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Dear Garden Coordinators,

On behalf of the Community Gardens Committee, I'd like to thank you very much for your thoughtful responses to the Garden Plot Fee Survey we sent in the fall of 2009. We received feedback from nearly three quarters of the gardens we contacted, more than enough to provide a good sense of how the plot fees are working around the City of Madison. We thought you would be interested in what you and your fellow coordinators shared with us.

The Plot Fee Chart has been edited to clarify several issues you raised. We hope the revised chart and notes for 2009/2010 is helpful.

Did the rates seem appropriate - Your responses were mostly YES, but there were concerns expressed about disparities, and suggestions made about other ways of "paying" for plots (e.g. volunteer hours.) It's worth reminding everyone that the sliding scale fees were developed to reflect gardeners' different abilities to pay, taking into account factors such as wages and the cost-of-living index, and resulted in reduced fees for those who have lower incomes or less money to spare after their personal expenses. The rates apply to one (standard sized) plot to promote fairness, and may help reduce waiting lists if gardeners with multiple plots decide to downsize. The rates are the result of a lengthy process of research

and consultation, by a group that included representatives from the City's Community Gardens Committee, the Community Development block Grant office, CAC and gardeners.

Any complaints about the fees - Most of you responded NO, but some thought language barriers might have been a reason for complaints in the gardens that had them. New gardens expressed a desire for a "grace period" for a season or two before paying into the New Garden Fund for a season or two, but this would delay replenishing the fund that made their gardens possible; see the need for better communication on this program below.

Have plot fees generated sufficient funds to support your gardens' activities - Most of you said YES, but some expressed the need for additional revenue to purchase tools and do projects, and raised concerns about the rising cost of water. There are some grant programs that might be appropriate for some of these needs, e.g., Fiskars for tools.

Awareness of the New Garden Fund - it is not what it should be. Your responses indicate that many gardeners do NOT know about the fund, but you believe they would support it if they did. We need to explain this program more effectively.

Other thoughts and comments - Expressed a hope that the fees would not be raised again soon, and a desire to support lower income gardeners. The income ranges shown in the chart and used to determine the fees, will be revised as needed to keep up with changes in the county and federal guidelines.

□ Community Gardens Committee Member Request - yielded a couple of recommendations of gardeners who would be good candidates to serve. We are always looking for people, so please keep this in mind.

Thanks again for your thoughtful responses to the survey, and for your work coordinating Madison's community gardens. You are an important link between the people who cultivate the gardens and those who develop policies to promote and support them. Clear communication is the key to understanding, and we appreciate anything you can do to clarify the purpose and goal of the plot fees among gardeners during this season's registration process. Please let us know if you have any questions or further comments.

Sincerely,

Letter to Garden Coordinators 2-25-10.txt

Nan Fey
Co-Chair
Committee on Community Gardens

NEF/lao

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