





HORTICULTURAL EXCELLENCE

4.6 CREATE OPPORTUNITIES RELATED TO URBAN GARDENING

The Garden's horticultural programming could educate about advances in vegetal food production and growing flowers and other specimens, with a specific focus on application in urban settings. Allan Gardens could serve as a venue for events focussed on locally grown food and plants, such as a local food market, seasonal workshops on urban farming and gardening, perennial and bulb exchanges, and demonstrations of new growing techniques.



*Dufferin Grove Park Farmer's Market
Toronto, ON (source: dufferingrovemarket.ca)*



Assiniboine Park

Assiniboine Park
Zoo
Assiniboine Park

ALLAN'S GARDENS refresh



HORTICULTURAL EXCELLENCE

4.7 INCREASE HORTICULTURAL PROGRAMMING

Currently, horticultural programming in Allan Gardens centers on several main activities: a series of five annual shows, school group education programming, and a presence at Canada Blooms. Outside of these activities, there are few opportunities for public engagement with the wonders of horticulture. Allan Gardens is a natural venue for evening and weekend courses in special subjects (such as plant propagation, flower arranging, garden design, urban food gardening, and plant identification) for both adults and children. Programs for young people could utilize the Children's Garden and could include summer camp programs in the park. The volunteer program (see 8.4) could provide additional opportunities for the public to learn about horticulture from enthusiastic new docents.



Seeds Building Roots Initiative
Allan Gardens- Toronto, ON (source: facebook.com/pg/buildingrootsTO)





PARK EDGES & SURROUNDING STREETS

5.1 CREATE DEFINED PARK ENTRANCES

Allan Gardens was originally planned as an axial Horticultural Garden. Those axes remain and should be celebrated at the historical park entrances at the termination of Homewood and Pembroke Streets. The entrances to the diagonal paths at the two eastern corners (Sherbourne and Gerrard Streets and Sherbourne and Carlton Streets) should be similarly marked. A formalized entrance or entrances along the Jarvis Terrace edge (as recommended by the 2001 “Market Research/Financial Viability Study”) should be defined when planning progresses on the Greenhouse Link Building. Both the 2001 study and the 2006 Master Plan recommend defined park entrances that are more “welcoming” than the existing entry spaces. Decorative, celebratory gates in keeping with other new design elements, intensive specimen planting, lighting, signage, and wayfinding will bring a heightened sense of importance, created by the experience of a threshold into this historic urban green space. The importance of the Homewood and Pembroke gates could be reinforced with new, signalled pedestrian crosswalks across Carlton and Gerrard, facilitating access to the Gardens.



Halifax Public Gardens Entry Gates
Halifax, NS (photo: Serena Graham-Dwyer)





PARK EDGES & SURROUNDING STREETS

5.2 RE-IMAGINE SURROUNDING STREETSCAPES TO DEFINE A TRANSITIONAL ZONE

FOAG believes that the streetscapes surrounding the Gardens could be re-imagined to enhance the experience of the park, and to better integrate the park into the surrounding Garden District, a proposed heritage conservation district (HCD).

The pedestrian experience would be improved by a distinctive and cohesively-designed streetscape: upgraded street and sidewalk pavements and elegant curb details; street furniture including benches, light standards, planters, tree grates and waste receptacles; and distinctive tree and understory plantings. The character and details of the streetscape should be consistent with improvements within the Gardens. Reductions of the number of vehicular lanes should be investigated.

Historically, the north-south axis running through the Gardens continued along Homewood Avenue to the north and Pembroke Street to the south, with Allan Gardens serving as the focal point of a unique mid-nineteenth century subdivision plan for park lot 5. Coordinated streetscape improvements along Pembroke and Homewood should be implemented, in order to highlight this historically integrated



*Trees and park benches along Sherbourne before street widened
Historic Postcard*

relationship, and to create improved linkages to Moss Park to the south. Signalized pedestrian crossings at Homewood and Pembroke should be investigated. Improved streetscapes linking existing parks are consistent with TOCore's vision for creating connected public space networks called 'park districts'.

Redevelopment along the edges of the Gardens creates opportunities to enhance the streetscape and park experience. Shadow impacts on the park and especially the Conservatory would need to be carefully considered.





