Tribal Community Garden Plan

Sitka Tribe of Alaska

Kaɣaaní Commission & Resource Protection Department

July 7, 2025

Background

In 1995 Sitka Tribe of Alaska (STA) established its Traditional Foods Program (TFP) within the Resource Protection Department to distribute subsistence-harvested traditional foods to Tribal elders and citizens. In 2016 STA began partnering with the Sitka Ranger District of the USDA Forest Service to grow Tlingit potatoes for distribution through the TFP. Our Tlingit potato production has sparked regional interest in this heirloom crop. Like many Northwest Coast Indigenous groups, Tlingit people practiced agriculture long before European arrival. Reawakening traditional gardening practices and enhancing Native representation in local food production will benefit our Tribal community and the local food production scene, contributing to stronger food sovereignty efforts. While STA distributes a minimum of 10,000 pounds of traditional foods annually, it still falls short of meeting the food needs of its Tribal citizens.

Food costs in Sitka are among the highest in the nation—60% higher than Portland, Oregon, and 30.1% higher than Anchorage, Alaska, according to the 2024 Sitka Community Food Assessment (SCFA). Reliance on imported foods shipped by boat or plane makes fresh, healthy produce costly, often poor in quality, and vulnerable to supply disruptions. At the same time, there are major barriers to growing food locally. The 2024 SCFA identified lack of gardening space, knowledge, time, and affordability as key reasons Sitkans do not garden. Additionally, Sitka's only previous community garden closed in 2016, leaving citizens without accessible shared growing spaces. Although a new community garden has been moving forward led by non-profits Transition Sitka and Sitka Local Foods Network, there remains a critical need to establish Tribally-led, culturally grounded food sovereignty initiatives.

The construction of a Tribal Community Garden in Sitka will supplement STA's traditional foods program with locally grown produce and supply a limited number of raised beds for Tribal citizens to garden their own vegetables. While Sheet'ká has an abundance of native plant foods harvestable as subsistence, we recognize that humans are not the first in line. If every resident of Sheet'ká were to harvest their fruit and vegetable needs from the land accessible by our road system, it would put a massive stress on our local ecosystem.

To build food security and self-sufficiency, Sitka Tribe of Alaska proposes the construction of a Tribal Community Garden. In partnership with the Baranof Island Housing Authority (BIHA), the local Tribally Designated Housing Entity, the Sitka Tribe of Alaska has identified a plot of land that is accessible by road, within walking distance of many Tribal households, and located in an open area where sunlight is unobstructed, making it ideal for gardening in our remote and forested town.

The Sitka Tribe of Alaska is a sub-recipient of USDA Southeast Alaska Sustainability Strategy (SASS) funding which will cover the development of the plan and site selection. Additional funding must be acquired to implement the plan: construction, operation, and maintenance of the garden. A land-use agreement and/or MOA with BIHA will need to be in place for STA to be eligible for most funding sources.

Goals

- Enhance Tribal food security: the Tribal Garden will create an area to grow larger quantities of traditionally cultivated plants (such as the Tlingit potato) and hardy vegetables to supplement the TFP. The garden will also strengthen Tribal citizens' ability to access local foods on their own by providing them with the space and assistance needed to grow vegetables.
- Increase community health: the garden will provide fresh, nutritious local foods and medicines to Tribal elders and citizens. Skills gained in the garden will help to reduce grocery bills and encourage healthy eating.
- Foster space for learning and connection: The Tribal Garden will be an excellent educational and cultural space year-round. Community members of all ages and experience will have the chance to be involved in garden tending, plant teachings, observational skills, food processing, and explore connection to lands and food systems.

Site Location

Land availability is a significant issue in Sitka, where only 14 miles of road are accessible, and steep mountainsides make expansion difficult. Furthermore, gardening in Southeast Alaska comes with its own challenges due to our poor soil quality and high rainfall. These issues complicate the expansion of local food-growing efforts, and a Tribal Community Garden aims to remove at least some of the barriers.

In site scouting, staff considered three criteria to select potential locations for the Tribal Community Garden: 1) Land ownership and ability to partner on the project, 2) site quality and ease of development, and 3) accessibility to Tribal households. A draft sketch is provided below.

