



STEELE COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS WORK SESSION AGENDA

Administration Center - 630 Florence Avenue – Owatonna, MN 55060

*Steele County's Mission:
Driven to deliver quality services in a respectful and fiscally responsible way.*

TUESDAY, JUNE 10, 2025 at 4:00 PM
County Boardroom, Steele County Administration Center

Agenda

1. Call to Order

Presentations

2. Teen Lodge
Julie Summy, Co-Founder
3. Master Gardner Presentation
Lorrie Rugg, Master Gardner Coordinator
Lisa Dierks, Regional Director

Business

4. Human Services Update
5. Other Business

Adjourn

Disclaimer: This agenda has been prepared to provide information regarding an upcoming meeting of the Steele County Board of Commissioners. This document does not claim to be complete and is subject to change.

Master Gardener Program Update - June 2025

Just as a garden is a work in progress, so is the Master Gardener Program. I took this job in January of 2020 and was excited about the prospect of how I could enhance our program. Then 2 months in, the world shut down with Covid. We had to pivot and totally change how the program worked. We are about education and bringing research-based gardening knowledge to our Steele County residents. Zoom calls became the norm and we all had to figure out how we were going to sustain the program with little or no contact with each other. The University required strict protocols on the limited things we could do. One thing that was a direct result of Covid is the start of the garden at the fairground. We could garden outside 6 feet apart using our own tools and we made it happen.

One of my goals during this time was to retain the current Master Gardeners and build on gaining new interns. Our membership prior to Covid was fairly stagnant, so I didn't want to lose the ones we had. A part of why we all became Master Gardeners was the social aspect, which was absent during Covid. Coming out of Covid the question became how to attract new interns and give the program a breath of fresh air. At that time, we had 17 active Master Gardeners in the program. Recruitment was number one priority - to get our program visible in the county. Every time we are in front of an audience, I tell the Master Gardeners that it is a recruitment opportunity.

Today we have 41 Master Gardeners in the county. More members, means more programming and the more visibility we have. The number of projects we are involved with has grown along with the membership. We currently have 12 projects that we are involved with. I will highlight a few of them:

- Our Community Garden has been in existence since 2011. We currently rent out 21 – 20 X 20 garden plots along with 9 raised bed gardens. The rental money we collect goes toward the straw we use for mulch, the dumpster in the fall and repairing/replacing hoses for our irrigation for the garden. Future plans are to install more raised beds to accommodate more people.
- The Blue-Ribbon Learning Garden is our biggest project. We installed the garden at the fairgrounds during Covid, but wanted to do more in that area. We applied and received a SHIP Grant through Public Health this spring

for \$4,000. We are expanding that area with a vegetable garden educational area. We are installing 8 raised beds, a 3 Sisters Garden along with grow bags for demonstration. Each raised bed will have a different theme and educational component.

- We have been in touch with the SAC program to get kids involved in the garden.
- We have also been in touch with the Senior Living facilities in Owatonna to see if they would like to bus residents there to help with gardening chores, since they no longer have that option.
- Signage will be installed to aid with the walk by learning goal.
- The fair board has donated a pergola that will be installed in that area. We have a 3-year plan for that with this being the first step.

Our other projects include:

- The garden at the library, helping with a seed giveaway at the library starting this spring. We will be holding classes next spring on how to get those seeds started.
- The Pollinator Garden at the extension office.
- 4-H Plant Sciences project.
- Revamping the gardens at the Riverland campus.
- Steele County Fair booth.
- Annual Plant Sale.
- Pumpkin Composting.
- Speaking to various groups in our Community and the Power of Produce program.

In 2024, Steele County Master Gardener volunteers reported over 2,300 hours of research-based gardening knowledge we shared with our community. The University values those hours at \$34.77 which equates to almost \$80,000.00 worth of free gardening education. My job as Coordinator is to oversee the volunteers and the projects we work on. We have regular monthly meetings all year, some with educational aspects for ourselves. We as Master Gardeners have to provide 25 hours of Community Service per year as well as 5 educational hours to keep our active Master Gardener status. We all log well more than the minimum of 25 hours because we all love to share our passion for gardening.

Currently we have 8 interns who are working hard on becoming Master Gardeners. As interns they have to complete 50 hours of community service as well as complete a Core Course of education provided by the University of Minnesota. That is our largest class of Interns to date - very exciting for our program.

My contract is for 14 hours a week. I maintain regular office hours at the extension office, 2 days a week, and am flexible when it comes to the job. We do have projects and meetings that require working outside of those office hours. I am also the Program Coordinator for Rice County with 14 hours a week there also. I get the privilege of working with 2 very talented groups of gardening enthusiasts. I get to be involved with gardening, my passion, it does not seem like a job. A garden is a work in progress and so is continually learning about new developments in gardening, new diseases and new insects to share with our community.