

Gardens of Golden Gate Park 2023-2028 Strategic Plan

Introduction:

We acknowledge that the Gardens of Golden Gate Park sit on the unceded ancestral homeland of the Ramaytush Ohlone who are the original peoples of the San Francisco Peninsula. We recognize that we benefit from living and working on their traditional homeland, and we affirm their sovereign rights as first peoples. Dedicated to connecting people to plants, the planet, and each other, the Gardens uphold the significance of this cherished and revered place that celebrates Earth's biological diversity in supporting the health and wellbeing of all people and the planet.

The **Gardens of Golden Gate Park** are located within walking distance of one another and other cultural institutions in Golden Gate Park, serving more than a million visitors annually.

The **Conservatory of Flowers** is a national, state, and local landmark and a place of exceptional beauty. Built in 1879, the Conservatory was the first formal structure erected in Golden Gate Park and remains an internationally renowned icon, displaying and cultivating unusual plants to heighten awareness of: the pressing need to preserve threatened rainforest environments, ethnobotany, and biodiversity, and to foster enjoyment of ornamental horticulture.

The **Japanese Tea Garden** is the oldest operating public Japanese garden in North America. This garden provides visitors from around the world with an opportunity to experience the natural beauty, tranquility, and harmony of a Japanese-style garden and was originally created as an exhibit for the 1894 California Midwinter International Exposition. Today, we are restoring treasured historical elements and re-examining and re-interpreting its complex history.

San Francisco Botanical Garden at Strybing Arboretum opened in 1940 and is a 55-acre living museum within Golden Gate Park, showcasing 8,000 different kinds of plants from around the world. San Francisco's oceanic climate with cool dry summers, mild wet winters, and presence of fog allows the Garden to grow a diverse array of species from around the world. The Botanical Garden is also home to a new plant nursery, Children's Garden, and library.

New Partnership Model

The Gardens of Golden Gate Park (GGGP) is a public/private partnership between a community-based nonprofit organization, the San Francisco Botanical Garden Society (SFBGS), and the San Francisco Recreation & Parks Department (RPD). A Lease & Management Agreement between RPD and SFBGS, approved by both the Recreation & Park Commission and the Board of Supervisors, sets the terms of the partnership. The agreement is a cooperative management agreement that outlines the roles and responsibilities for each partner.

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Key areas of responsibility for SFBGS include volunteer engagement, education, visitor experience, philanthropy, membership, marketing, and other functions. RPD has primary responsibility for horticulture and facility management and maintenance, master planning and capital improvements conducted in collaboration with SFBGS, as well as other functions. Together, RPD and SFBGS collaborate on collections management within the Gardens.

This strategic plan for the Gardens of Golden Gate Park was intentionally developed, and shall be implemented, in alignment with RPD's strategic plan, the Golden Gate Park Master Plan, and RPD's Racial Equity Action Plan.

Gardens of Golden Gate Park seeks to establish itself as one of the premier botanical and horticultural institutions in the country. The new partnership seeks to integrate and elevate the three gardens to provide:

- A smoother, more cohesive experience for visitors and volunteers at each location
- More diverse gardens with new and improved plant collections and facilities
- Expanded global plant conservation efforts protecting biodiversity in the face of climate change and the extinction crisis
- Upgraded accessibility and improved garden designs, pathways, and maintenance
- More public programs with existing and new community partners
- Improved interpretation and educational resources including new digital tools
- Enhanced educational opportunities that provide access to all
- Implementation of major capital projects that include community and stakeholder input

Mission: The Gardens of Golden Gate Park connect people to plants, the planet, and each other.

Vision: All people have access to beautiful public gardens and experience the intrinsic value of plants to life and culture for a healthy community and planet.

Values:

- Everybody's Gardens
- Stewardship
- Experience and Enjoyment
- Education and Engagement
- Excellence
- Partnership and Collaboration

Problem Statement: Nature deficit disorder, plant awareness disparity, and shrinking biodiversity threaten the health and wellbeing of people and the planet.

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Theory of Change: Expanding people’s understanding of the value of plants to human and environmental health inspires awe, activism, action, and advocacy. GGGP is uniquely situated and qualified to deliver key messages about biodiversity in the heart of the city while also directly contributing to global plant conservation efforts. The shared experiences of gathering, celebrating, exploring, meditating, volunteering, and learning in these extraordinary places builds deep relationships and strengthens community.

Five Pillars

1. People

The Gardens of Golden Gate Park are *Everybody's Gardens*. We are **public** public gardens, and our priority is being accessible and welcoming to everyone.