Figure 1. Proposed STA Tribal garden site; NE Andrew Hope Street, 1-acre to be developed in multiple phases over time.

Land Ownership

Staff considered municipal, federal, and BIHA lands as possible site locations. Staff ruled out City property due to the available land requiring extensive development that would be cost prohibitive. The City is also already supporting a Community Garden project at Jarvis Street led by Transition Sitka and the Sitka Local Foods Network. It is unlikely that the city would provide land for another community garden. Federal lands create their own challenges. To place the garden on federal lands would require the Tribe to obtain a long-term special use permit along with the likelihood of being required to vet the permit through the NEPA process. It was also observed that the available federal lands are remote and would likely require extensive and costly development.

Baranof Island Housing Authority (BIHA) is one of the few major landowners of undeveloped and accessible property on the Sitka road system. After investigating sites through digital maps and field visits, STA staff presented the site above (Figure 1.) as a top contender for Tribal Community Garden development to the BIHA Board of Commissioners. The site selection and project proposal were well received. Staff at both BIHA and STA have continued to collaborate on bringing the Tribal Community Garden to life as partners. Please see Appendix A for BIHA's Letter of Support for Sitka Tribal Community Garden Project.

Site Quality

STA staff evaluated several locations with a future community garden in mind. Ideal qualities included even, unforested terrain; ample exposure to sunlight; room to expand over time; and overall ease of construction. Approximately 1-acre of land was sought for the purpose of expanding infrastructure over time, and accommodating requirements such as parking, processing, and storage in addition to gardening space. Once again, BIHA's Indian River housing area included many of these qualities—open, undeveloped space with unblocked sunlight and access to road and water.

Accessibility and Service Area

Since the goals of the Tribal Community Garden aim to improve food security, health, and skills of Sitka Tribal citizens, STA staff favored potential sites which were central in location, accessible for all ages, and in close proximity to Tribal households. BIHA's Indian River housing area achieved these goals because of its high Tribal citizen occupancy and convenient location less than a 10 minute drive from RPD offices.

Garden Infrastructure

STA envisions a simple garden with potential to expand in subsequent phases. Ideally, the garden will start with:

- A cleared, filled, and leveled platform to build upon, including room for on-site parking
- Fifty 4' x 12' raised garden beds
    - ≥ 20 managed by the STA Traditional Foods Program to grow and distribute crops to Tribal elders and citizens in need
    - ≤ 5 dedicated to the Sitka Native Education Program for youth programming and supplying food for gifts and snacks
    - 25 available to Tribal citizens at no cost, through an application process
- Chain-link and electric fences due to high bear activity in the area
- Onsite water storage tanks and a small number of solar panels and battery banks that would be used to power the electric fence and a water pump system/wash station
- A small shed for gardening supplies to be stored
- Worktables and a fire pit for traditional foods preparation and community gatherings to support the garden's mission of fostering a culturally centered learning environment

STA and BIHA will work together to utilize as many local resources as possible in garden construction. For example, conversations have been had about obtaining rock fill and timber from BIHA's quarry for a lower cost. Community gardens across the region have been creative in filling raised beds with local organic materials as opposed to importing large amounts of soil; Sitka Tribe will consult with other Tribes and community gardeners to seek out resourceful options throughout construction.

Though compost will be an essential part of creating fertile soil in the raised beds, there will be no composting on-site to avoid further unwanted interest from animals.

After several years of successful management, the garden could expand to include a greenhouse or high tunnel to extend the growing season, a small orchard, and/or a food forest of native plants.

Garden Support

As funding and availability allows, RPD will seek opportunities for staff to grow their gardening knowledge. Knowledge gained will be shared back into the community through workshops, classes, events, and informal advising on-site. STA will encourage engagement with local and regional gardeners, especially Tribal garden experts as the program begins and expands.

Funding Needs

Approximate minimum project costs below. Additional line items may be added to better suit specific funding opportunities and/or cross-departmental priorities. As project lead, the Kayaaní Commission Coordinator will work with the RPD Director and Grants Specialist to seek implementation funding.

