

## **Montgomery County Council puts school gardens on the table**

Gardens considered at three school system sites

by Peggy McEwan | Staff Writer

Three sites owned by the county school system could one day host vegetable gardens, a move closer to the demands of advocates that want gardens on school property.

"I see this as the first step, an opportunity to work with MCPS. We can show them community gardens can be run according to guidelines," said Ursula Sabia Sukinik, community gardens coordinator for the Maryland National Capital Park and Planning Commission, who attended a hearing on the topic at the Montgomery County Council on Tuesday.

The three sites are: Spring Mill Center on Kemp Mill Road in Silver Spring, Rocking Horse Center on Macon Road in Rockville and Emory Grove Center on Washington Grove Lane in Gaithersburg.

Montgomery County Public Schools policy does not allow community vegetable gardens on property where there is a school. The school system has a Garden Work Group that is developing criteria for vegetable gardens, according to an Oct. 7 letter from school superintendant Jerry. D. Weast to the school board.

At Tuesday's council meeting, Wendy Friar, chairman of the Montgomery County Commission on Health, urged the school system to "remove the ban on MCPS vegetable gardens. The policy is inconsistent with promoting better health," she said.

Several council members spoke in support of the school-based gardens but there was no action on the issue.

"We are delighted that the council is having this hearing. It is a positive step in bringing attention to this issue. We are hoping they will do what they can to persuade the school board to deal with this matter and lift this ban," Gordon Clark, project director of Montgomery Victory Gardens, said.

Meanwhile, the Montgomery County Department of Parks has announced a schedule of public hearings on the three community gardens they hope to open on school system property next spring.

The park department's garden meetings are scheduled for:

Thursday, Oct. 21, 7-8:30 p.m., Spring Mill Center, 11721 Kemp Mill Road, Silver Spring.

Monday, Nov. 1, 7-8:30 p.m., Rocking Horse Center, 4910 Macon Road, Rockville.

Thursday, Nov. 4, 7-8:30 p.m. at Emory Grove Center, 18100 Washington Grove Lane, Gaithersburg.