PARK EDGES & SURROUNDING STREETS

5.3 VEGETATE THE PARK'S EDGES

Currently the edge of the park is not well or consistently defined, and the experience of the verdant and tree-canopied space of the park diminishes at the perimeter sidewalks. As the 2001 “Market Research/Financial Viability Study” observes, “The gardens and their constituent parts are unframed; there is a blurring of the park at its edges, in that the park seems to bleed away; there is also a problematic pattern of lighting. Thus, a strong sense of entry and departure is absent.” This edge condition can be defined with low planting, decorative curbs and fencing, benches, and sidewalk trees. By defining the edge FOAG believes that a meaningful horticultural space can be contained within the grounds of the park, defined by a permeable green buffer that enhances the peaceful and natural experience of the park, especially the historic tree canopy of the Arboretum, while mitigating the visual impact and interruption of vehicular traffic and its noise.



Naturalizing a Street Edge
Ron Finley of LA Green Grounds, LA (photo: Stephen Zeigler)





E 26th St
5th Ave
ONE WAY
ONE WAY



PARK FUNCTIONALITY & MAINTENANCE

6.1 DEVELOP A HOLISTIC ACCESSIBILITY PLAN FOR THE PARK AND CONSERVATORY

Currently the Conservatory is not universally accessible, a deficiency which compromises the spirit of inclusivity associated with the history of Allan Gardens.

Accessibility in the park should be addressed in a holistic way, balancing AODA requirements with unique site conditions and heritage considerations. Impacts on plant material adjacent to existing pathways within the Conservatory, for example, would need to be carefully addressed.

Vehicular circulation at the perimeter and within the Gardens (for Wheel-Trans and accessible drop offs, maintenance vehicle access and loading, and drop off for school and tour busses) needs to be carefully planned to minimize space requirements and visual and physical impacts on the Gardens.

Opportunities to create new public Green P parking facilities as part of adjacent redevelopment projects should be investigated.



Braille Interpretive Plaques
(photo: P Heymont)





PARK FUNCTIONALITY & MAINTENANCE

6.2 PROVIDE A WORKS YARD THAT SERVICES PARK MANAGEMENT REQUIREMENTS

The contemplated expansion of greenhouse facilities (Link Building) to the west of the Conservatory would dislocate the existing works yard (the existing north courtyard), which services Allan Gardens as well as a number of other city parks.

A functional works yard should be planned in association with the Link Building, sized to service Allan Gardens alone. An underground facility, or, a surface yard accessed from Horticultural Avenue to the south of the existing playground (as proposed in the 2006 Masterplan) could be considered.

This challenging opportunity should accommodate park management requirements while maximizing amount of park space usable by the public.



Garden Preparation Area

Protea Propagation Centre, South Africa (source: fossilplants.co.uk)



Balled and Burlapped Tress
Nursery Work Yard (photo: Cathy Testa)



PARK FUNCTIONALITY & MAINTENANCE

6.3 ADOPT SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT PRACTICES AND SYSTEMS

As a centre for urban horticulture, Allan Gardens should demonstrate and explore innovative approaches to all aspects of sustainable landscape management. A horticultural garden uses significant amounts of energy for lighting and heating the conservatory and pumping water, and water for irrigation. Material is imported to amend and improve soil fertility and to manage pests and disease. All of these practices, and the infrastructure which supports them are opportunities to demonstrate and innovate cutting edge techniques, to educate the public, and to promote a broader sense of stewardship and responsibility to the environment.

Specific opportunities include:

- Rainwater harvesting
- Greywater treatment and recycling
- Living Machine systems for waste water treatment and reuse
- Innovative monitoring technologies for measuring soil moisture and fertility, and organizing community stewardship
- On site composting
- Managing dog waste



NYC citywide tree survey, 2015
source: The Nature Conservancy

The Water Factory in Dierenpark Emmen Zoo, the Netherlands, showcases and educates visitors about innovative approaches to waste water treatment within a greenhouse setting. Using plants and a range of different micro-organisms, water is treated in a 'Living Machine', and recycled in various ways associated with the running of the zoo. →





REVIVAL OF HERITAGE FEATURES

7.1 CREATE A NEW CENTRAL WATER FEATURE

For decades, the focal point of Allan Gardens was the ornate Victorian fountain and basin at the centre of the Gardens, directly in front of the Palm House. The fountain brought the sound, sparkle and freshness of water that so commonly contributes to great park spaces around the world. In the 1950's regeneration of the Gardens, the fountain and basin were removed following the designs of landscape architect Austin Floyd. The feature was replaced with a series of shallow disc basins of increasing diameter that allowed water to cascade from the Palm House Terrace. These basins were also eventually removed and the Gardens have remained waterless, with the exception of a diminutive drinking fountain, located where the grand fountain once stood. The loss of the original fountain is mourned in all planning reports for Allan Gardens. There have been numerous calls to restore the fountain to its original and rightful place.