Implementation Needs	Cost estimate (2 year project):
Personnel	
Kayaaní Commission Coordinator (20% time; $26.62/hr; 6% increase year 2) - wages	$21,357.04
Kayaaní Commission Coordinator - fringe	$11,443.25
Contracts	
Garden site design	$20,000
Garden site development (clear, fill, gravel, fencing)	$150,000.00
Direct Costs	
Office supplies	$2,000.00
Garden tools (shovels, rakes, gloves, etc.)	$1,000.00
Seeds, starts, row labels	$1,500.00
Electric fencing (energizer, wire, posts, signage, etc.)	$3,000.00
Picnic/worktables (x2)	$2,000.00
Fire pit	$500.00
Tool shed	$1,000.00
Raised garden bed supplies (lumber, hardware, fabric, etc.)	$20,000.00
Soil and sand for garden beds	$30,000.00
Indirect Costs	
STA Indirect Rate (excluding contracting): 43.13%	$40,456.07
Grand Total	$304,256.36

Next Steps

Task	Group responsible	Timeline
Phase 1: Planning		**2025**
Secure garden site (MOA, long term lease, etc.)	STA, BIHA	In progress
Seek funding for implementation	STA	In progress
Phase 2: Preparation, Design, and Construction		**2025-2026**
Apply for applicable permits (e.g. USACE)	BIHA	Mid 2025
Open RFP for site design	STA, BIHA	Late 2025
Open RFP for site construction	STA, BIHA	Early 2026
Purchase garden materials (lumber, soil, fencing, supplies, etc.)	STA	Early 2026
Clear, level, and fill the site	Contractor	Mid 2026
Install garden infrastructure	STA, Contractor	Mid 2026
Develop application and garden use policy for Tribal citizens	STA	Mid 2026
Phase 3: Operation		**2026-2027**
Prepare garden beds for use in Spring	STA, Volunteers	Late 2026
Review and approve Tribal citizen gardening applications	STA	Late 2026
Purchase seeds to plant, tend, and harvest	STA, Volunteers	Early 2027
Offer educational opportunities and community events at the garden	STA, BIHA, Volunteers	2027 (year-long)
Phase 4: Expansion		**2027 and beyond**
Pursue funding to expand garden (e.g. high tunnel, greenhouse, orchard, food forest, etc.)	STA	Mid 2027

Appendix A

Baranof Island Housing Authority
245 Katlian Street
Sitka, AK 99835
(907) 747-5088

April 30, 2025

Subject: Letter of Support for Sitka Tribal Community Garden Project - Site Control

To Whom It May Concern,

Baranof Island Housing Authority (BIHA) is pleased to partner with Sitka Tribe of Alaska (STA) to support the development of their proposed Tribal Community Garden project.

At a BIHA Board of Commissioners (BOC) meeting held on February 5, 2025, BIHA's board approved a motion to approve STA's Tribal Community Garden project proposal concept and directed BIHA's Executive Director to collaborate with STA staff to further investigate project feasibility and identify a suitable site for a future garden project on BIHA land.

Since this time, both BIHA and STA have jointly identified an undeveloped 1.0 acre parcel located at the terminus (cul-de-sac) of Andrew Hope Street in Sitka, Alaska. A Location Map is attached with this Letter of Support. This property is currently owned free and clear by BIHA and has been reserved for the future development of STA's Tribal Community Garden project.

Once project funding has been secured, BIHA will work with STA staff to fully vet this site for feasibility and location suitability. It is BIHA's intent to then formalize an agreement via an MOA (or similar) and eventually a very affordable long-term lease that allows STA to utilize the preferred BIHA-owned site for development and long-term use as a Tribal Community Garden.

BIHA is dedicated to providing affordable housing for Sitka's Tribal Citizens. We believe that a community garden will significantly enhance food sovereignty and help our community manage the increasing costs of produce in Sitka, Alaska, while promoting outdoor activities and healthy living for STA Tribal Citizens.

