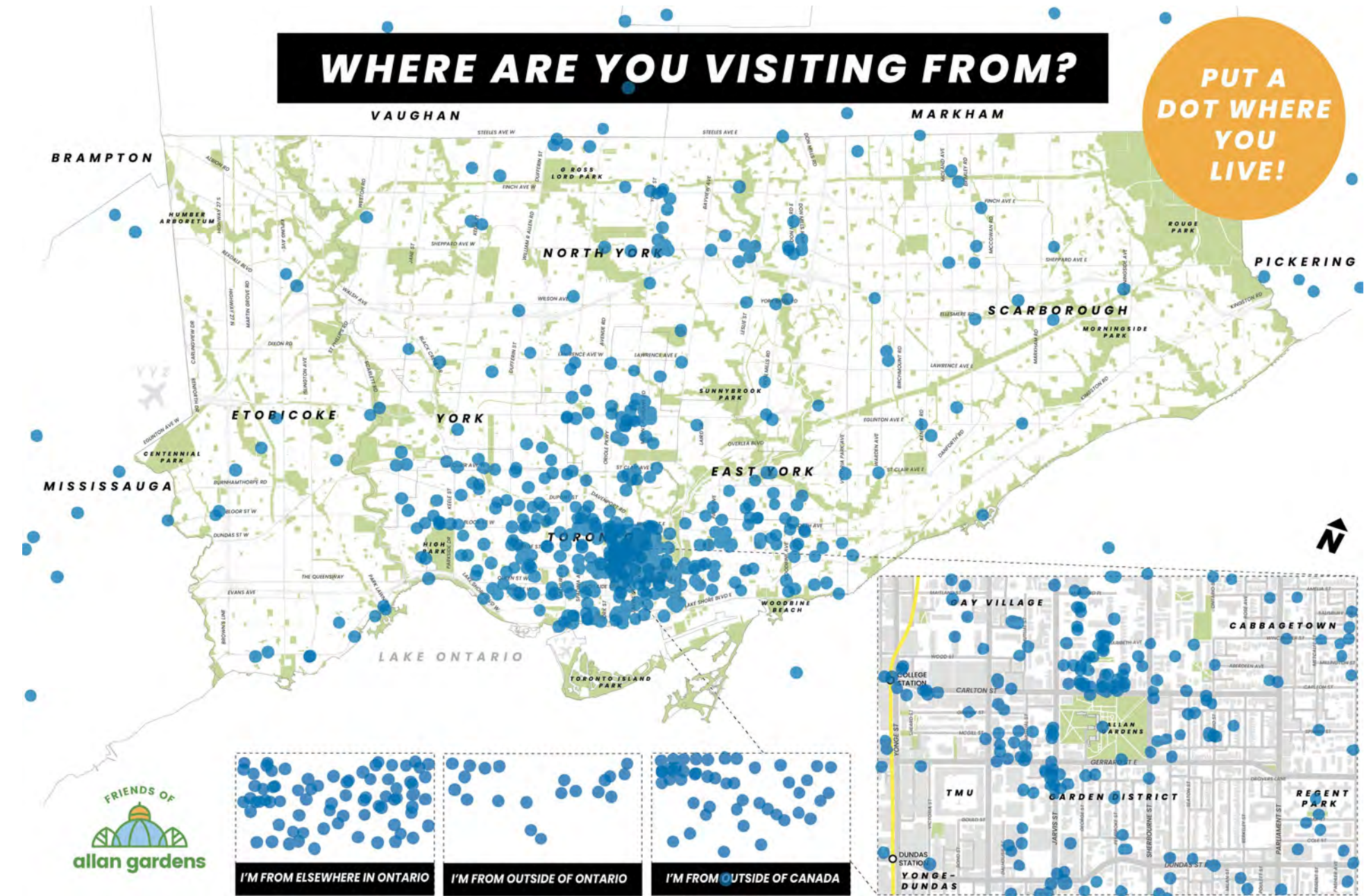
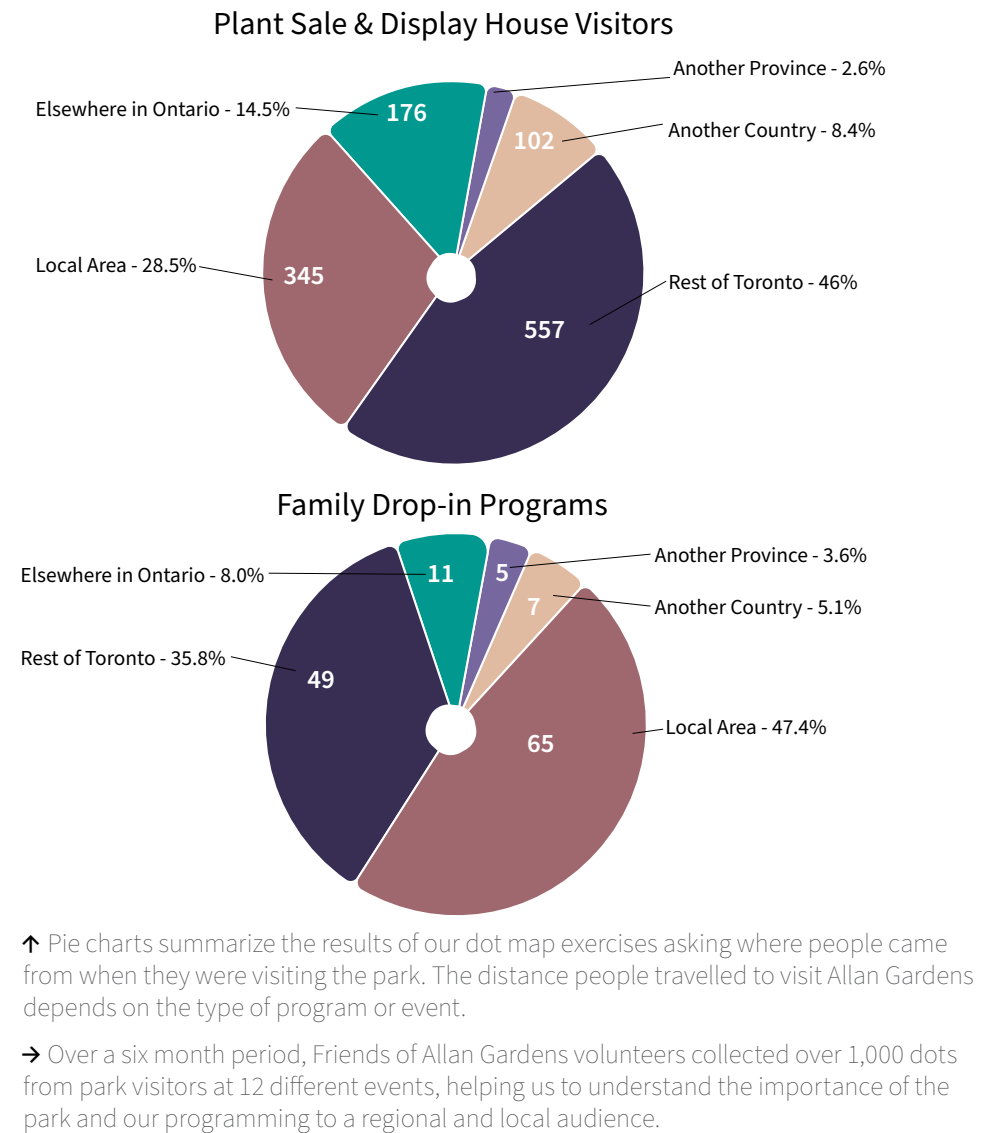


