annuals, perennials, ground cover, shrubs, trees and any design elements such as planters, rocks, mulch, or similar elements when integrated as part of the landscape."

It also states, "no more than 20 percent of the landscaping may be devoted to the growing of vegetables and/or fruit." And the proposal calls for vegetables not to exceed 4 feet in height.

River Park resident Sue Tracy saw no reason for the percentage.

"Why are you singling out fruits and vegetables?" she asked. "To me, growing fruits and vegetables is like a basic human right."

Max Fernandez, director of the city's code enforcement division, said the percentage was seen as a way to possibly get the new proposal past the

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Sacramento City Council Law and Legislation Committee, which last year turned down a proposal for a new ordinance.

In May 2005, an ordinance proposal presented to the four-member committee had very broad language that worried most members. The proposal defined front yard landscaping only as "living vegetation" that needed to be "landscaped, irrigated and maintained."

Council members Lauren Hammond (District 5), Sandy Sheedy (District 2) and Robbie Waters (District 7) all expressed concerns that the simple wording would allow people to grow corn stalks in their front yards or turn their property into "jungles."

The committee sent the proposal back to the city staff with only Councilman Steve Cohn opposing the decision.

Kim Glazzard, representing the group Organic Sacramento, said limiting what people can grow in their front yards would be a backward step when "the city has made a commitment to significant changes."

The Sacramento City Council has signed pledges toward ending hunger in the city, Glazzard added, and increasing sustainability and home gardens are part of those goals.

Others at the June 13 meeting noted that cities such as Seattle, San Francisco and Portland, Ore., place no such restrictions on landscaping.

Marsha Prillwitz, an area author and director of Sacramento's master gardener program, said the city needs a consistent message on gardening.

"We are planting more gardens in our schools, and we need to encourage more in our homes for healthy living," she said.

Bill Maynard, a UC master gardener and coordinator of the Sacramento Area Community Garden Coalition, said he hopes a compromise can be reached. He reminded those attending the meeting that at one time all the nation's residents were encouraged to grow a garden, and millions did.

After World War II ended, Maynard said, there were 20 million Victory Gardens nationwide that were grown in front yards, on rooftops, in medians and even at gas stations.

"We could do that again," Maynard said.

Fernandez said he will take the issue back to the Law and Legislation Committee. Late July is the earliest the committee will consider the matter.

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