

Proposal for the Washoe County Regional Parks and Open Space Commissioners

Regarding Partnership with Polygrarian Institute

March 7, 2017

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Executive Summary

The Polygrarian Institute is requesting to work with Washoe County Regional Parks and Open Space to lease a portion of the Betsy Caughlin Donnelley Park. We are open to other ideas of locations in Washoe County, i.e. Anderson Park for example, but potential site needs include enough water access and availability for small scale farming, arable land, and permission for basic temporary infrastructure developments like fencing and storage shed(s). Our goal in this proposal is to introduce our request to partner with Washoe County Regional Parks and Open Space to lease approximately five acres (initial request) of park land with water accessibility for a public demonstration and local food production farm.

Who is the Polygrarian Institute?

The Polygrarian Institute (PI) is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization with a vision to grow the next generation of conscientious farmers, innovative educators, and sensible leaders who will collectively push the pendulum of local food production in a new direction. Through intensive training and mentorship programs at our working demonstration farm, students will experience the interconnectedness of food systems and develop contemporary methods to deploy effective change in our community.

Our mission is *cultivating community based food systems through education, research, & civic engagement.*

The Polygrarian Institute was founded in 2016 by former Urban Roots Executive Director, Jeff Bryant. Jeff's first project for the Polygrarian Institute was a partnership with the University of Nevada, Reno on the High Desert Hops Project. This collaboration aimed to introduce hops as a viable crop for farmers in the high desert while working with area brewers who are excited for a way to get involved with the local food movement. The University will continue to develop this program while the Polygrarian Institute is turning its attention to establishing a public-friendly demonstration farm that serves the Truckee Meadows community through numerous multi-faceted phases.

Our organization is governed by an enthusiastic Board of Directors comprised of some of our area's most vocal advocates for sustainable local food systems including Jeff Bryant, Michelle Cobb, and Chef Mark Estee, owner of Liberty Food & Wine Exchange in downtown Reno. We plan to grow our board to five members by the end of 2017. Our operational team consists of a devoted collective of local food and community health promoters that have demonstrated experience in the areas of small business management, small scale commercial farming, education, nutrition, and fundraising.

Phase 1

For the 2017 growing season we anticipate creating our basic operational infrastructure in preparation for expanding our community engagement in subsequent seasons. During the first phase, we will be procuring private foundation funding and pursuing grant opportunities to support a three acre farming operation that includes a small paid staff (executive director, farm manager, administrative assistants, "polygrarians").

While we are motivated to engage with the public on multiple levels, our farm will differ from a traditional community garden in some important ways. The production area will be open to visitors only during designated hours. Paid staff will be responsible for caring for the acreage and any livestock in this first season. Phase one will include structured community engagement activities as described in the "Parks Partnership" section below.

Phase 2

The Polygrarian Institute will expand beginning in the 2018 growing season by adding opportunities for formal volunteer engagement such as AmeriCorps partnerships and University of Nevada internships and serve as a research setting for graduate students. We will also engage targeted youth populations through educational and vocational experiences directly on the farm.

Phase 3

Our Phase 3 will be marked by the implementation of a 2-year intensive training and mentorship program to prepare future farmers and advocates for sustainable food system change. In this phase, we will also begin implementing our vision of the “Polyfarm” project. The Polyfarm is a collaborative partnership with homeowners and businesses utilizing small plots of land that PI will coordinate to grow produce that is then aggregated to feed our institutional members, community partners, and businesses via a Community Supported Agriculture model.

Parks Partnership

Our focus during the next two growing seasons (2017-2018) will be entirely on developing our demonstration farm’s infrastructure, production, and public engagement. Our intention is that in later phases we can expand to additional locations within the Washoe County Regional Parks and Open Space system as well as through partnerships with private landowners with the goal of operating enough land in production to offer immersive hands-on internships for the next generation of Northern Nevada’s urban farmers.

Phase 1

The number one priority in our first phase (2017 growing season) is ensuring we build strong relationships with our Key Partners: Washoe County Regional Parks and Open Space, Renown Health, and other small businesses such as Fairly Square. We will focus on working with the County on various needs identified and outlined in more detail below as well as developing a prescription food program in partnership with Renown Health. We have a working relationship with Fairly Square, a locally owned business, that has capacity to help us create and implement the needed infrastructure to start a productive demonstration farm while simultaneously offering educational workshops on necessary trade skills suitable for the urban farmer.