## THE FRIENDS OF ALLAN GARDENS

### 3.5 Community Engagement: Dot Maps

Between September 2022 and March 2023, Friends of Allan Gardens volunteers asked visitors to put a dot on a map indicating where they were coming from to visit the park. We engaged with over 1,000 visitors to the park for this exercise, helping us better understand the community we serve. We ran dot map exercises with visitors in the greenhouses, and at public events including children's programs and plant sales. We noticed a difference in where people were visiting from depending on why they were visiting the park. Visitors to the greenhouses and to our plant sales were more likely to reside outside the local area, whereas participants of our family drop-in events were more likely to come from the local area. Allan Gardens is indeed both a community hub that provides space for local families and a regional and even international destination for visitors to see and learn about plants.

These dot map results can be interpreted as a snapshot of visitor patterns rather than a fulsome survey of visitors, since not everybody who visited the park during the collection period placed a dot on the map. In addition to being a data collection tool, the dot map exercise proved to be a great conversation starter with visitors as most people we interacted with were eager and enthusiastic to participate!





## THE FRIENDS OF ALLAN GARDENS

### 3.6 Community Engagement: Love Most

On Sundays in Spring 2023, Friends of Allan Gardens volunteers were stationed in the Allan Garden's Display Houses to ask visitors what they loved most about the park. We interacted with over 250 park visitors and recorded what they shared with us on heart-shaped post-it notes. As a key horticultural destination in the city of Toronto, we are not surprised that many expressed their love for the plants! Many visitors shared their love of a specific plant, like the papayas, bananas, or cacti. Some shared that they love the blooms and the fragrance of the flowers. Children and families enthusiastically expressed their love for the playground and the animals including the turtles and the fish. A number of visitors shared with us that they loved everything about the park and thought the greenhouse plantings were well cared for by City of Toronto staff.

This exercise speaks to two insights. Firstly, the strength of Allan Gardens as a public space for people to connect with plants and nature. Secondly, the deep love the community has for the park broadly. Visitors love Allan Gardens!



↑ Friends of Allan Gardens staff digitized the responses and created a wordcloud to summarize the data. The larger the word appears, the more often it was used in a response shared with us about what visitors love most about Allan Gardens.

→ Friends of Allan Gardens volunteer greeters stationed themselves in the Allan Gardens Conservatory throughout the spring of 2023 to ask visitors what they love most about the park.





## THE FRIENDS OF ALLAN GARDENS

### 3.7 Social Service Providers: Towards a Public Common

In the spring of 2020, Saint Luke's United Church began a dialogue with a number of community collaborators interested in making the park a more inclusive public common. In the summer of 2021, they led a co-design consultation to develop programming that would address the cultural, artistic, health, and social needs of the surrounding neighbourhood.

The committee included representatives of Friends of Allan Gardens, Saint Luke's, Faith in the City, Dixon Hall, Sherbourne Health, Toronto Metropolitan University's Office of Social Innovation, OAHAS (a social service and health agency for local Indigenous communities), and Anishinaabe artist Raylah Moonias.

Each committee member serves, or holds strong relationships with, key segments of the neighbourhood community. Each member consulted with their own constituents on what brings them to the park; what improvements, if any, they would suggest; and what makes them happy or unhappy within the park.

