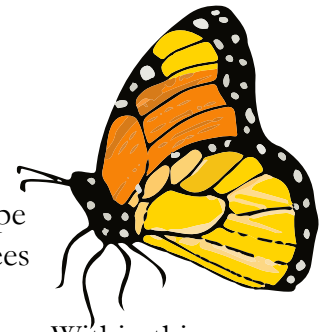


BARTRAM'S GARDEN

TENDING COMMON GROUND
Strategic Plan for 2025–2033



INTRODUCTION



Within the 50 acres of Bartram’s Garden there are few straight pathways. The landscape sprawls between ecosystems, from a stately botanic garden shaded by centuries-old trees to a new riverfront recreational trail, from a thriving crop farm showcasing African Diasporic foodways to a reclaimed meadow on land once occupied by a concrete factory. Within this Southwest Philadelphia public park and National Historic Landmark, no two visitors have the same experience: not only because the Garden changes, season by season and harvest by harvest, but also because the mission centers the relationships among people and nature. Everyone is called to be a character in the long, layered, and still-growing story of Bartram’s Garden.

And so this strategic plan, which guides the next seven years of this storied place, ties every element of the future to the longstanding certainty of the Land, River, and Histories as Common Ground. These are the Garden’s center, a commitment to deepen understanding of these gifts of nature and humanity, and a humble promise for ongoing relevance to nearby neighbors. Viewing the Land, River, and Histories as Common Ground also anchors the Garden’s Campus Plan, which includes long-planned projects that are poised to come to fruition during the plan period as well as others that will advance during these years. In this span, the Garden will commemorate the 300th anniversary of the site in 2028, reckoning with the many ways in which past, present, and future coexist here and for the park’s 125,000+ annual visitors. This plan also anticipates how planned new neighborhood development might transform the lives of the people of Southwest Philadelphia, many of whom are among the Garden’s most frequent visitors and closest partners.

Developed through a collaborative, year-long process that engaged all members of the Bartram’s Garden staff and board as well as the Southwest Philadelphia Community Leadership Team and other stakeholders, this strategic plan sets intentions for 2025–2033 based on a holistic, introspective assessment of the Garden’s positioning, priority-setting, practices, and relationships. Underpinned by the mantra of “going from good to great,” this plan builds upon the Garden’s extraordinary resources—its strengths, assets, and past experience—in order to chart a bold vision for meaningful impact during an era of unprecedented change. At the same time, this plan acknowledges sobering realities, scaffolding the organization to advance sustainably and resiliently after a period of meteoric growth.

- **Goal 1: Shared Joy, Shared Responsibility** sets the overarching priorities for **what** the Garden will do to strengthen personal bonds with nature, to take action for climate resilience, and to exchange multi-vocal stories about this land and the many beings—human and non-human alike—who have called it home.
- **Goal 2: Values-Driven Human Ecosystem** calls for greater investment in the people **who** power Bartram’s Garden. For the site’s ethos of welcoming and care to be invigorating and sustainable, it must be accompanied by a culture of cross-pollination, systems that ease communications, and shifts in practices that lead to more holistic and impactful solutions.
- **Goal 3: Abundance and Constraints in Harmony** outlines **how** to sustain sharpening the Garden’s position, setting priorities, and navigating uncertainty. The goal includes striking a balance between acknowledging finite financial resources as well as uncertainty in our wider world while also leaning into the abundance and shared values that the Garden enjoys and fosters with partners, neighbors, and supporters.

CAMPUS PLAN UPCOMING PROJECTS

Learn more at www.bartramsgarden.org/plans

Together with neighbors and partners, Bartram's Garden is establishing new opportunities for learning, creating, and sharing. **These new spaces are not just structures.** These projects will create more inviting, more sustainable ways to connect with the land, the river, and each other, transforming how the site welcomes learners of all ages and strengthening this public park against climate change and increased local development.

