

## Growing interest in community gardens leads Pomona officials to seek ground rules



Chris Covella, a Cal Poly student, left, helps build a garden bed for a new community garden space created by the Institute for Public Strategies and nonprofit My Pomona Community Garden at Emerson Middle School in Pomona, Calif., on Saturday, Nov. 23, 2019. (Photo by Trevor Stamp, Contributing Photographer)

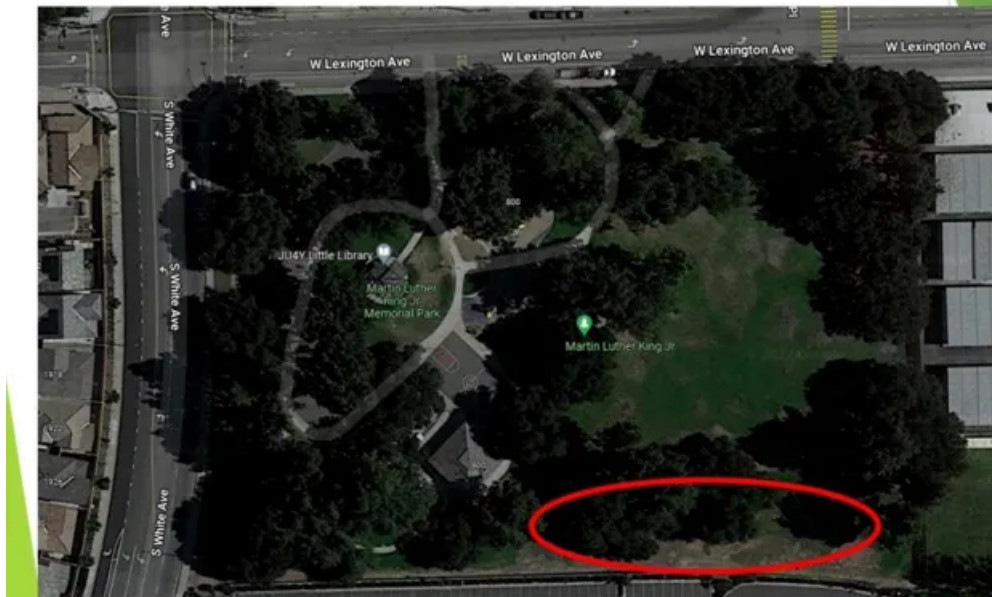
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As interest in [urban gardens](#) grows in Pomona, city leaders are working to solidify a process for future projects throughout town.

One such project is a proposal from [Food Cycle Collective](#) — a nonprofit centered around composting — to transform a portion of Martin Luther King Jr. Park at 800 W. Lexington Ave. into a community farm and composting site.

If approved by the City Council, the proposed farm would be located in the southeast corner of the park, a section that city planners say would not interfere with regular park activities.

## Proposed Location of Community Farm Initiative



Proposed location of community farm at Martin Luther King, Jr. Park, 800 W. Lexington Avenue, from Food Cycle Collective. (Courtesy of city of Pomona)

Plans shared at a Jan. 9 council meeting call for two growing areas, each about the size of half a football field, a composting area, and a small area for storing bulk materials such as woodchips for use in maintaining pathways.

In addition, a buffer of about 10 feet is proposed along the southern wall and fence line to allow for a path around the park, according to a staff report.

The community garden would be open to the public and no fencing is proposed at this time, a notable departure from other similar green spaces in the city.

The city anticipates water costs of about \$2,000 a year at the community farm, which Food Cycle Collective is asking the city to pay for out of the general fund.

At minimal cost, the city would purchase tools, paid for through the parks maintenance operating budget, to connect a new drip irrigation to its existing park irrigation system.

The cost of operations, maintenance and any damages caused by vandals would be the responsibility of Food Cycle Collective. The collective has extensive experience in the development and operation of composting projects in Pomona, Ontario, Chino, Claremont and San Dimas.

While there are already more than [a half-dozen community farms](#) in the city, not all of them are publicly accessible or have similar hours of operation, Pedro Vasquez, a member of Food Cycle Collective, said at the Jan. 9 meeting.

“I know that there are certain farms here already but I think that we need to have more,” Vasquez said. “That would help (the community) immensely.”

The group’s proposal led to a discussion at the council meeting regarding future similar projects and how the city could better streamline a process for other interested groups.

As interest in community gardens has increased in recent years, city leaders would like to see if an advisory group, similar to the art commission, could be established to be stewards of such initiatives. That way, regulations and framework can be followed moving forward.

Input from various city departments that play a role in the approval of such projects — such as public works and development and neighborhood services — is needed as well, officials say.

Although the city previously entered into a similar agreement [transforming an empty lot](#) into what is now the Buena Vista Community Garden, the current proposal is a pilot program that would be evaluated prior to approving other future community garden locations.

While no action was taken at the meeting, the City Council agreed that establishing a process for future community gardens in Pomona is needed before the current proposal can be approved.

That sentiment echoed comments from Stephen Yorba-Patten, who oversees the [Lopez Urban Farm](#), another local community garden.

If urban gardening is going to be successful in Pomona, he told the council at the Jan. 9 meeting, he would like to see collaboration between interested parties, not just those behind the current proposal, “play an important advisory role in executing best practices.”

A report on starting a formal process, including criteria and guidelines, for community garden approvals is expected to return before the City Council in the near future, according to public works director Rene Guerrero.