All consultees enthusiastically expressed the value of the park to their health and well-being and their ongoing desire to see diverse cultural, artistic, recreational, health, and social activities within it. While specific attitudes and "asks" sometimes diverged, there were many overlapping requests and recommendations with respect to park amenities and their

maintenance and cleanliness, park safety and security measures, supplemental services given local food and housing insecurity, encampments, alcohol and substance use, seating availability, public art and multicultural events, Indigenous ceremony, horticultural programs, and broader nature and community connectedness.

These community collaborators and social service providers have proposed to continue their work in meeting together and with various engagement strategies which may be developed to communicate with the larger community neighbouring Allan Gardens.







# AN ECOSYSTEM OF INITIATIVES

## 4.0 Restoring the Palm House

Originally constructed in 1910, the Palm House is the largest of the existing conservatory buildings, and the focal point of Allan Gardens. Due to the building's stature, historical significance, and cultural prominence, the Palm House is the park's original landmark. Both the 2006 master plan, and the 2017 *Refresh* document highlighted the condition of the Palm House as a major concern. One hundred and twelve years after the building's opening, the City of Toronto began efforts to conserve the building. The project respects and restores the building's architectural heritage while also modernizing its environmental and functional performance.

Once complete, the renewed Palm House will serve as a reference point for an expanded and evolving Allan Gardens, providing a framework and testbed for how the park and conservatory should support the changing needs of the city and community.

Friends of Allan Gardens has committed to supporting the interior renovations and the long-term programming of the Palm House once the conservation work is complete. We envision this will happen in two phases. In the short-term, the Palm House is the park's premier indoor programming space. This calls for the

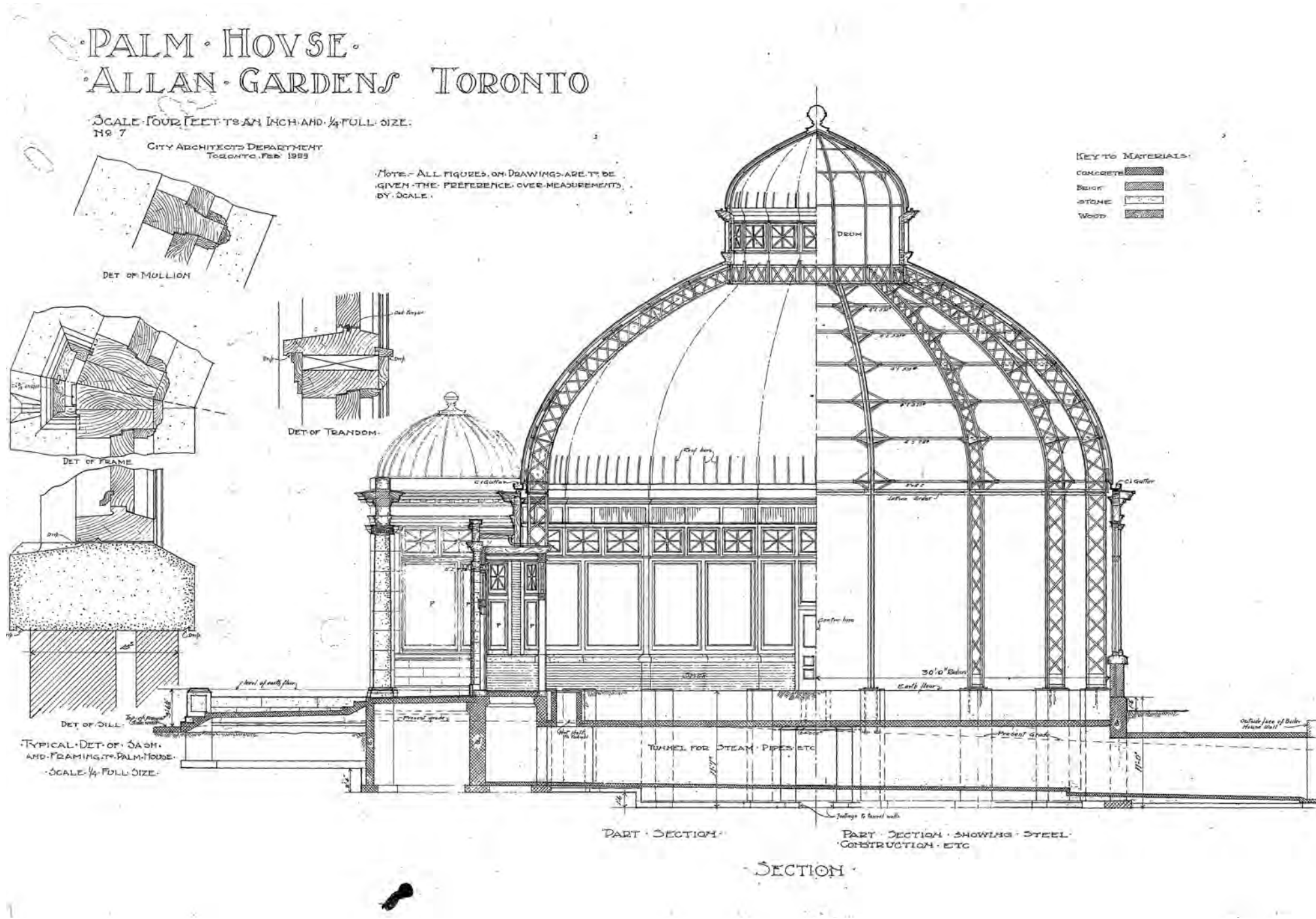


↑ Palm House restoration, 2023. Photograph by Brent Wagler.  
→ Drawings by the City Architect Robert McCallum for the original Palm House that opened in 1910. Image courtesy of the City of Toronto's Parks, Forestry and Recreation department.

space to be open and flexible to allow for a range of events including seasonal horticultural shows, performances, art shows, town halls, and private bookings such as wedding ceremonies. In the long-term, dedicated programming areas in the anticipated Greenhouse Link Building (see section 4.1) will relieve pressures on the Palm House as an event space, allowing for more of the building's floor plate to be dedicated to

plants. The long-term future of the Palm House will be aligned with its past, a place of towering palm trees and other tropical plants.