Building on nearly \$20 million in recent campus investment and leveraging more than \$500 million in planned neighborhood projects, highlights include:

- **FloatLab**, a one-of-a-kind accessible art piece and river access point designed by J. Meejin Yoon and Höweler + Yoon Architects
- **Ecosystems Education Center**, the Garden's first dedicated educational spaces, including lab-equipped classrooms and a teaching kitchen
- A new riverfront **Field Station & Welcome Center**, a climate-informed **Long-Range Landscape Plan**, and partnerships supporting community-driven local development like **The NESTT** pre-school by Woodland Academy



▲ **Ecosystems Education Center**
▼ **FloatLab** with Mural Arts Philadelphia



GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The following core statements were developed collaboratively by the board and staff in 2020–2021, and they continue to be affirmed as guiding principles going forward.

VISION

Bartram’s Garden is a place and an aspirational vision for the future, where:

- Public spaces are centers of welcome, respite, and celebration.
- Nature and the environment are accessible and inviting to everyone.
- People decide what happens in their own communities.
- Historic places seek to repair our fraught legacies.

MISSION

The mission of the John Bartram Association is to co-create equitable relationships among people and nature through immersive, community-centered experiences that activate the Bartram legacy, Garden, and House, on land and on the Schuylkill River, in Southwest Philadelphia.

VALUES

Bartram’s Garden provides a respite from the world and a promise for its transformation. We strive to:

- Cultivate the sound health and stability of the garden, farm, river, buildings, and natural lands. In so doing, honor past, present, and future ecological communities, including humans.
- Center the voices of Southwest Philadelphia in our evolving interpretation of the Bartram legacy, house, garden, and programs.
- Foster experiences that encourage wonder, joy, and interconnectedness.
- Engage in honest dialogue about the histories of the garden and Bartram family.
- Create abundance and belonging with deference to those who have not always felt welcome.
- Nurture fellowship and reciprocity, a sacred mutualism among all beings.
- Act responsibly with an intentional commitment to honoring our mission and values, embracing uncertainty and renewing this commitment with every choice, every day.
- Respect our capacity and that of the land in all that we do.



OVERVIEW OF PLAN GOALS & OBJECTIVES



GOALS	Shared Joy, Shared Responsibility GOAL 1	Values-Driven Human Ecosystem GOAL 2	Abundance & Constraints in Harmony GOAL 3
OBJECTIVES	1.1 To strengthen the public’s bond to the vitality of the land, river, and ecosystem	2.1 To deepen care and reciprocal accountability in the workplace culture	3.1 To ensure ongoing relevance to the people of Southwest Philadelphia
	1.2 To prioritize climate action in caretaking, land restoration, and community engagement	2.2 To establish systems that sustain quality as the Garden grows and becomes more complex	3.2 To center nearby residents within institutional collaborations
	1.3 To ignite broader curiosity about the site and its histories through storytelling and learning	2.3 To co-author decision-making policies and practices that increase trust, understanding, and effective collaboration	3.3 To generate and manage sufficient resources amid greater risk and opportunity

What will happen, who makes it possible, and how.

This plan is designed so that each goal holds within it three objectives. Each objective includes corresponding initiatives to guide a separate implementation plan with tactical workplans and practices for assessment from 2025–2033.



GOAL 1. SHARED JOY, SHARED RESPONSIBILITY

Bartram's Garden is beloved. It is a place where people from Southwest Philadelphia, the wider city, region, and beyond seek respite and recreation. It is also a place where people work, learn, and play in community with others. On any given day, you might see a child spotting butterflies, an elder fishing, or a group of friends cycling together. On that same day, you could see urban farmers with bent heads coaxing their plants, youth leading presentations on native ecosystems, or families dancing at a cultural festival.

Looking ahead, the Garden will strengthen the bond between people's enjoyment of the site and their sense of shared responsibility to care for the land, river, and ecosystem, both now and for future generations.

Today's caretakers must anticipate and respond to the implications of climate change, recognizing that safe, inviting access to nature is a key component of galvanizing future stewards. The Garden will continue its welcoming ethos, dismantling remaining barriers to engagement at the site. It will also work to ensure that these sensitive ecosystems are protected from the impacts of over-use, remaining verdant and safe to be enjoyed and cherished.

