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## Got kelp? City needs \$100,000 for organic parks

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By [Jim Haug](#) Herald staff writer

A consultant has prescribed spraying soy and kelp powder, a liquid form of molasses, and humic acid at nine city parks as part of a pilot organic management program that could begin as early as this spring, provided the city can find \$100,000.

The program is intended to be cost-neutral, but to be able to spread the molasses and kelp powder, the city would have to make a one-time expenditure of \$100,000 for the equipment, such as a motorized sprayer with an attached 300-gallon tank.

Scott Sallee, owner of Scott's Pro Lawn Care, criticized the expenses during a presentation for the public at the Community Recreation Center on Tuesday morning. Parks and Recreation Director Cathy Metz did not dispute his cost comparisons.

"According to my quick calculations, it just seems the cost of the capital casts and the consultant's fee (\$36,000) for the nine parks is going to be approximately four to five times as much as what it costs to do all the parks for a whole season," said Sallee, who also criticized organic parks treatments in other parts of North America as ineffective.

To spend the \$100,000, the City Council would have to approve a special appropriation during a regular meeting, but Councilor Christina Rinderle suggested during a study session Tuesday that the money could be raised privately.

City Manager Ron LeBlanc called it a "molasses drive."

Rinderle predicted there would be much popular support because so many supporters of organic land management had packed city meetings last fall, saying they wanted to protect their children from the perceived dangers of synthetic pesticides.

As part of compromise with the city, organic supporters withdrew a ballot initiative to require organic land practices when the council appropriated \$36,000 to hire a consultant to design a management program.

The consultant, Chip Osborne of Osborne Organics, said Durango would not be the first city to rely on private donations to start an organic program.

A youth sports group in his home city of Marblehead, Mass., raised money for organic-care equipment because of Marblehead's tight budget.

Katrina Blair, an organizer with Organically Managed Parks Durango, said she was supportive of a fundraising effort.

Time is critical, Osborne said, because Durango would have “limited windows of opportunity” within the natural growing season to start an organic program. Organic treatments are not as flexible or “forgiving” as more conventional, synthetic treatments.

Metz is asking for patience of the youth baseball and soccer leagues in setting aside time, sometimes as much as 72 hours, for an organic application at a playing field.

Metz said the city would work around their schedules as best it could.

Playing fields at Riverview Elementary School and Folsom Park are part of the pilot program as well as Riverfront, Iris, Fanto, Schneider, Brookside, Pioneer and Needham parks.

Osborne described his organic plan as a systematic approach that “solves problems instead of treating symptoms” by improving the health of the soil.

Over time, the soil should naturally produce more nitrogen and reduce the need for fertilizer.

Osborne also praised the city for the “tremendous” condition of its city parks.

“Most cities cannot say that,” he said.

As part of his research, Osborne said he could find only small, incremental differences between the quality of soil samples from Riverview, a conventional-treated park, and Pioneer, a park that already has been treated organically.

It’s probably because the city does not regularly use fungicide or insecticides, which are the harshest pesticides on the environment, Osborne said. Herbicide, which is part of the annual schedule, is not as harsh as the other kinds of pesticides.

Osborne also promised that the city would not see a decline in park conditions.

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