



MARK TUMOLO

Growing on Borrowed Time

Veggies violate UO policy.

Lettuce, beets, eggplant, artichokes and rhubarb are among a few of the violators of newly formed UO policy. This was the startling news delivered to UO student/employee, east campus housing resident and garden enthusiast John Boosinger in mid-April.

Boosinger, 27, a June graduate of the UO architecture school, has a 2-1/2-year-old garden in his front yard. East campus maintenance policy, adopted April 8, stipulates that vegetable gardening is only permitted in the back yard. (See *EW* 5/15 for initial story). East campus properties are located between East 15th and 19th avenues and Agate and Villard Streets. The university provides water and landscape maintenance to properties in the area.

"I am using water and land in a responsible, healthy, efficient, and beautiful way, and I believe the university should support my efforts instead of literally trying to destroy them," Boosinger wrote in an e-mail to the university after being told he had until May 1 to uproot his garden.

The potential for a front-yard garden was key in Boosinger's decision to rent the paint-blistered house on Villard Street. The garden is the center of activity for Boosinger, his wife and their three children, ages 1, 5 and 7. Bicycles and garden tools are scattered among the perennials, herbs and vegetables that make up the 28-by-40-foot plot.

UO Planning Associate Christine Thompson said although there have been no direct complaints about Boosinger's garden, property owners in the adjoining Fairmount neighborhood have complained about the "perceived lack of maintenance" along the Villard edge.

In an e-mail addressed to the Office of University Planning, one Fairmount resident said, "Much of the angst ... stems from the slow deterioration of the neighborhood while under UO management."

In another letter, a neighbor referred to "the ghetto-type approach in the wreckage of the older neighborhood that once existed."

Now, new wording in the university's family-housing rental agreement specifically disallows front-yard gardening. Restrictions against front porch and front lawn storage and/or display of yard art, patio furniture, bicycles, child play toys, outdoor grills, bird feeders, and flower pots, to name but a few, are also included in the agreement.

"The new rental agreement language is not unusual language," UO Housing Director Mike Eyster says. "Lots of real estate management organizations use similar language to maintain the quality of appearance of their facilities."

"The objective, generally, is to try to make the exteriors look more like owner-occupied homes," adds Eyster.

In Boosinger's garden, the red-leaf lettuce now looks withered, the beets have bolted, and thirsty strawberry runners compete for space with dandelions and crab grass. Trays of shriveled lettuce, tomato and pepper starts sit at the garden's edge.

"Our garden is not looking like it usually does," says Boosinger. "This whole issue has affected our garden this year a lot."

Generally, the patch includes numerous tomato plants, melons, squash, peppers, herbs, kale, collards, peas and carrots. But Boosinger was hesitant to engage in spring planting after receiving notification that university staff would restore the front-yard area to lawn on May 1 if he failed to do so.

A day or two before the May Day deadline, Boosinger contacted the Office of Student Advocacy, as well as an attorney. Both advised that he stood on firm legal ground in his refusal to comply. Boosinger advised the university that it risked legal action if it proceeded to unearth his garden. Within hours, university staff advised that he would be allowed to complete the growing season but would be expected to remove his garden in September.

Boosinger perceives his garden as a neighborly endeavor. During the summer when he has surplus, he gives food away.

"It has encouraged a lot of play with other children and discussion with other neighbors and a lot of positive feedback," he says. Some neighbors have told him they've even re-routed their evening walks because they enjoy walking by his garden.

Although he's been accepted to graduate school, Boosinger has chosen not to attend. Come late July, Boosinger and family will leave Eugene.

"If I were staying in family housing, I feel strongly enough that I would take them to court for myself and for all future residents to have the new (rental agreement) wording removed," Boosinger says. "It should not be within (the UO's) jurisdiction to decide which species of plants are acceptable for me to grow in the dirt in the front of my home with my water." **ew**

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