

No row to hoe

By **STEPHEN BISSET**

A GROUP of Warners Bay gardeners is at risk of losing more than \$52,000 in State Government funding because Lake Macquarie Council has yet to approve a site for the group's proposed community garden.

Convenor of the Warners Bay community garden group Ben Henley said despite attracting 320 members and \$52,800 in funding under the State Government's community builders program, the council had yet to approve the proposed site at Bunya Park, Eleebana.

"Essentially there has been a lack of defined process from the council and we're waiting for them to finalise the process by which they assess the suitability for community gardens," he said.

A condition of the funding is that at least stage one of the project must begin within three months of the agreement being signed. This gives the group only until August 24 to get the project up and running.

The council voted eight to four in May to defer the project following some opposition from residents and the local Landcare group which was concerned about the aesthetics of the garden and the potential risk of weed and nutrient runoff in surrounding areas.

A council spokesman said officers were in the process of reassessing how they evaluate sites earmarked for community gardens.

"The new procedure will be used to evaluate proposed community gardens where they are intended for community land,"

the spokesman said.

"Bunya Park will be one of many sites assessed for suitability for a community garden."

Mr Henley said despite the group's frustrations, it was still willing to work with both the council and the community to ensure a positive outcome for all concerned.

"A lot of time and effort has gone into developing a plan to protect the local environment from things like nutrient runoff and the garden's plan has been designed by a landscape architect," Mr Henley said.

"The whole idea of a community garden is that it is supposed to benefit the whole community, and everyone from children to older people can benefit from this," he said.

"While we are a little bit disappointed with the council and the time it has taken, we are still more than willing to work together with both the council and everybody in the community to get the garden up and running."



FUNDING WOES: From left, Warners Bay community gardeners group members Shelly Wilson, Carmen Eastlake, Stephen Taylor, Mark Henley and Ben Henley.

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