The theme of 'water in the park' is broad and the opportunities are varied. There is the potential to restore the original fountain as an absent element, however, new designs that incorporate water as a symbolic element, or which interpret Indigenous perspectives towards water, can also serve community identity and enhance experience.



Crown Fountain
Chicago, IL (photo: Serge Melki)





REVIVAL OF HERITAGE FEATURES

7.2 REINTERPRET LOST PATHS AND GARDEN EXPERIENCE ON THE PARK'S EAST SIDE

Since its first iteration, the east lawn of Allan Gardens (the proposed Arboretum) has gone through numerous changes. The original landscape design is uncertain, but the earliest plans show a variety of axial routes overlaid with curving and meandering paths. Most recently, expedient cross-park routes – called ‘desire lines’ – were established, and all of the smaller meandering paths have disappeared.

The 2006 Master Plan proposes the introduction of new radial paths that centre on the Palm House, highlighting the symmetrical nature of the original Gardens. Examining the historical mapping of the park more closely it is clear that some of the lost paths might be reinstated or reinterpreted. The axial routes provide a practical route to get through the park. The meandering paths, however, were intended for strolling, a way to appreciate and explore the Gardens in a more gradual, contemplative and leisurely way. These leisurely paths were inspired by the Gardenesque movement that gave birth to Allan Gardens. Re-establishing the meandering path system can interpret the historic roots of the Gardens, and, in combination with the development of new gardens along the route, can create new opportunities for horticultural appreciation.



*Allan Gardens
Historic Postcard*





REVIVAL OF HERITAGE FEATURES

7.3 RESTORE THE EXISTING PALM HOUSE AND CONSERVATORIES

The most significant cultural landmark on the site is the central dome and cupola of the Palm House. It is the gem-like architectural centrepiece of the horticultural greenhouses and the focal point of Allan Gardens. The Palm House was completed and opened in 1910 to replace an earlier pavilion that was destroyed by fire. The earlier pavilion was an important venue for Toronto's social scene. Horticultural displays and musical performances were held, along with presentations and lectures. Notably, Oscar Wilde spoke on the topic of "The House Beautiful" as part of his North American tour of 1882. The current Palm House, designed by the office of Toronto City Architect Robert McCallum, is the central component of a collection of later greenhouse wings added in the 1950s, with the most recent addition being the Children's Conservatory, brought from the University of Toronto in the 1990s.

The maintenance of the Palm House has been a major concern for a number of years and was referenced in the 2006 master plan. While a state-of-good-repair policy is in place, the overall structural repair of the Palm House has not been addressed. The most recent condition report was completed in 2017 by Baird Sampson Neuert Architects and it outlines the most significant and urgent repairs.

FOAG advocates that the recommendations of the Baird Sampson Neuert report be implemented.



*View from within the Allan Gardens Palm House Portico, 1920's
Historic Photo: Allan Gardens, Toronto*

Originally the Palm House was graced with an elegant limestone Ionic colonnade portico, through which one entered on a central axis. The portico was removed during the modernizations of the 50's. The single central axis entry was sealed and two new entrances cut through the domed side pavilions. Re-construction of the Portico would contribute to the grand experience of the Palm House and its terrace.



*Palm House Historic Postcard Showing Colonnade Portico
Allan Gardens, Toronto*



STEWARDSHIP

8.1 EXPLORE MODELS FOR PARK GOVERNANCE AND OPERATION

The past decade has seen new models for improved and focussed public park governance and programming. Many historic public parks and botanical gardens in the United States have entered into successful public-private partnerships between municipal parks departments and motivated and organized friends' groups, horticultural societies, and concerned citizen groups. These partner organizations often refer to themselves as Conservancies. The Central Park Conservancy is a well known example overseeing the programming and maintenance of Central Park in New York. In April 2014, with support from TD Bank, FOAG commissioned a report authored by Toronto Parks People and the Martin Prosperity Institute called "Growing Opportunities: Investing in, revitalizing, and sustaining Allan Gardens". The report championed the need to consider new models for park governance and partnership opportunities in Toronto parks generally, and Allan Gardens specifically. FOAG believes that Allan Gardens, as a cherished public space, should always be supported and owned by the City of Toronto, but that spaces, facilities, and programming could be better delivered and operated through a conservancy model.