In the first phase, we will also look to partner with other organizations involved in the local food scene such as Nevada Grown and Great Basin Community Food Co-op, as well as continue to strengthen our established relationships with the Nevada Department of Agriculture and Washoe County’s Food Policy Council.

For public engagement we will operate a consistently scheduled farm stand where we will have a platform to provide information about opportunities for community involvement and support. We currently sell PI memberships that will include access to a produce share from the farm (members will not be ‘gardening’ on the farm), discounts off workshops fees, hot topics and tips in our newsletters, and invitations to open farm days and other public outreach events. We will also invite our public members to attend our infrastructure building days for “barn raising” style workshops that will teach construction of basic urban farm needs as well as harvest celebration and other community gathering events.

Our intention is to utilize the existing park systems to the community’s benefit by increasing connectivity of our local food system. The Polygrarian Institute aspires to maximize local food production and access, develop and maintain a research and knowledge bank, and last but not least, cultivate, educate, and celebrate (borrowed

from Truckee's Demonstration Garden's slogan) future stewards of the land to ensure Nevada's Agricultural heritage has a future.

Phase 2

Phase two key partnerships involve further investment in educational collaboration with institutions and community organizations such as the University of Nevada, Reno or other Nevada System of Higher Education Institutions (UNCE, CABNR, High Desert Farming Initiative, and the Community College of Western Nevada); as well as organizations that specifically serve vulnerable youth populations such as the Eddy House or the Truckee Meadows Boys and Girls Club. We will create and implement a curriculum for our next generation of farmers and offer field study credit through local universities as well as partner with community organizations to offer content as an immersive internship for vulnerable youth. Our working high density, small scale farm will serve as a resource for area growers to ask questions, share learnings, and consult on troubleshooting. We will continue to nurture relationships with regional partners, such as University of California at Santa Cruz, to offer the best available farmer incubator curriculum.

Services to Park Systems

The Polygrarian Institute will contribute to the stewardship of our local community by working with Washoe County Parks staff to expand sustainability initiatives. Specifically, the Polygrarian Institute proposes to combine public engagement with practical hands-on horticultural work by assisting with the care of existing park assets such as the apple orchard and grapevines at Bartley Ranch Regional Park. PI envisions composting services for farm waste, annual seedling production for public sale and for the parks, and weed abatement in county parks through innovative animal husbandry projects (e.g. goats and sheep) managed by PI students and staff. All of these activities will honor Nevada's traditional ranching and agricultural activities and serve as a vibrant connection to our state's heritage.

Phase 1

During our first season in partnership with local parks, PI will begin actively cultivating existing park assets as identified by park staff (e.g. the orchard at Bartley Ranch Regional Park). Any fruit harvested from these efforts will be shared through community engagement events such as harvest celebrations or food preservation workshops. PI will also conduct a pilot program during Phase 1 to compost all of the farm waste at our site. Green waste may be shared with park chickens in partnership with the Nevada Farms and Families Area of Rancho San Rafael Regional Park.

Phase 2

Next summer, PI will grow annual seedlings for a public seedling sale and for planting in our area parks. The emphasis will be on plants that are well adapted to our climate and that have edible or medicinal parts or plants that provide habitat for Nevada's native pollinators. Also during this phase, a small herd of grazing animals (sheep or goats) will be reared and managed by PI staff as a solution for weed abatement in County parks and open space.

Phase 3

PI will expand the demonstration farm model on a smaller scale at additional public and private lands to serve as incubator projects for students. These satellite farms, or “Polyfarms,” will expand public engagement by putting food production in more of our neighborhoods, sparking conversations and inspiring our communities to enjoy our open spaces.

Farming Opportunities

In preparation for this proposal, PI volunteers have prepared a preliminary farm plan (see below). If this proposal is accepted, PI will begin with a complete site analysis followed by a more detailed farm design. Several landscape zones will be developed to support different types of crop production and will integrate animal husbandry, fruit trees, perennials, composting, and high tunnel projects implemented in phases over the next five years.

Phase 1

During phase one, PI will begin by assessing the site including soil analysis, irrigation planning, and farm design. We will put three acres of land into high density vegetable production. Preparation of this acreage includes tilling the soil, installing irrigation, and seeding crops. We will prepare and plant in one-acre segments several weeks apart in order to stagger harvests. We will install a lockable toolshed to store needed materials onsite. In the fall in anticipation of planting over-wintering crops, PI will begin adding high tunnels based on budget and production needs. During the planning phase, PI will develop design layouts for perennial crop systems based on site flow, water availability, production needs, and feedback from Washoe County Regional Parks and Open Space. Once sites and layouts have been selected, we will begin site preparation for planting perennial crop systems.