The Palm House conservation work began in October 2022 and is set to be completed in late 2024, after which the interior work, including the replanting, and programming will commence.





## AN ECOSYSTEM OF INITIATIVES

### 4.1 The Greenhouse Link Building: More Space for Plants and Community

As the surrounding context of Allan Gardens evolves, the Conservatory must adapt to better serve the community that uses the park today, and to ensure the park can better support the continued growth expected in the urban core.

Building on Allan Gardens' local and regional draw and its past and present significance, the Friends of Allan Gardens imagines an expansion to the historic greenhouse conservatory.

The proposed expansion has been called the Greenhouse Link Building as it would link together the currently disconnected ends of the greenhouses. This expansion would increase exhibition and programming space and unlock the 21st-century potential of horticulture in the city.

A new Greenhouse Link Building would create opportunities for:

- Expanded plant communities to better reflect the cultural diversity of the city.
- Nature and horticulture education on climate change, sustainability, and urban agriculture, with added classroom spaces and improved signage and interpretation.
- Artistic events, musical performances, ceremonies, and revenue-generating events through the addition of a small performance hall and gathering spaces.
- Cultural sharing around food by adding space to prepare and serve the unique foods grown at Allan Gardens.
- A café in the Park.
- Exploration of the history and evolution of contemporary greenhouses internationally.

→ A conceptual rendering by Baird Sampson Neuert of a new Greenhouse Link Building at Allan Gardens.