- 1.1. Integrate existing teams across the three sites. Build a culture of collaboration and performance excellence between RPD and SFBGS staff based on respective roles with the shared goal of delivering the Gardens to the public.
- 1.2. Enhance visitor access and experience through increased use of multi-garden tickets and memberships.
- 1.3. SFBGS will attract, develop, and retain exceptional talent by paying all staff a living wage, providing fair and compassionate benefits, and supporting a culture of inclusion and excellence.
- 1.4. Provide workforce development opportunities for horticulture training through RPD’s workforce development pathway in alignment with RPD’s Racial Equity Action Plan.
- 1.5. Take meaningful actions to ensure visitors, volunteers, staff, board, and program participants reflect the cultural diversity of the San Francisco Bay Area.
- 1.6. Recommit to antiracism and anti-discrimination policies, training, and practices in alignment with RPD’s Racial Equity Action Plan.
- 1.7. Raise public awareness and increase visitation with the launch of the new Gardens of Golden Gate Park brand.
- 1.8. Develop and expand our educational programming for adults, children, and families.
- 1.9. Relaunch, refresh, and grow our membership and volunteer programs, providing more value and enhanced experiences for our members and volunteers.
- 1.10. Launch a founding funders campaign for the Gardens of Golden Gate Park.
- 1.11. Undergo a workforce analysis to right-size classifications and staffing levels across the RPD Operations division (RPD Strategic Plan objective 5.1.c.).

2. Plants

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Our climate and facilities allow us to grow and display an extraordinary diversity of plants from around the world. These plants are essential elements of the historical and cultural landscapes of the Gardens. Our living collections create opportunities for conservation and education and a platform to teach the public about ethnobotany, botany, horticulture, and ecology.

- 2.1. Develop partnerships with other institutions and public gardens to better develop, perpetuate, and interpret our living collection, and to advance global plant conservation efforts.
- 2.2. Through collaboration between RPD and SFBGS staff, implement a peer reviewed collections policy.
- 2.3. Develop and implement improved horticultural maintenance and landscape standards for the Gardens.
- 2.4. Develop a tree canopy succession plan that includes management of canopy cover and preservation of individual heritage trees.
- 2.5. Develop a business, marketing, and volunteer engagement plan for retail plant sales upon completion of our fully operational new nursery.
- 2.6. Relaunch a plant propagation program for the plant collections and conservation at the new nursery.
- 2.7. Develop a strategic plan specifically for Helen Crocker Russell Library of Horticulture.
- 2.8. Steward, document, and enhance our signature plant collections such as magnolias, high elevation palms, southern hemisphere conifers, high elevation orchids, tropical pitcher plants, historical collections at the Japanese Tea Garden, and others to be developed and displayed.

3. Place

We are place-based stewards, entrusted with preserving, improving, managing, maintaining, activating, protecting, promoting, and caring for iconic beloved public spaces. The Gardens themselves bring joy, peace, awe, wonder, and inspiration to more than a million people annually.

- 3.1. Create a Capital Improvement Plan for the Gardens of Golden Gate Park (RPD Strategic Plan objective 2.1.i.)
- 3.2. Participate in the implementation of ADA barrier removal projects, prioritized in partnership with the Mayor's Office of Disability (RPD Strategic Plan objective 1.2.f.).
- 3.3. Establish facility wide deferred maintenance priorities and identify critical maintenance needs.
- 3.4. Complete asset data collection to implement TMA Preventative Maintenance module for the Gardens of Golden Gate Park (RPD Strategic Plan objective 1.2.a.)
- 3.5. Develop an interpretive plan to weave the stories of the three gardens into one comprehensive narrative and call to action.
- 3.6. Reopen a state-of-the-art nursery facility that sets the standard for nursery sanitation and best management practices.
- 3.7. Complete the restoration of Japanese Tea Garden Pagoda, Pagoda Plaza, and Long Bridge.
- 3.8. Further develop the concept plan to renovate the Children's Garden, seek Recreation & Parks Commission approval, and prepare to launch a capital campaign for the project.

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- 3.9. Refine conceptual plan for Conservatory of Flowers renovations and create a development campaign and public engagement strategy.
- 3.10. Prepare for museum accreditation with the *American Alliance of Museums*, starting with an application for the Museum Assessment Program.
- 3.11. Develop a business plan for earned revenue to support garden improvements and community programs.

4. Planet

Our roles in addressing climate change and environmental sustainability are: to lead by example with sustainable and regenerative horticultural practices and organizational operations; conserve rare and endangered plant species that are increasingly threatened by climate change and development; and educate and activate the public around biodiversity loss and sustainable gardening.

- 4.1. Partner with organizations that work to re-grow, repair, and restore degraded plant communities that are represented in our living collection.
- 4.2. Initiate the planning and conversion of small gas-powered landscape equipment to viable zero-emission alternatives (RPD Strategic Plan objective 4.1.e.).
- 4.3. Improve our offices, events, and retail operations through sustainable purchasing and practices following SF Environment's policies to promote and require zero waste.
- 4.4. Increase use of public transit, biking, and walking routes to enjoy the Gardens.
- 4.5. Develop strategies to enhance audience engagement with climate change/biodiversity issues through social media, onsite visitor experience, a speaker series, volunteer engagement, and other means.
- 4.6. SFBGS ensures environmentally and socially responsible investing for endowment funds.
- 4.7. Join the [Climate Tool Kit](#), a coalition of museums, public gardens, and zoos working globally to address climate change; and work locally under the guidance of the San Francisco Recreation and Parks Commission and the San Francisco Climate Action Plan.