Phase 2

In subsequent seasons, acreage under production will be increased to meet the needs of farm budgets and programs. We anticipate an addition of 1- 3 acres of high density vegetable production during phase two. Appropriate perennial crop systems will be planted and managed both in continuing development of the phase one area and on additional acreage. We will add an animal husbandry program focused on raising animals (such as goats or sheep) that can be used in weed abatement programs for the County.

Phase 3

PI intends to expand the farm model to areas in addition to the flagship demonstration farm. This will include additional micro-farms at supplementary park locations and incubator farms for PI interns on private property.

Educational Opportunities

Phase 1

Open invitation and calendarized dates will be available to the community for work days. Ideas include but are not limited to helping and learning how to build irrigation systems, creating semi-permanent structures on the property such as a tool shed, goat/sheep shelter, covered wash station, compost bins, cold storage rooms and hoop houses. As we develop our curriculum for the following summer, we will adjust according to trial and error and feedback from parties involved.

Phase 2

PI staff will offer workshops for tree trimming and grape pruning at the Bartley Ranch Regional Park over the winter and early spring months. We will also offer a workshop series that focuses on seed-to-soil concepts: an ongoing class that follows the seed through the process of germination to first harvest. Our farmer incubator program will include but is not limited to animal husbandry, Nevada agricultural traditions, soil amendment, small engine mechanics, annual and perennial crop production, season extension, farm sales and marketing.

Phase 3

PI will continue to push the pendulum of sustainable, innovative food-systems research and philosophy in a new direction. Applied science projects, feasibility and asset mapping, and micro-economic impact studies will all aid in setting the direction of PI and lead to real, tangible impacts in our region. PI will work with universities, state and federal institutions, and local municipalities to carry out its research initiative opportunities and pursue projects that will open up National Science Foundation funding for projects that improve high desert farming strategies. Especially in areas where the University of Nevada, Reno doesn't have the capacity, PI can take the lead in creating research opportunities for graduate students and faculty at UNR and the Desert Research Institute.

Funding Sources

Funding for the Polygrarian Institute will come from a diverse stream of sources including private foundations, public grants, revenue from farm activities (including fee-for-service programs such as workshops and classes and a nominal tuition fee for the farmer incubator program), and individual contributions through memberships. Any profits generated by PI activities will be invested back into its programming or into other community support endeavors that are aligned with PI's mission.

Phase 1

Our immediate focus will be to implement a pilot prescription food program in partnership with Renown Health. PI will dedicate a portion of our farm production to distribution to Renown patients with a prescription from a care provider. Renown is interested in supporting local food systems that can provide their patients with access to fresh, healthy foods. We have also approached the Community Foundation of Western Nevada for funding opportunities and this foundation is excited to learn of our growing potential and community involvement. Additionally, we have identified several public grants from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the Nevada Department of Agriculture, and the Corporation for National and Community Service that are in alignment with programs addressed by our proposal. Finally, we will pursue a small amount of revenue from farm activities such as an onsite food stand memberships and sales to local restaurants or markets.

Phase 2

Grant and foundation funding will continue to be an important revenue stream throughout the life of PI. However, we expect that revenue from farm production will increase over time as we have more acreage in production. In phase two, we will work to bring some of our production to market by expanding our seedlings, sales to local restaurants and markets, and selling directly to the public through memberships and community partners.

Phase 3

Fee-for-service programming will be added as an additional revenue source in phase three. Through an intensive tuition-based two-year certification program (accredited through Western Nevada Community College or the University of Nevada, Reno), PI students will explore food systems, develop hands on farming skills and knowledge, and learn to navigate local communities to create effective change. The first year of this program will focus on introducing students to food systems and agro-philosophies while gaining hands-on farming experience. Students will develop their own manifesto on how to best engage their food system and develop a business plan accordingly. In the second year, under the guidance and umbrella of PI, students will implement their business plan, hone their leadership skills, and mentor first year students in the program. PI will supply the land necessary within our foodshed for students to implement their agribusiness theory into action.

Contact the Polygrarian Institute at info@polygrarianinstitute.org or visit us on the web at www.polygrarianinstitute.org

Polygrarian Institute Organizational Chart