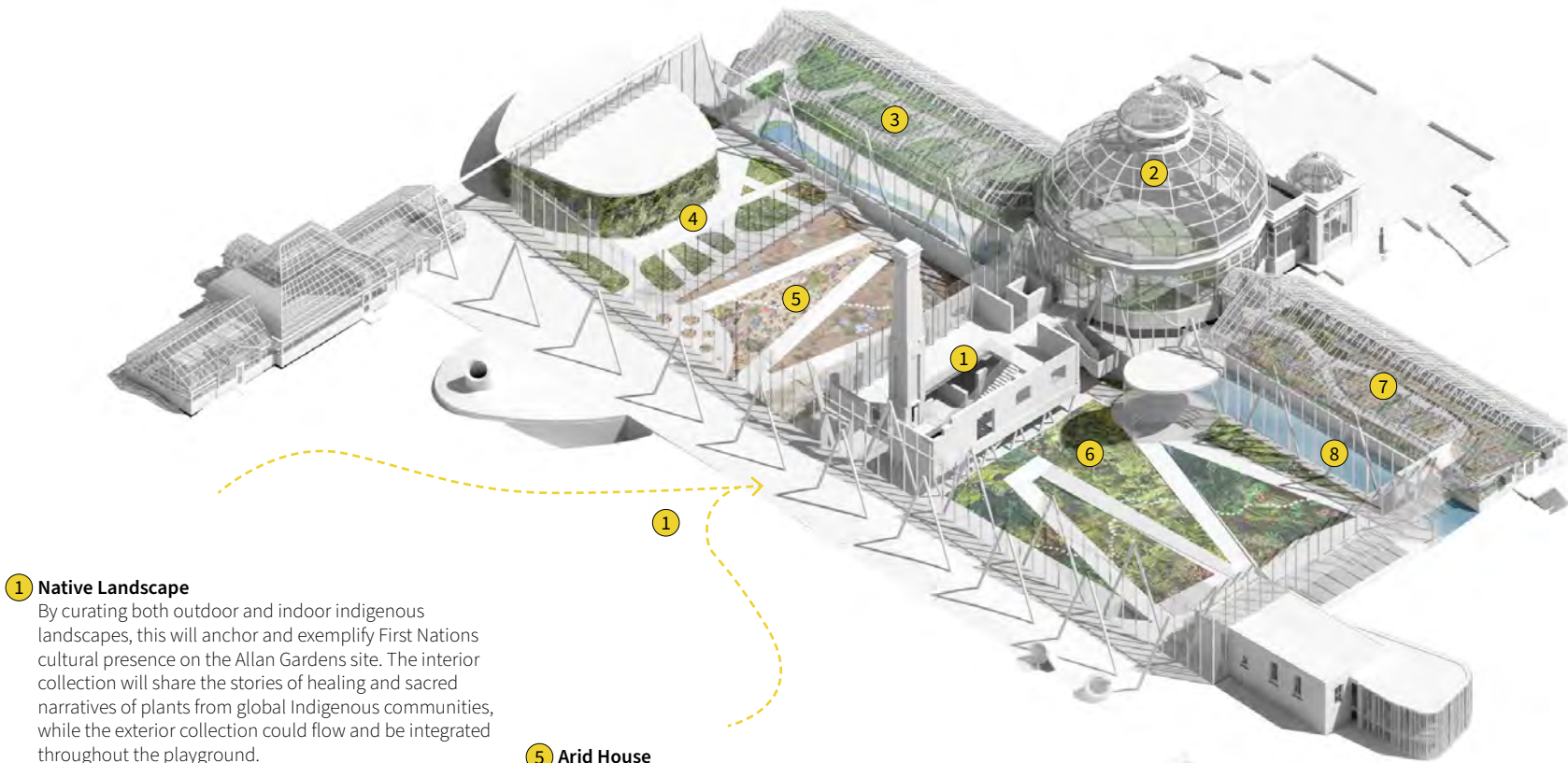
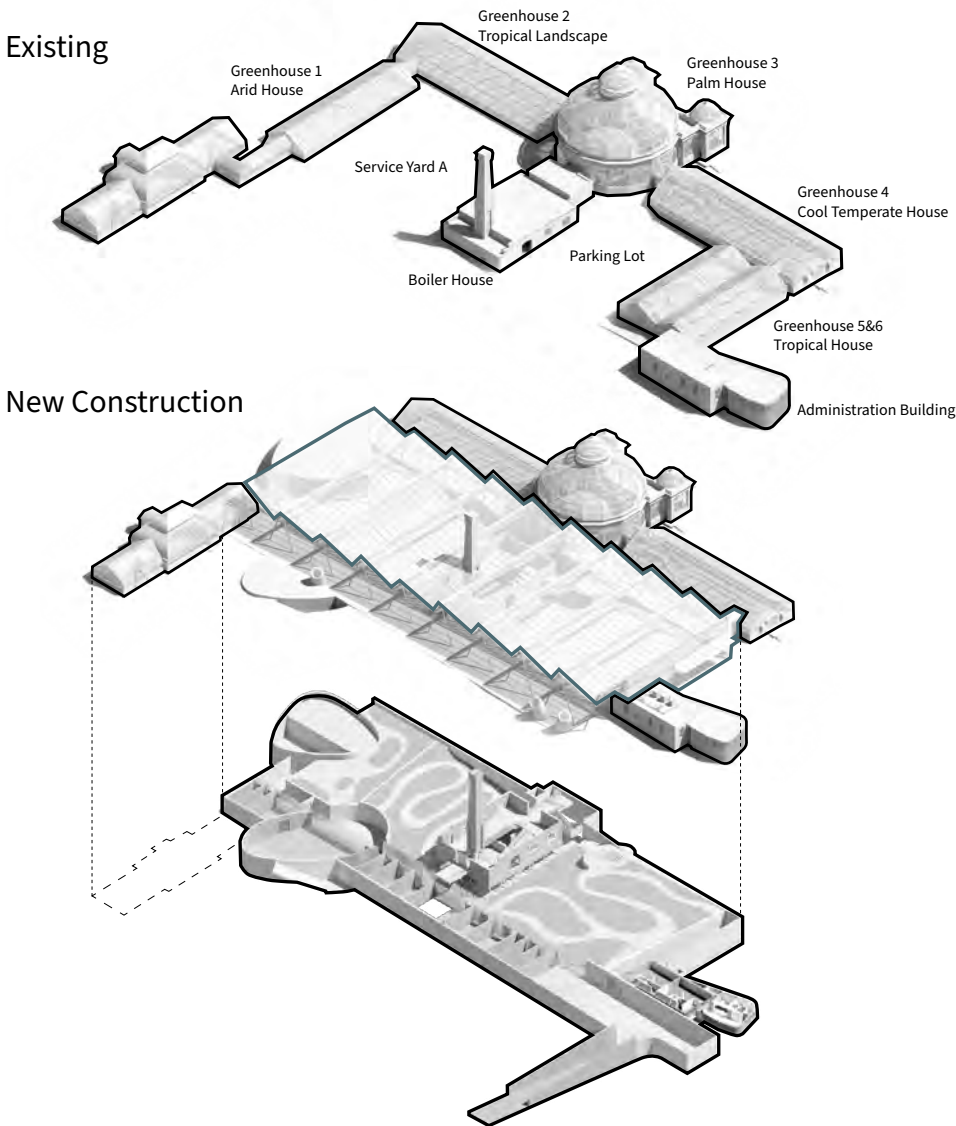
# AN ECOSYSTEM OF INITIATIVES

## 4.2.1 Expanding the Greenhouses without Reducing the Park’s Greenspace

To expand the conservatory at Allan Gardens without reducing the park’s greenspace, the new greenhouse could be located where the paved service yard and parking lot are found today.

New service facilities and staff parking could be accommodated underground. Early explorations for ramp locations that minimize disruptions to the park have begun. The Friends of Allan Gardens are engaging with the BA Group, a Toronto-based transportation planning firm to bring a context-sensitive and thoughtful approach to this work.

→ A concept for how the new Greenhouse Link Building could fit in with the existing buildings at Allan Gardens. Concept design and visualization of the Link building is provided by Baird Sampson Neuert.



- 1 Native Landscape**  
By curating both outdoor and indoor indigenous landscapes, this will anchor and exemplify First Nations cultural presence on the Allan Gardens site. The interior collection will share the stories of healing and sacred narratives of plants from global Indigenous communities, while the exterior collection could flow and be integrated throughout the playground.
- 2 Palm House**  
The historic Palm House is now transformed into a new seasonal display greenhouse, with large palms in movable pots. The space can be converted into a memorable event space in between horticultural shows.
- 3 Fern House**  
As visitors turn north, they enter into a Cycad Fern House which would include tropical and sub-tropical ferns and gymnosperms (Cycads). These plants represent some of the oldest and most unique plants on Earth, reflecting an ancient era.
- 4 Fruit and Spices Collection**  
This greenhouse could showcase tropical fruits and spices from around the world like bananas, coffee plants, chocolate trees, papayas, ginger, and dragon fruit.
- 5 Arid House**  
The Arid collection will be doubled in size. It is one of our most popular greenhouses because of the uniqueness of the plants. The expansion will allow for more and larger agave, succulent, and cacti exhibits.
- 6 Tropical Rainforest House**  
This biome will be hot and humid to highlight international equator plants. This is an opportunity to provide further knowledge of the currently threatened exotic ecosystems.
- 7 Orchid House**  
Greenhouse 4 could be converted into the Bromeliad and Orchid or Epiphyte House - showcasing the epiphytes that grow in trees and rocks and the outstanding blooms and fragrances of orchids. There are between 25 000 and 35 000 orchid species from around the world and approximately another 40 000 hybrid species.
- 8 Lily Ponds**  
The Lily ponds would be a hydrological landscape in between the old and new buildings and act as a catchment reservoir for rainwater from the sawtooth roof of the building.

