

For Clinton Township community garden, interest blooms

By Douglas B. Brill | The Express-Times

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File Photo

Harmen Vos

In his native Holland, Harmen Vos helped his dad run a community garden, sowing seeds that turned into fruits and vegetables for him and others to eat.

The **Clinton Township** councilman remembers the garden so fondly he now wants to create one closer to home.

Vos has proposed an organic community garden on a preserved half acre that the township owns. The land is the site of the former White Cloud plant nursery, behind Bundt Park and near Red School House Road and the township hall.

Township Mayor Kevin Cimei, however, is concerned plans for the garden are progressing before the township knows what it's getting into.

"I'm not saying it's a bad idea. I'm not saying it's a good idea. I'm just saying it's very premature right now," Cimei said. **"What he needs to do is ... come back to the council and show he's got some ideas that make sense and don't cost the taxpayers money."**

Vos broached the plan for the garden at a council meeting earlier this year. He said he plans to tell fellow council members more about it at a meeting Wednesday, and said he'd like to start planting in the spring.

"My father, God bless his soul, he devoted his whole life to a community garden in Holland. He taught children after school how to grow flowers and vegetables," Vos said. **"I've grown up in the garden. ... I think there's a great opportunity for children in our township."**

Vos sent e-mails seeking families who want to tend a plot, and said about 25 are interested so far. He said he envisions about 70 families paying an annual fee to plant and harvest fruits and vegetables. It would also provide produce for food banks.

The would-be-garden is surrounded by about 20 preserved township acres, allowing room for growth, Vos said.

Brent Kodat, 32, said he was about to rip shrubs out of his backyard to make room for a vegetable garden. Now he's among the first to request a plot.

Like Vos, he said he has fond memories of a community garden his family helped tend in Ohio.

"My daughter (Hannah, 6) just had a wonderful time going to help out and ultimately eating the fruits of her labor," he said. "A lot of people here have a lot of long hours and busy lives, so it's a good way to get time outside, get fresh air and meet your neighbors."

In response to Cimei's call for more information, Vos said he's taking guidance from directors of other community gardens, that he sent the council an information packet Thursday, and that he'll discuss the garden Wednesday. He also said a test showed the soil is fertile.

Vos, who has **campaigned twice to supplant Cimei as mayor**, dismissed Cimei's comments as political bitterness.

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