

## Backgrounder:

# The Case for a True Private/Public Partnership between Toronto Botanical Garden and the City of Toronto

- In 2003, the former Civic Garden Centre in Edwards Gardens changed its name to Toronto Botanical Garden, and accepted a much broader mandate to serve the people of this city
- In 2004-2005, The Toronto Botanical Garden added a new 3060 sq. foot building with a green roof, and 12 gardens
- The cost of this revitalization was about \$8 million, and \$6.5 million of this was raised by the TBG from private sector funds, with the other \$1.5 million coming from the City
- In 2011, thanks to a bequest, the TBG invested nearly \$200,000 to revamp the outmoded, dingy and almost unusable Garden Hall, at no expense to the City
- Today we have 17 gardens, the largest of which is more than 23,000 square feet
- We are also home to the country's largest private horticultural library, with more than 10,000 books, periodicals, archival and research materials, and ephemera, which is widely used by students, scholars, teachers, designers, horticultural professionals and the general public

The private-sector visionaries who got this project off the ground always intended that Toronto Botanical Garden would be a true public/private partnership with the City of Toronto. However, despite numerous requests and presentations, we have never received the level of support that we expected from the City, even in better times. We are now at a critical financial juncture where this support must be forthcoming, or we will be forced to close our doors. The wind-down would be highly complex and expensive, and the knock-on effect extensive. Yes, times are difficult in general, but they are impossible for us.

We submit that it would cost the City far more to run this centre, offer these excellent educational programs to the community, and keep these gardens to the standard we have established, than to support our efforts and let us continue to manage this facility as efficiently and prudently as we have up to now. The fate of the TBG is in your hands.



## About Toronto Botanical Garden

- The TBG is Toronto's only Botanical Garden and a de facto year-round educational facility and community centre for the people of Toronto, where everyone is welcomed
- It is a registered, volunteer-driven, educational charity run for the benefit of all Torontonians
- It offers hundreds of educational programs throughout the year, including courses, classes, seminars, camps, lectures and workshops
- It is a tourist attraction for garden-lovers from all parts of the world
- Four acres of 17 city-sized gardens are tended organically to serve as living examples to home gardeners not only of beautiful plantings they can replicate at home, but also a healthy ecosystem that provides sustenance for many birds, butterflies, bees and other creatures. It also serves as a living classroom for many programs
- The TBG is the horticultural epicentre of Toronto, and is home to Canada Blooms, Milne House Garden Club, the Garden Club of Toronto and the Toronto Master Gardeners, and serves as a meeting place and hub for dozens of horticultural societies and clubs across the GTA
- More than 10,000 adults participate in our educational programs every year. Some courses lead to certificates through Ryerson University and George Brown College
- We teach more than 6,000 children each year
- School programs are linked to the Ontario science curriculum and support TDSB and TCDSB guidelines. We also offer March break and summer camps
- About half of the children attending TBG programs are from disadvantaged communities in priority neighbourhoods, and we enable them to participate free of charge by raising funds through grants, subsidies and donations
- Our public programs include the TBG Lecture Series, the Edwards Summer Music Series: Gardens of Song, an Organic Farmers' Market, and various programs in the Weston Family Library
- Our free celebrations include Harvest Day, Earth Day, Doors Open, and the Holiday Open House
- Admission to our gardens is free, and many tens of thousands of people visit them each year, and visitation is growing exponentially (as we don't charge admission, we have no way of offering a precise number)
- We partner with myriad other institutions and organizations on various projects and support a variety of organizations through our participation. These include the RBG, ROM, LEAF, Evergreen Brick Works, Trees for Life, Landscape Ontario, the Garden Tourism Coalition, Heritage Canada, Toronto Master Gardeners, Canada Blooms, the TDSB, the TCDSB, the Composting Council of Canada, the Ontario Urban Forestry Council, and others

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# TORONTO BOTANICAL GARDEN

## Finances and Administration

- The Toronto Botanical Garden has an annual operating budget of approximately \$1.6 million
- It employs 23 full- and part-time staff
- It has 400 volunteers
- Each year, the TBG struggles to raise more than 95 per cent of its operating budget through membership fees, donations, programs, sponsorships and grants, tours, retail sales in our shop, special events and fundraisers, and the renting out our spaces
- However, this ad hoc fundraising is unpredictable at best, and in recent years has proven to be impossible to sustain at the level we require to effectively function
- Our revenue generating ability is severely hampered by our free admission policy, the lack of parking revenues, and the lack of a dining facility within our building, as mandated by our management agreement
- Despite this, we have brought in many improvements over the past several years and the TBG is a far more vibrant and well-attended than it was in years past
- Unfortunately, though our profit centres are in the black and tracking above budget, donations, foundation grants and sponsorships are down
- Despite our best efforts, we cannot raise enough money ourselves to cover our operating costs, and our cash reserves are nearly depleted
- Additionally, any setbacks have serious implications to our bottom line—for example, we estimate the long-drawn-out parking lot project that was sprung on us last fall with no warning has cost us about \$180,000 in lost revenues, and has brought us to the brink of bankruptcy

## The City of Toronto and Toronto Botanical Garden

- We are very grateful to the City of Toronto for providing us with rent-free premises and the coverage of our utilities
- Additionally, for about 35 years, the City of Toronto has annually given first the Civic Garden Centre, and then the Toronto Botanical Garden, a flat \$25,000 toward maintenance
- In today's dollars, this amount would translate to \$92,700, but even that doesn't take into consideration that the Toronto Botanical Garden is a much larger and more complex operation than the Civic Garden Centre was way back then
- In fact, today, the cost of maintenance alone for the building and gardens is not \$25,000, but about \$380,000 every year

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Thus, this is NOT an equitable public/private partnership

## The Ask

- If we are to continue to be Toronto's Botanical Garden, we must find at \$200,000 in stable, ongoing funding each year
- We thank the City of Toronto for its ongoing support and respectfully request that it replace the \$25,000 annual grant with a far more realistic stipend of \$160,000 per annum—or about ten per cent of our operating costs—on an ongoing basis, with adjustments made as needed for the cost of living. This is slightly less than the average of local government support cited in a 2009 benchmark study from APGA (American Public Garden Association).

## The Consequences

- If we are given the support we so desperately need, we can continue to maintain our gardens, classes, programs and facilities, and in fact work carefully to provide even more service to the City and the people of Toronto. For a relatively modest investment, the City can continue to have a beautiful, well-managed, trouble-free community centre and botanical garden of which it can be justly proud
- If we do not receive this support, the Toronto Botanical Garden will run out of funds and will be forced to close
- It's make or break time. The bottom line is: Do the people of Canada's largest city deserve a botanical garden and active community centre in Edwards Gardens, or not?
- We believe that they do, and that we also believe that we deserve the committed support of the City of Toronto to make sure that we can continue to give it to them