**Question for the Reader:**  
Do the horticultural rooms imagined in this image resonate with you? What plants or ecosystems would you like to see represented at Allan Gardens? We’d love to hear from you! Email us at [info@friendsofallangardens.ca](mailto:info@friendsofallangardens.ca)

↑ A concept for the rooms and spaces in the new Greenhouse Link Building. Concept and visualization is provided by Baird Sampson Neuert.



## AN ECOSYSTEM OF INITIATIVES

### 4.3 Washroom & Administration Building

The City of Toronto is completing the interior renovation of Allan Gardens' existing administration offices, as well as the addition of a 720 square-foot public washroom facility. Constructed of translucent glass and stainless steel, this new addition to the park's southwest side compliments the architecture of the main conservatory, reflects back the landscape of the park, and improves sightlines for the sake of public safety both indoors and out.

Designed as a suite of fully accessible, single occupant facilities, the washrooms are a significant upgrade to a critical public amenity in the park. Conservatory visitors, park and playground users, and vulnerable neighbourhood residents alike rely on the availability of clean, safe, and accessible facilities to serve their daily needs, and they look forward to the building's opening in 2023.

#### Did you know?

Toronto has just 6.5 park washrooms per 100,000 people, less than half the national average of 13.1. Of the 182 washrooms available, only 54 are open in the winter. (Source: City of Toronto, 2023.)



→ Renderings of the new Washroom and Administration Building at Allan Gardens. Images are provided by Baird Sampson Neuert, the architects for the project.





# AN ECOSYSTEM OF INITIATIVES

## 4.4 Edible & Teaching Gardens

Edible Allan Gardens is a garden oasis that brings together local volunteers to share vegetable gardening knowledge and to grow food for neighbours in need. The raised bed garden was established in 2016 through a partnership with Building Roots, TMU, the Toronto and York Region Métis Council, the Friends of Allan Gardens, and the City of Toronto Parks, Forestry and Recreation.

Crops grown and harvested in the garden include tomatoes, leeks, berries, rhubarb, turnips, radishes, and kale, among others. The garden’s harvest is donated to local food banks. Sunday morning harvests are distributed to people in the park same-day by Toronto Food Not Bombs. Weekday harvests are donated to the Moss Park Market.

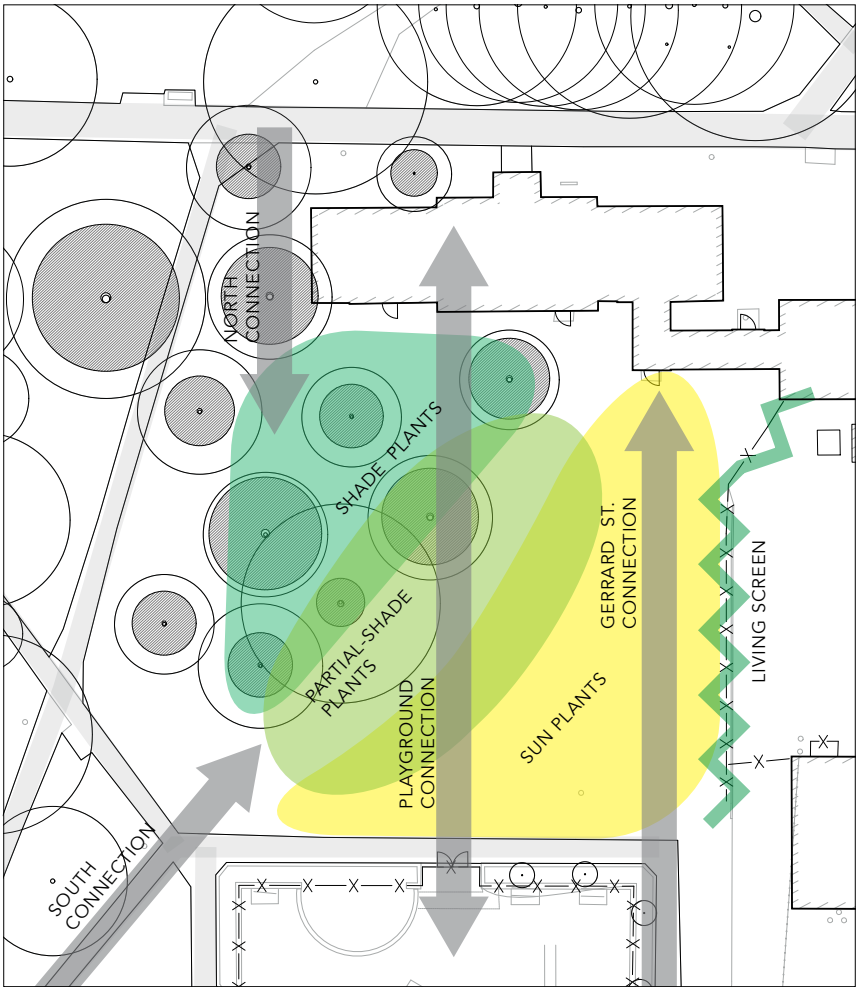
In 2021, the Garden Club of Toronto gifted the City of Toronto and the Friends a donation to increase the footprint of the Edible Garden, allowing more space to grow food and to teach community members—especially children—about horticulture. The new Teaching Garden will feature more raised garden beds and an outdoor classroom. Construction is scheduled to begin between 2023 and 2024.