*Bryant Park Winter Village
Bryant Park, New York (photo: Angelita Jusay)*





STEWARDSHIP

8.2 PARTNER WITH INDIGENOUS GROUPS TO MANIFEST TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION IN ALLAN GARDENS

Opportunities should be explored to partner with Indigenous groups to provide spaces and support for expressions of Truth and Reconciliation, such as events, ceremonies, healing spaces, gardens, and water features. Neighbouring Indigenous groups have expressed a strong interest in Allan Gardens, and already use the park in various ways. FOAG will seek counsel from these groups on appropriate initiatives.



*"All My Relations" Mural Unveiling
Allan Gardens, Toronto (source: blogTO)*



*Unveiling of Monument to Missing and Murdered Aboriginal Women
The Forks National Park, Winnipeg MB (source: CBC News)*



STEWARDSHIP

8.3 EXTEND VISITING HOURS IN THE CONSERVATORY

Currently the conservatories are open to the public from 10am to 5pm, seven days a week. This timing precludes daytime workers from visiting the conservatory, especially on weekdays. The proposed volunteer program could provide staffing support to extend visiting hours. Special evening events, such as performances or display exhibitions, could also provide opportunities for after-hours access. Later hours could also provide an opportunity to light greenhouse interiors, adding to the drama of the gardens at night (see 1.3)







STEWARDSHIP

8.4 RUN A VOLUNTEER PROGRAM

Volunteers are an important way to build citizen 'ownership,' stewardship, and oversight of the Gardens. Volunteers care, and are motivated to share their enthusiasm for their causes. New classes and programming can train volunteers as docents, to lead tours of the conservatory collections and the grounds, and assist with simple park maintenance (litter and debris), seasonal planting events (alongside city horticulturalists), and support and leadership of FOAG-sponsored events in the Gardens.




*Open House Workshops, Summer 2016
Allan Gardens, Toronto*



Pennsylvania Horticultural Society Garden Tenders
Philadelphia, PA (source: phsonline.org)

RESOURCES

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| 1986 | “Allan Gardens Revitalization Programme”
Dept. of Parks and Rec. | 2007 | “Conservatory Programme Models” by
Landplan Collaborative Ltd. et al |
| 1987 | “Allan Gardens Revitalization Study” by Arcop
Architects [large link greenhouse proposed] | 2009 | “Allan Gardens Conservatory Plant Study” by
Landplan Collaborative Ltd. et al |
| 2001 | “Preliminary Discussion Paper: Market
Research/ Financial Viability Study for Allan
Gardens” by Roger Jones | 2010 | “Fertile Ground for New Thinking; Improving
Toronto’s Parks” by David Harvey for the
Metcalf Foundation |
| 2001 | “Final Report: Market Research/ Financial
Viability Study for Allan Gardens” by Roger
Jones [link building proposed] | 2012 | Allan Gardens Heritage By-Law Designation
and Heritage Evaluation Report |
| 2003 | “U of T Greenhouse Relocation to Allan
Gardens” (Children’s Conservatory) Staff
Report | 2014 | “Growing Opportunities: investing in,
revitalizing and sustaining Allan Gardens” by
Martin Prosperity Institute and Toronto Park
People |
| 2004 | “A Heritage Conservation Management
Strategy for Allan Gardens” by Commonwealth
Historic Resource Management and Pleasance
Crawford | 2016 | “Garden District Heritage Conservation District
Plan” by City of Toronto Planning |
| 2006 | “Allan Gardens Landscape Revitalization
Strategy and Management Plan” by The
Landplan Collaborative Ltd et al | 2016 | “Rebalancing Parks & Public Realm” in TOcore;
Planning Downtown Proposals Report |
| 2006 | “Technical Appendices – Archaeology,
Servicing & Tree Inventory and Management
Strategy” | 2017 | “FOAG Refresh: A Vision Document for Allan
Gardens” by the Friends of Allan Gardens. |



“ We imagine a revitalized Allan Gardens, which grows from its heritage roots as a horticultural garden of creativity, education, natural beauty, and cultural influence to become a year round green oasis and vibrant landmark in the heart of downtown Toronto.