The landscape is also changing to become more accessible and interactive. Planned in partnership for years, major components of the Garden's Campus Plan will soon become reality, both relieving pressure on the site's most delicate areas and fueling deeper opportunities for people to learn and share about horticulture, food and farming, the watershed, the history of Southwest Philadelphia, and one another.

1.1 To strengthen the public's bond to the vitality of the land, river, and ecosystem

- 1.1.1 Encourage independent visitation, thoughtful engagement of all visitors, and people's interests in growing, learning, and playing outdoors through enhanced welcoming, wayfinding, and communal functions
- 1.1.2 Center the river and the watershed ecosystems as inviting spaces for learning, creating, and recreation through activation of FloatLab, the public dock, and expanded recreational trail
- 1.1.3 Engage students, families, and teachers in hands-on educational experiences through a new Ecosystems Education Center and corresponding school-based and youth programming

1.2 To prioritize climate action in caretaking, land restoration, and community engagement

- 1.2.1 Implement a comprehensive plan for capital improvements to facilities, trails, and public amenities, including appropriate facilities for necessary horticultural and maintenance functions
- 1.2.2 Undertake watershed restoration, ecology, and sustainability projects guided by a long-range ecosystem and landscape resilience plan and informed by Traditional Ecological Knowledge and best practices for historic, urban landscapes
- 1.2.3 Develop stronger practices for safety, land use, and risk management to offset increased visitation and the impacts of climate change

1.3 To ignite broader curiosity about the site and its histories through storytelling and learning

- 1.3.1 Curate a cohesive story about the historic significance and contemporary relevance of the site, its peoples, and its place in Southwest Philadelphia
- 1.3.2 Preserve, archive, interpret, and provide public access to the site's landmark structures, artifacts, and historic and living collections
- 1.3.3 Leverage the site's assets to convene local, regional, and national collaborative learning communities

GOAL 2. VALUES-DRIVEN HUMAN ECOSYSTEM

The Garden's staff and volunteers exude a spirit of generosity that is welcoming and engaging. This makes the Garden a great place to work, visit, and volunteer. It also demands a level of intensity that, after nearly a decade of exceptional growth, has outpaced structures for both care and accountability. Systems, processes, technologies, and facilities need to catch up with the Garden's maturation to create efficiencies, improve communications and ownership, and strengthen cross-team cohesion.

Looking ahead, the Garden will make a greater investment in the people who power the organization, attending to individuals as well as the dynamic and interconnecting human ecosystem. These commitments, including upskilling and professional development, will anticipate and prepare for the increased complexity required by new campus investments, increased visitation, and the impacts of known unknowns like climate change and neighborhood development.

The challenges and opportunities that lie ahead are interconnected—and so must be the responses. By working across teams, disciplines, and areas of expertise, departmental, staff, and board goals will be tightly aligned with the organizational mission and shared outcomes. Both within the staff and with volunteer stakeholders, teams will actively break down siloes and exchange resources to better inform joint planning, shared responsiveness, and collective decision-making.

These key shifts in practice will depend on intentional communication, shared tools and practices, and dedicated time for joint reflection and assessment. When engaging with partners and across hierarchies, they call for a culture that encourages trust, openness, listening, and collaboration.

2.1 To deepen care and reciprocal accountability in the workplace culture

- 2.1.1 Co-create intentional approaches to upskilling, professional development, and leadership pathways
- 2.1.2 Enhance orientations, supervision, and mentorship to support



staff and volunteers in feeling that their work is recognized, understood, and valued

- 2.1.3 Balance the site's seasonal intensity by embedding periods of restoration and reflection into workflow planning and partnership expectations

2.2 To establish systems that sustain quality as the Garden grows and becomes more complex

- 2.2.1 Develop a methodical and routine process for evaluating initiatives to inform priority-setting and work plan refinements
- 2.2.2 Use technologies to streamline cross-team processes and communications while furthering collaboration, synergy, and innovation
- 2.2.3 Instill rigor into shared tools for tracking and fulfilling organizational priorities, outlining a multi-year timeline with milestones