↑ A young Friends of Allan Gardens volunteer posing in front of a successful Edible Allan Gardens Harvest. Photograph from Diana Teal.

**Did you know?**

Roughly one in five Torontonians reports that, at some point in the past 12 months, they have eaten less than they felt they should because they didn’t have enough money to buy food. Single parents, Black Torontonians, those with a disability, and those who identify as LGBTQ2S+ (all of whom are communities demonstrably served by Allan Gardens) are all more likely to experience food insecurity (Source: Toronto Social Capital Study, 2022.)



↑ The new Teaching Garden is being developed by thinc design landscape architects through contributions by Toronto Parks, Forestry & Recreation, and the Garden Club of Toronto and will be operated by the Friends of Allan Gardens.







# 4

## AN ECOSYSTEM OF INITIATIVES

### 4.5 Experimental Garden

Building on Allan Gardens’ history as a place of education and horticultural innovation, the Experimental Garden is imagined as a space for exhibiting land-based solutions to address the major issues of our time, including climate change, biodiversity loss, and socio-economic inequalities. These defining issues require both creative thinking and the space to trial new ideas.

Indigenous Knowledge Keepers, educational institutions, and gardening societies are all already very active in the Allan Gardens community and are looking for the space to more deeply engage with the land. The west side of the park, between the Children’s Playground to the east and Jarvis Street to the west, is surprisingly under-utilized. With proper care and attention, this space can be incrementally transformed into an experimental garden planned and designed for educational programming.

**Did you know?**  
87% of respondents to the 2022 Canadian City Parks Report stated they were in favour of more native plant species within parks—the second most requested park amenity after public washrooms.

→ This light study highlights movement of shade throughout the day in different areas of Allan Gardens. This helps to understand how future designs should be planned to accommodate shade and sun. Study by Thea Freer.







## AN ECOSYSTEM OF INITIATIVES

### 4.7 Homewood-Pembroke Allée

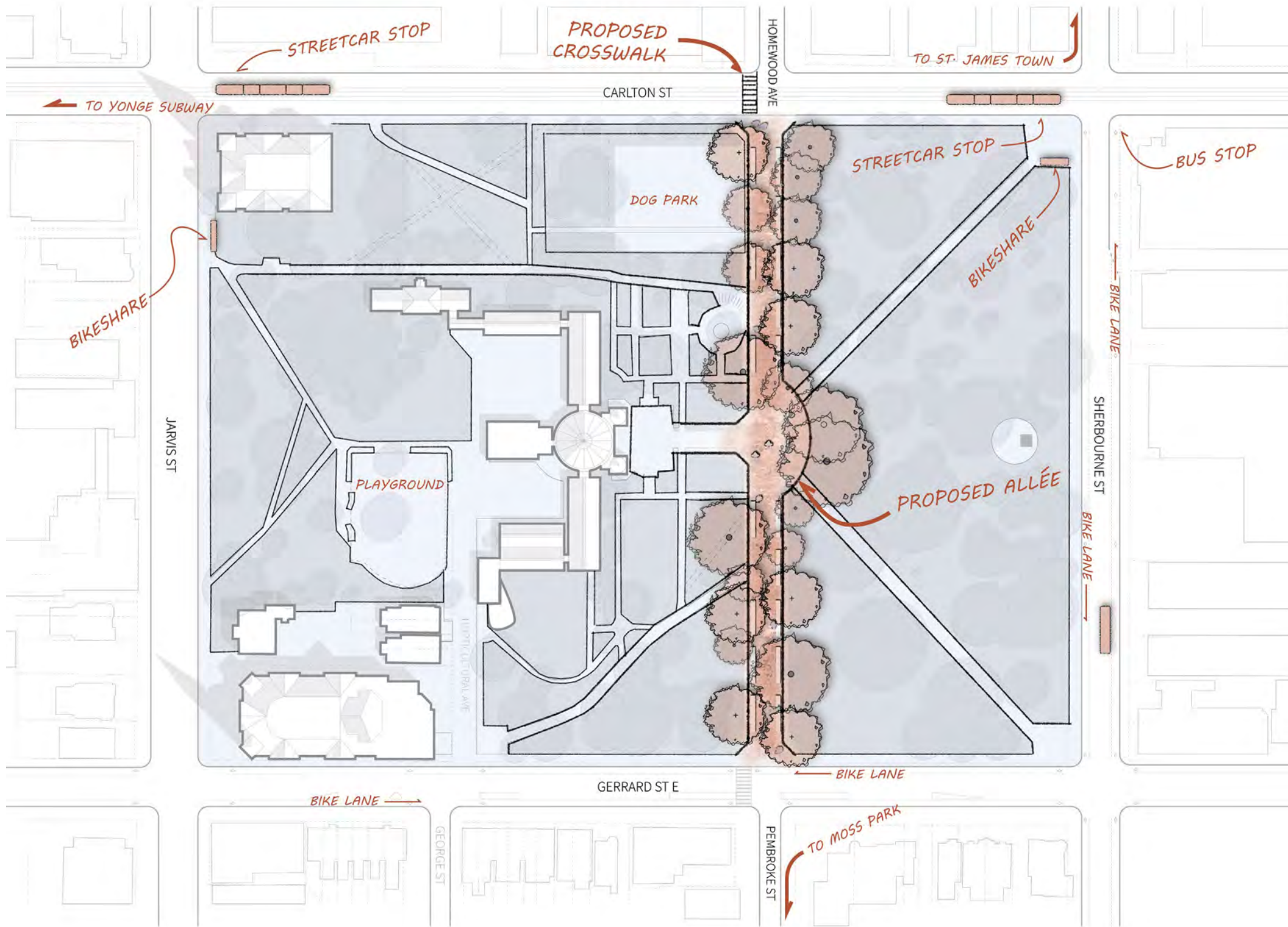
As we aim to improve the pedestrian experience of the park, we imagine a central path or allée linking Homewood Avenue and Pembroke Street, enlivening the Gardens and setting a standard for future path improvements.

