

Evanston considers land lease for farm

By Deborah Horan
Tribune staff reporter

Proponents of urban farming took another step toward bringing a small organic farm to Evanston this week, when the city's Human Services Committee voted to lease 3 acres from the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District for the project.

The proposed lease moves to the Evanston City Council this month, said Ald. Elizabeth Tisdahl (7th). The vacant, scrubby land near the canal that divides Evanston and Skokie is the best of two or three options for locating the farm, Tisdahl and urban farm proponents said.

"It's empty, it's totally unused, and nobody has been using it for years, so it is clearly available," said Debbie Hillman, a founder of the Evanston Food Policy Council who has been behind the creation of an urban farm.

The other possibilities include a part of a city-owned park known to residents as "Mt. Trashmore," and a private parcel.

Hillman and others say they envision a non-profit, self-sustaining farm that would grow organic produce year-round for sale to local groceries, soup kitchens, restaurants and farmers markets. The initiative, called the Talking Farm, also would feature classes on sustainable and organic farming practices.

The idea has been germinating among green activists in Evanston for more than a year, steadily gaining momentum and support among members of the City Council. Finding suitable land has held up the project.

The farm also would need money to buy "hoop houses"—a kind of greenhouse—that run between \$5,000 and \$10,000 each, as well as tools and seedlings and pay a full-time staff.

Frank Avila, one of nine commissioners at the Water Reclamation District, said he favored leasing the land for organic farming.

"It provides more nutrition than food that is non-organic," Avila said.

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