2.3 To co-author decision-making policies and practices that increase trust, understanding, and effective collaboration

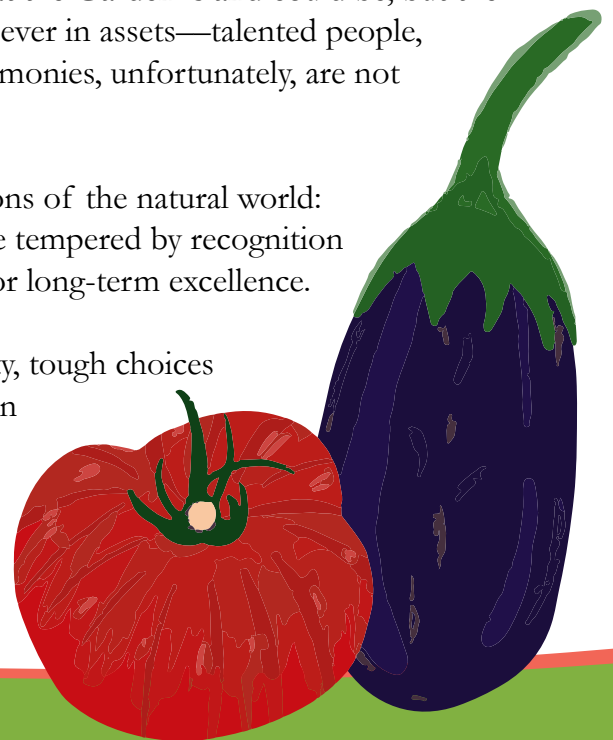
- 2.3.1 Increase clarity and transparency around roles and responsibilities for making and communicating various decisions
- 2.3.2 Advance communication between staff, board, and the Southwest Philadelphia Community Leadership Team to facilitate collegiality and greater clarity around when each group leads, collaborates, or augments the work of others
- 2.3.3 Leverage institutional power and influence to advocate for neighborhood sovereignty and decision-making

GOAL 3. ABUNDANCE & CONSTRAINTS IN HARMONY

Bartram's Garden has been in a meteoric phase, with visitation, staff size, and operating budget all quadrupling since 2012. This growth has been shepherded by an extraordinary range of programmatic initiatives, expansions, and opportunities, all securing the enthusiasm of new friends and the loyalty of long-time supporters. Each has their own point of view of what the Garden is and could be, but the organization is now at an inflection point: although richer than ever in assets—talented people, community goodwill, unique site features, increasing renown—monies, unfortunately, are not unlimited, and time remains finite.

Looking ahead, the Garden will listen more intently to the lessons of the natural world: all things in balance. An inherent appetite for abundance will be tempered by recognition of practical realities in order to create more sustainable plans for long-term excellence.

While the Garden will always be open and ready for opportunity, tough choices lie ahead. To navigate these paths with intentionality, the Garden holds fast to its values, prioritizing community-centered collaboration and deep listening to ensure continued relevance. Cohesive storytelling will build the brand, locally and



nationally, honing understanding of the Garden's identity and purpose and helping to attract the financial resources for a multi-year plan that has the flexibility to expand or pivot as needed.

3.1 To ensure ongoing relevance to the people of Southwest Philadelphia

- 3.1.1 Facilitate pathways that increase youth leadership, agency, and advocacy within the Garden as their backyard and within their communities
- 3.1.2 Refine processes that collect and absorb input and feedback to tailor public programming to be responsive to nearby neighbors while also aligning offerings with capacity
- 3.1.3 Identify priorities for building the Garden's presence at community events and bringing activities and resources into neighborhoods

3.2 To center nearby residents within institutional collaborations

- 3.2.1 Prioritize safe, inclusive access to nature, green space, and the riverfront as a key aspect of community health by collecting and sharing environmental data and issuing timely alerts
- 3.2.2 Refine existing and new partnerships in ways that ensure structural and cultural alignment with core values and that center community priorities
- 3.2.3 Amplify efforts that affirm neighborhood-based power and authority, especially in light of upcoming major development projects in Southwest Philadelphia and Gray's Ferry

