

The Sitka Community Greenhouse on Japonski Island

A Proposal

Overview

The purpose of this proposal is to obtain the approval of the directors of Mount Edgecumbe High School for the concept of constructing and operating the Sitka Community Greenhouse on the Mount Edgecumbe campus. The Sitka Community Greenhouse (SCG), based on similar projects in Alaska and the lower 48, was targeted as a major goal by participating members of the 2008 Sitka Health Summit. Also as a result of the Heath Summit, the Sitka Farmers Market and the St. Peters Fellowship Farm were established in 2008 and are thriving in 2009. Those responsible for this work have incorporated as the Sitka Local Food Network (SLFN). It is the nonprofit SLFN that would build and operate the Sitka Community Greenhouse on land leased from the state.

Community Greenhouses

A Community Greenhouse is a facility designed to accommodate both botanical bounty and community interaction. It is by definition a greenhouse that produces plants for food, beauty and income. It is also a vibrant community center that hosts positive opportunities, educational and therapeutic activities. Daily tasks in the facility are organized by the director and volunteers earn credits for the hours they work. These credits can be redeemed for produce and plants. Produce and plants are also sold through local markets to help support the facility. Other sources of income will include tourism and therapeutic services.

Why Here and Why Now

Like other communities in Alaska, Sitka faces severe challenges related to food security and energy. At least 95% of our food supply arrives by barge. Rates of obesity and diabetes are at all time highs. The Sitka Community Greenhouse will grow healthy produce for local consumption, thus reducing dependence on imported food. It will also provide a working example of sustainable agriculture and appropriate technology that can be replicated in communities throughout Alaska. It is the intention of the SLFN to heat the greenhouse using renewable energy, such as biomass or an ocean-based heat exchanger. Building on the existing partnership between Mount Edgecumbe High School and the University of Alaska Southeast, the greenhouse will provide a venue for teaching horticulture, greenhouse construction and maintenance, horticultural therapy, and renewable energy development to students of both institutions. We anticipate the students will literally enjoy the fruits of their labor by way of the MEHS kitchen. Specifically, we are proposing to locate the facility on the approximately 8.5 acre section of bare land located between the SEARHC entrance road and the new Airport road. About half of this land lends itself to greenhouse and horticultural uses. To the best of our knowledge, MEHS has no future plans for this land.

Management

The SCG will be managed by professional staff, and volunteers will provide the majority of the physical labor. Meaningful opportunities will be provided to volunteers, including students, seniors from the Pioneer Home, patients from our healthcare facilities, including SEARHC, and their families, Youth Advocates, SAFV and SCPS clients and members of the general public. Educational and therapeutic activities will be provided daily, including demonstrations and

classes in gardening, cooking, and renewable energy. The volunteer base will consist mainly of seniors, youth and disabled individuals. It is anticipated that the SCG will attract many visitors, including tourists. Landscaping featuring edible, native and medicinal plants will enhance the area surrounding the greenhouse, beautifying the campus, eventually leading to the creation of a botanical park.

The Sitka Community Greenhouse will be operated by the non-profit Sitka Local Food Network. The SLFN will build, fund, operate and maintain the facility. It will pay all construction and operating expenses including utilities and insurance, which will indemnify MEHS and the State of Alaska from any liability.

Nuts and Bolts

The SLFN will raise the funds and community effort to build three 30' x 90' steel frame hoop houses with double wall polycarbonate glazing. These will sit atop three concrete slabs of the same dimensions. A gravel parking lot will be made near the entrance and an asphalt walkway will connect the parking lot to the greenhouses. An asphalt walkway, for wheelchair accessibility, will run from the parking lot to the greenhouses. Adjacent to the greenhouses will be a portable ATCO trailer that will house the ADA restroom and office. SLFN will ensure that licensed contractors are used to connect to the existing utilities, water and sewer on the site. A time-release Certificate of Deposit equal to the cost of dismantling the greenhouses and removing the concrete and asphalt improvements will be assigned MEHS prior to beginning work. We have designed the facility specifically for quick and inexpensive removal if necessary. We are requesting that this CD be timed to coincide with a lease in 5-year increments. Every five years the parties can evaluate the terms and conditions of the lease, including the amount of the CD.

What We Are Asking For

The Sitka Local Food Network is asking for the approval of the Sitka Community Greenhouse project on MEHS property from the directors of Mount Edgecombe High School. This will allow us to conduct a feasibility study for the project, including the construction specifics, the heating plant, operating costs, and develop a draft five year lease for the property. If results of the study are positive, we would like to enter into a lease agreement on the land, specifically the approximately 8.5 acre section of bare land located between the SEARHC entrance road and the new Airport road. This lease will allow us to begin the strategic planning and fundraising process for the Sitka Community Greenhouse.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Kerry MacLane
Board Chair
Sitka Local Food Network