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University Heights lot on Ashurst Road will be developed into rain garden

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By [Ed Wittenberg, Sun News](#)

UNIVERSITY HEIGHTS -- The city has accepted a \$10,000 grant from the Northeast Ohio Regional Sewer District to develop a vacant lot at 2603 Ashurst Road into a rain garden.

City Council voted, 6-1, Monday to authorize Mayor Susan Infeld to enter into an agreement with the sewer district to accept the grant.

Service Director Chris Vild said he applied for the grant because water was running off the city-owned property into the yards of neighbors. Installing a rain garden will address those concerns by managing stormwater runoff, he said.

"The service director and I met with neighbors on Ashurst to get input from them on what this development should be," Infeld said. "They were in favor of a garden, with plants and flowers.

"Green space can increase the property values of the homes around (this property)."

Councilman Frank Consolo cast the dissenting vote.

"We have no report or recommendation as to other options for the property, such as putting it up for sale," Consolo said. "We were on a narrow, one-sided track, and I don't think we represented the entire city (Monday)."

Infeld said she was not aware of anyone who wanted to purchase the property and maintained the best use of it is to develop it into a community garden.

"I believe the grant will improve the character of the neighborhood," she said.

The city took ownership of the long-neglected property in May 2009 after council accepted a quit-claim deed from Catherine Harbourt, the previous owner.

The house had fallen into disrepair, and council voted to have it torn down, since it was a safety hazard and a public nuisance. It was demolished last fall.

In May, a group of Ashurst Road neighbors suggested to council to convert the property into a "pocket park," indicating such a use would benefit the neighborhood and the city.

Linda Johnson, who lives across the street from the property, said Monday she was pleased the city received the grant and urged council to accept it.

"This is a great opportunity to help with further abatement of stormwater issues and to reinvent the city," she said.

But not all Ashurst residents favor such a use. Sheila Hubman said she would like to see the property turned back into a home, which she believes would benefit the city more than a rain garden.

"This is an opportunity to put it back on the market," she said. "I have no doubt it could sell and be an income-producing property."

Although the grant application indicated the project could cost as much as \$20,000, Infeld said she believes the \$10,000 grant will cover most of it.

"The only cost to the city will be a little bit of grass seed and the work effort of service department employees for planting," she said.

Vild said he budgeted \$10,000 for labor, materials and equipment, but he expects the service department will be able to provide most of that at no additional cost to the city.

"The neighbors have expressed an interest in participating and helping to maintain it," he said.

A design for the rain garden still needs to be developed, Vild said. A consultant, Jean Loria of CW Waterworks Inc., has been selected to help with the plan, which must be approved by the sewer district, he said.

"This sounds like a very exciting effort to me," Vice Mayor Frankie Goldberg said.

Vild said the project should start and be finished in October. The grant agreement requires that the rain garden be completely installed by Nov. 15.

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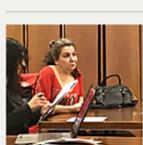
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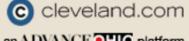


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