5. Partnerships

We recognize that this is an ambitious plan and that multiple partnerships will be critical to our success. Strategic partnerships will help us advance our mission, expand our reach, diversify our stakeholders, enhance our expertise, generate revenue, and achieve our shared goals.

- 5.1. Launch an endowment campaign building on the establishment of the Maxwell-Hanrahan Endowed Fund to provide long-term financial sustainability to the Gardens.
- 5.2. Steward and deepen existing donor relationships while working to identify and cultivate new relationships with philanthropic institutions, government agencies, and corporate funders.

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- 5.3. Partner with cultural, environmental, and scientific institutions for enhanced programs and outcomes; and partner with performing arts organizations to offer performances in the Gardens.
- 5.4. Partner with botanical gardens directly and through associations like American Public Gardens Association and Botanical Gardens Conservation International to advance this plan and keep abreast of trends, innovations, and best practices in the field.
- 5.5. Partner with colleges and universities on workforce development, internships, and programming.
- 5.6. Build on our long and successful history of partnering with San Francisco Unified teachers and expand our partnerships with independent schools to strengthen our youth education programs.
- 5.7. Connect with cultural organizations, community groups, and neighborhood associations to expand our reach.
- 5.8. Work with businesses and neighborhood merchants to enhance visitor experience and member benefits and to further connect the Gardens to neighborhoods.
- 5.9. Increase non-resident visitation through partnerships with SF Travel and the tourism industry.
- 5.10. Identify and develop relationships with additional City departments and other governmental agencies where partnerships could advance shared goals of community service and environmental protection.
- 5.11. Pilot targeted outreach and marketing efforts to Equity Zones and/or specific recreational activities (RPD Strategic Plan objective 2.2.a.).

Aligned with Recreation and Parks strategic plan:

<https://sfrecpark.org/DocumentCenter/View/19860/Strategic-Plan-Update-2023>

Aligned with Recreation and Parks Racial Equity Action Plan: [Racial-Equity-Action-Plan-Phase-I-FINAL-dec2020 \(sfrecpark.org\)](#)

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Appendix: Process and Timeline

2019

- San Francisco Botanical Garden Society (SFBGS) Board of Directors launched a strategic planning committee (included RPD Garden Director) and reviewed American Public Gardens Association benchmarking analysis.
- All Botanical Garden staff (city and nonprofit) participated in a facilitated SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) analysis and mission statement workshop.
- SFBGS Board of Directors Strategic Planning Committee conducted an environmental scan, identified “best in class” examples of strategic plans to serve as models, and reviewed visitor feedback.
- Harvard Business School Community Partners presented recommendations to increase and diversify revenue.
- SFBGS Board of Directors voted to explore the feasibility of merging with the Conservatory of Flowers (COF) and Japanese Tea Garden (JTG) and SFBGS Executive Director met with RPD Leadership to discuss.

2020

- Letter of Intent to collaborate between SFBGS, RPD, and San Francisco Parks Alliance (SFPA, former fiscal sponsor of COF).
- SFBGS, RPD, and SFPA selected consultants: MIG, with HR&A, to develop and recommend a new public/private partnership model for the gardens in Golden Gate Park. The scope of work included stakeholder interviews, benchmarking against the leading botanical gardens in the country, and financial analysis.

2021

- Two strategic planning subcommittees formed: Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (JEDI) Subcommittee; and Climate Change and Environmental Sustainability Subcommittee.
- MIG and HR&A concluded their work and recommended a merger of the Gardens by expanding the role of SFBGS through an amendment to the existing lease and management agreement (LMA).
- November - Recreation & Park Commission unanimously approved the amendment to the LMA between RPD and SFBGS that expands the LMA to include the COF and JTG.

2022

- March - SF Board of Supervisors unanimously approved a resolution introduced by the Mayor to amend the LMA. Ten Supervisors also voted in favor of a resolution on flexible pricing at all three sites, which includes provisions for free admission for SF residents and all US military veterans.
- March - SFBGS launched a search for key leadership team positions. New RPD Garden Director hired by RPD.
- Stakeholder workshops held and facilitated by organizational development consultant.
- Summer - 3,000 community members participated in public survey administered by Civic Edge
- December - SFBGS Board of Directors approved final draft of plan pending Recreation & Park Commission review.

2023

- Robust peer/partner review process conducted
- May - Recreation & Park Commission presentation
- Summer - Operationalize and publish plan along with launch of new brand