CM Richter

Cliff Richter
Executive Director

Attachments: Location Map #1 dated 4/30/25

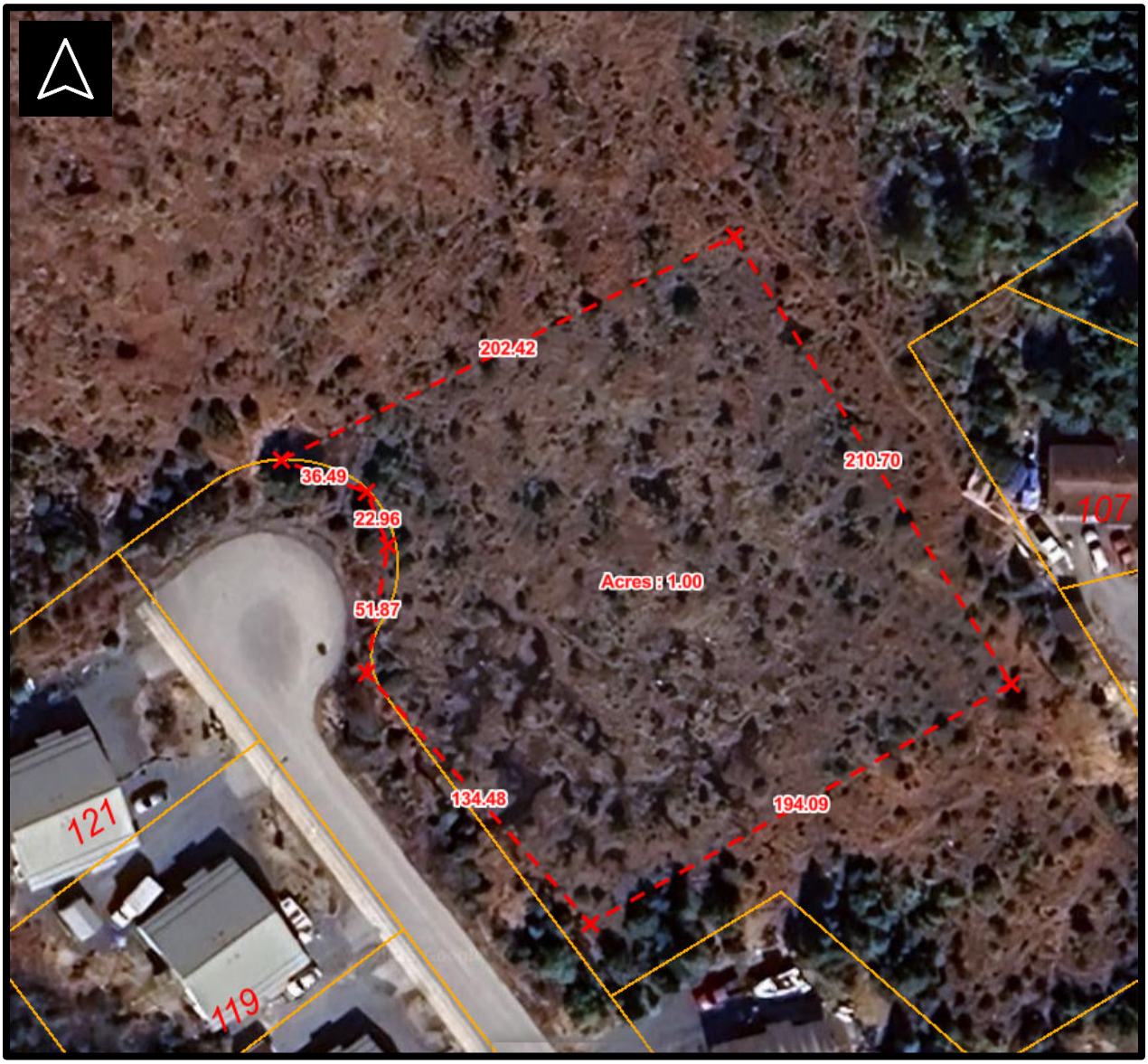
LOCATION MAP #1:

STA Sitka Tribal Community Garden – Proposed Site

Legal Description: 1.0 acre portion of Lot 5C, U.S. Survey 407B, Sitka Recording District, First Judicial District, State of Alaska

Physical Address: Located in the vicinity of 121 Andrew Hope Street in Sitka, Alaska

Note: The property is presently owned free and clear by Baranof Island Housing Authority.



Prepared 4/30/2025