3.3 To generate and manage sufficient resources amid greater risk and opportunity

- 3.3.1 Evolve and increase funding relationships that emphasize the Garden's core values, equitable practices, and meaningful outcomes
- 3.3.2 Shift from annual to multi-year financial projections supported by vigilant monitoring of available funds and other indicators for launching or pausing projects and initiatives
- 3.3.3 Build a cohesive identity and brand to inform messaging that aligns with organizational intentions and that resonates with a variety of audiences, regionally and nationally

IMPLEMENTATION: BRINGING THE PLAN TO LIFE

For this strategic plan to be successful, it must be embraced and understood. Implementation planning was initiated concurrently with strategy development to ensure that the plan would be flexible, relatable, and transparent.

Most important, the strategic plan needs to be supported by structures and processes so that it will be relied upon as a tool for shaping the agenda and scope of work for departments, teams, and committees.

FLEXIBILITY

While the strategic plan serves as a tether to help people feel grounded by a shared view of the future, it also can act as a flexible compass for re-directing energies or shifting decision-making based on new circumstances. The first joint summit of staff, volunteers, and board members occurred during the strategic planning process. Going forward, the summit will become an annual forum for building community, celebrating what is working well, and exploring what areas need to be refined.

RELATABILITY

To be most useful, the implementation of the strategic plan must present the “why” behind the intended pathways and also guide people toward understanding how their perspective and work is actionable and fits into the broader picture.

For example, one activity planned to respond to climate change is expanding the neighborhood’s tree canopy. Residents enjoy the seasonal impact of a shadier block while also benefitting from longer-term outcomes such as paid youth workforce development and a more diverse and resilient ecosystem.

TRANSPARENCY

The strategic plan outlines the complicated work of sharpening the Garden’s positioning, priority-setting, practices, and relationships. Partners, prospective board members, donors and funders, and potential supporters will be invited to join the Garden on this ambitious journey. The strategic plan will be public-facing and inform messaging, outreach, fundraising, and community engagement.

STRUCTURES & PROCESSES

The strategic plan calls for new practices and shared tools for work planning. The practices and tools will be derived from more rigor and skill development in project development, assessment, and course correction. Yes, there will be charts!

An internal implementation framework assigns lead responsible parties to each objective as well as outlines the sequencing, resource requirements, and milestones for major initiatives over the seven-year span. Equally important, implementation planning and execution will leverage the Garden’s inherent culture of inquiry. As the plan unfolds, there will consistent reflection on the impacts on the place, the organization, individual people, and communities.

This plan was affirmed and adopted by the Board of Directors on June 12, 2025. The plan was created in 2024–2025 thanks to collaborative leadership and gracious input from all members of the Garden’s staff and board as well as the Southwest Philadelphia Community Leadership Team.

The lists below reflect all who contributed to the collaborative development of this strategic plan from July 2024–June 2025.

STRATEGIC PLAN COMMITTEE

Elizabeth Bressi-Stoppe *Emeritus, Board of Directors* • Emily Constantino *Formal Flower Gardens Gardener*
Nakia Fields *Southwest Philadelphia Community Leadership Team* • Cedric Hardy *Director of Youth Education*
Lawrence Jones *Vice President (2025), Board of Directors* • Charles Lomax *President, Board of Directors*
Todd McCoy *Southwest Philadelphia Community Leadership Team* • Vania Miller *Board of Directors*
Sophia Poe *Community Partnerships Manager* • Maitreyi Roy *Executive Director*
Kate Tyson *Committee Chair / Secretary, Board of Directors* • Ben Vershbow *Board of Directors*
Caroline Winschel *Director of Development & Communications*

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(Ecosystems Education Center) and by Höweler + Yoon Architecture
and Brick Visual with Urban Engineers (FloatLab).



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