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The Rev. Tim Overton-Harris, Vermont Hills Methodist Church

Community garden gets a windfall of land

A church is donating part of a parking lot, doubling the popular garden's size

By TOM HALLMAN JR.
THE OREGONIAN

A Southwest Portland community garden with a two-year waiting list is about to double in size. The church

that owns the site has donated a portion of a parking lot next to the garden, and in late August volunteers will rip up the asphalt to reclaim the land.

"We have plenty of parking," said the Rev. Tim Overton-Harris of the Vermont Hills Methodist Church, 6053 S.W. 55th Drive. "This is a way to witness to the stewardship of the Earth, do something that is good for this community and respond to a need."

Leslie Pohl-Kosbau, community garden director for Portland Parks and Recreation, which organizes and manages 35 community gardens throughout the city, said the garden features 15 plots and the waiting list is up to 61 people. She said it can take as long as two years for a plot to become available. The expansion, she said, will add at least 12 more spaces and provide two raised garden beds.

"We have a lot of apartment and condo dwellers in the area, and people who live there don't have a place to garden," said Dave Sexton, who has had a plot at the site for more than 10 years. "Even folks with backyards have a problem in Southwest. There are so many trees in this section of town that it's hard to find a spot even in a big yard to have a garden. What makes this site

Please see GARDEN, Page E8

THE OREGONIAN • SATURDAY, AUGUST 14, 2010

Garden: 400-square-foot plot costs \$75 a year

Continued from Page E1

perfect is all the sun."

Sexton said each gardener is assigned a 400-square-foot lot. For that they pay the city a yearly \$75 fee. They also must agree to maintain the plot and the common pathways in the garden.

"People grow vegetables, fruit, flowers," he said. "It's an absolute honor system. There's no stealing, and people share ideas about the best way to grow things. I love having fresh things to eat. Plus, working in the garden is a great way to relax."

Lisa Mary Wichowski has lived in Southwest Portland for six years and has been unable to garden because she's always been in a condo or apartment. This summer, after a two-year wait, she finally got a plot in the community garden, which she describes as having her piece of Americana.

"This place is a little community," she said. "People are always exchanging things. I got seeds from someone here. The produce tastes so different when you grow your own. There's nothing like a tomato out of your own garden."

Aside from the food, though, coming to the garden gives Wichowski a chance to slow down.

"When I am at my plot, it is a time for me to be quiet and contemplative," she said. "It's an oasis. The city seems far away. It is so gratifying for the church to share this way."

When the church agreed to give part of the lot to the community garden, Depave, an all-volunteer Portland group, mobilized. The



In a matter of weeks these weeds, as well as the pavement, will be gone when a portion of a parking lot at a Southwest Portland church is torn up and added to the adjacent community garden, which will double in size. The garden has a waiting list of 61 people.

MICHAEL LLOYD
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She said Depave is funded through grants and relies on volunteers to do the work. The group will meet at the church site Aug. 28, Murphy said. The tear-out will begin at 9 a.m. and should be finished by 4 p.m.

"All ages are welcome on these projects," she said. "There's a demonstration before we do

anything. Then the lot will be divided into quadrants, with each quadrant having a leader that knows that they're doing. We provide all the tools and gear. All people have to do is wear closed-toe shoes, show up and get to work."

Overton-Harris said the church will see an undetermined reduc-

tion in its water bill when that portion of the lot is removed.

"The city bases part of the bill on the square feet of impervious surfaces," he said. "This will reduce that area. But it's really about doing something for the area."

Tom Hallman Jr.: 503 221-8224;
tomhallman@news.oregonian.com