

Brookside Gardens



ITEM 2
010405

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30 December 2004

MEMORANDUM

To: Montgomery County Planning Board

Via: Carl Falcone, Chief, Natural Resources Division
David Vismara, Horticultural Manager, Brookside Gardens

From: Stephanie Oberle, Horticulturist III, Brookside Gardens

Subject: Worksession Number 3: Staff Draft Master Plan for Brookside Gardens

Agreed
Carl Falcone
David Vismara
Stephanie Oberle

Requested Board Action:

1. Review revisions to Staff Draft Brookside Gardens Master Plan.
2. Give authorization to take Plan to public for review.

Background:

The Brookside Gardens Master Plan was initiated by staff to articulate the need for a renewed facility to meet the needs of present and future visitors. The Plan creates a timeline to guide our work, including prioritizing essential maintenance, planning renovations to existing structures, and anticipating the development of new amenities and facilities.

Brookside Gardens has enjoyed 35 years of continuous use, offering visitors beautiful gardens to stroll, superior plant collections, and inspiring educational programming. Despite devoted care, the years, and visitors, have taken their toll. Changing programs, changing uses and users, and an aging infrastructure all pointed to the need for a critical assessment of the facilities and their functions before the necessary capital expenditures could be justified. Prior to the undertaking of the Master Plan, staff completed a strategic plan to assess current conditions and identify critical needs. Reviewed on a regular basis, this document articulates both mission and vision statements for Brookside Gardens, and charts new directions for programs and services. The need for a master plan was one of the prominent findings.

Since November 2000, a staff committee has worked closely with the firm EDAW, Inc., to develop the Plan. An integral part of the planning process was to solicit input and feedback from not only Brookside Gardens and Commission staff, but from our community of users, including volunteers, neighbors, Friends of Brookside Gardens, and peer professionals in related



horticultural, educational, public service and cultural arts fields. To this end, a series of three public meetings were held to invite the scrutiny of the Garden's most frequent users. These meetings were held in January, March and May 2001. A successful effort was made to solicit input from Commission experts in planning, safety, and natural resources management.

The staff draft was presented to the Planning Board on October XX, 2001. A public hearing occurred on November 15, 2001. Two worksessions were held with the Planning Board, on December 13, 2001 and April 18, 2004. While the Board generally favored the vision of the Plan, three issues were not resolved: the overall cost of the plan and feasibility of funding, a desire to incorporate more garden renovations earlier in the plan, and a concern over the viability of the Event House. Staff initiated a new contract with EDAW in July 2004 to revise the staff draft Master Plan to address the Planning Board's concerns. While the majority of the Plan remains unchanged from the original 2001 document, there are several changes, as well as a significant re-ordering of the implementation plan.

An informal public meeting was held on December 4, 2004 to gather feedback from the community. Direct mail notices were sent to approximately 800 members of the Friends of Brookside Gardens and 120 neighborhood associations. E-mail notifications were sent to Brookside Gardens volunteers and *Xperience* registrants. Press releases to the media were distributed by Brookside Gardens and the Community Relations Office. The response from those attending the public meeting was positive and supportive.

The revised Staff Draft Master Plan outlines cost for each phase of implementation. To fund the Plan, we will seek funding from the CIP budget for facility planning and design and project management. We will seek private and public funding for construction.

Summary of the Changes to Staff Draft of 2001

Change 1: Modifications to the Visitors Center to accommodate Rental Functions

In the 2001 Plan, staff proposed that the footprint of the existing Conservatory at 1500 Glenallan Avenue be re-used as the basis of a new Event House to accommodate Garden and Commission events, rentals, and community events. The concept of the Event House was not favored by the Planning Board. In the 2004 Plan, it is proposed that the functions of the Event House be absorbed by the existing Visitors Center. A summary of those changes are:

- The current Visitors Center main entrance will become a dedicated events entrance.
- The entrance to the Auditorium will be re-oriented by using the existing gift shop space.
- The new visitors entrance will be via the Atrium, including the Information Desk.
- The Gift Shop, Gift Shop storage, and enterprise offices will be relocated to the current Adult Classroom, Workroom and Office space.
- The Adult Classroom and Workroom will be relocated to the current Main Office and Conference Room.
- A new staff lunchroom will be created in the space currently occupied by the Information Desk.
- The Children's Classroom and Offices will remain the same.

Change 2: Creation of Tent Terraces adjacent to Visitors Center

To accommodate outdoor events and ceremonies, the 2004 Plan includes the creation of two Tent Terraces adjacent to the Visitors Center Auditorium. The Tent Terraces are intended to provide an outdoor venue for events, but with low-impact hardscaping features to minimize effect on the landscape. The Tent Terraces will be accessed by a new service road, a larger paved patio for service use, and new accessible pathway connecting the Visitors Center to the Azalea Garden.

Change 3: Creation of New Native Wetland Garden on the former Conservatory Site

After the new Conservatory is built adjacent the Visitors Center, the old Conservatory will be demolished. This portion of the Garden is located on a 100-year flood plain, is adjacent to the Brookside Nature Center, and is the terminus of formal water features running from the Visitors Center down the hill. The Native Wetland Garden gives the opportunity to develop a new garden feature with great design and interpretive possibilities, as well as creating a graceful transition from formal water gardens to the informal wetland garden to the natural wetland that form the perimeter of the Gardens.

To make best use of the existing utilities on that site, a Garden House will be built. This structure will offer shelter, orientation, restrooms, and storage. Additionally, a small café is proposed, to meet demands from the public for food service. Adjacent to the café, a picnic lawn is proposed, for school groups or others who bring their own food. Although current policy prohibits food at the Gardens, except for organized events with catered food, repeated requests from visitors make us ready to entertain the possibility to change this policy in the future.

Change 4: Parking: The 2004 plan has a total of 300 parking spaces, which is a net gain of 119 spaces. This total is 25 fewer parking spaces than the 2001 plan, due to the revised use of the old Conservatory site as the new Native Wetland Garden.

Change 5: Phasing

In accordance with the Planning Board's request, the emphasis in the implementation plan has shifted to focus on renovations first and new construction second. In particular, more garden improvements have been included in earlier phases. Major construction projects, like the Visitors Center Addition, New Conservatory, and Native Wetland Garden are in the final phases of the implementation plan. Additionally, the number of phases has been increased to make initial projects smaller in scale and easier to fund and implement.