Since the 1850s, a designed pathway has existed along the north-south axis from Pembroke Street to Homewood Avenue, serving as a defining feature of Allan Gardens' layout and overall experience. Establishing an allée pathway with accompanying benches, improving lighting, and providing a generous amount of space for sitting or moving through the park will create an enhanced park experience. In addition, this allée connects main gateways on Pembroke and Homewood, and the larger Garden District.

As a multi-use urban promenade, the five-metre-wide space with pavers encourages a pedestrian friendly pace. Upgraded lighting will facilitate safe and comfortable experiences at all times of day. The proposed addition of a crosswalk on the allée's north end at Carlton and Homewood, similar to Gerrard and Pembroke, would allow for greater usability and continuous travel along this corridor.



- ↑ Queen's Park's 7.5 metre-wide allée is an example for what is possible at Allan Gardens; courtesy the City of Toronto.
- A map showing the location of Homewood-Pembroke Allée.





## AN ECOSYSTEM OF INITIATIVES

### 4.8 Dog Off-Leash Area

The existing dog off-leash area represents one of the shifts towards more diverse programming at Allan Gardens in the past couple of decades. The addition of this amenity to the northern edge of the park in 2008 was welcomed by the community and continues to be enjoyed today. Over the years, it has become apparent that a reconceptualization of the space is necessary to address user feedback, maintenance challenges, and overall integration into the park.

An enhanced dog off-leash area would celebrate dogs in Allan Gardens, improve circulation, and introduce plantings and furnishings that allow for greater comfort and a richer user experience. Careful consideration would need to be given to the safety of park staff in establishing a new design vision for the dog off-leash area and plantings that require maintenance would be located outside the area's fencing.

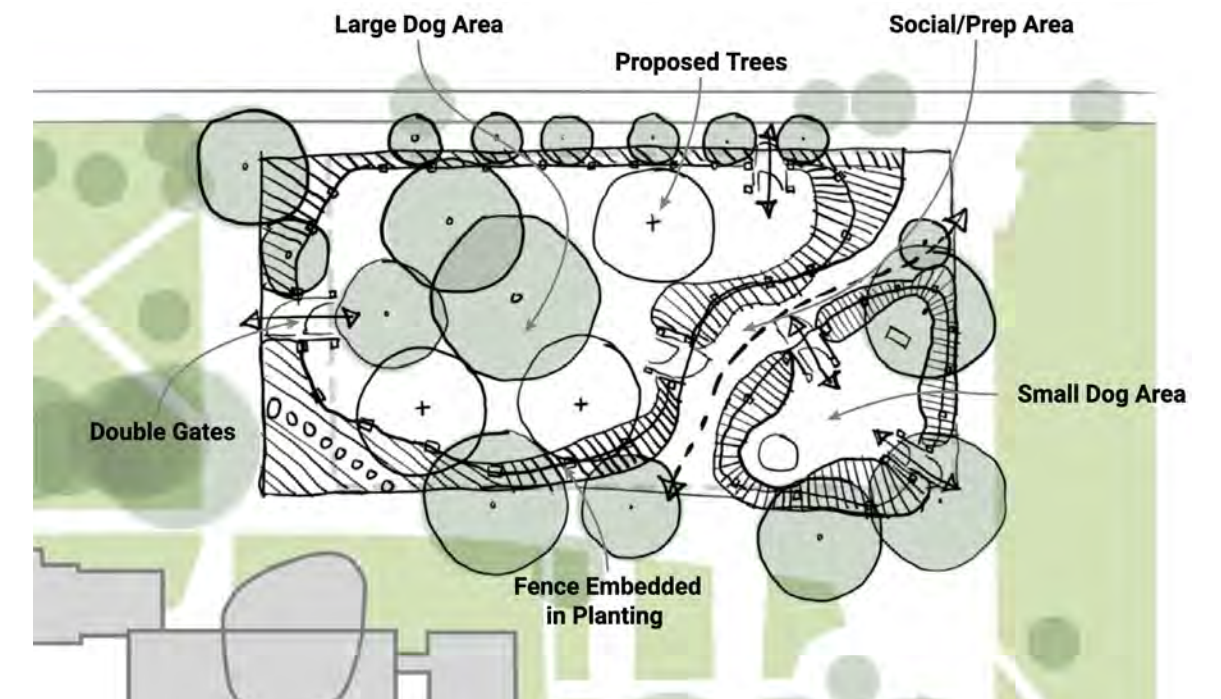
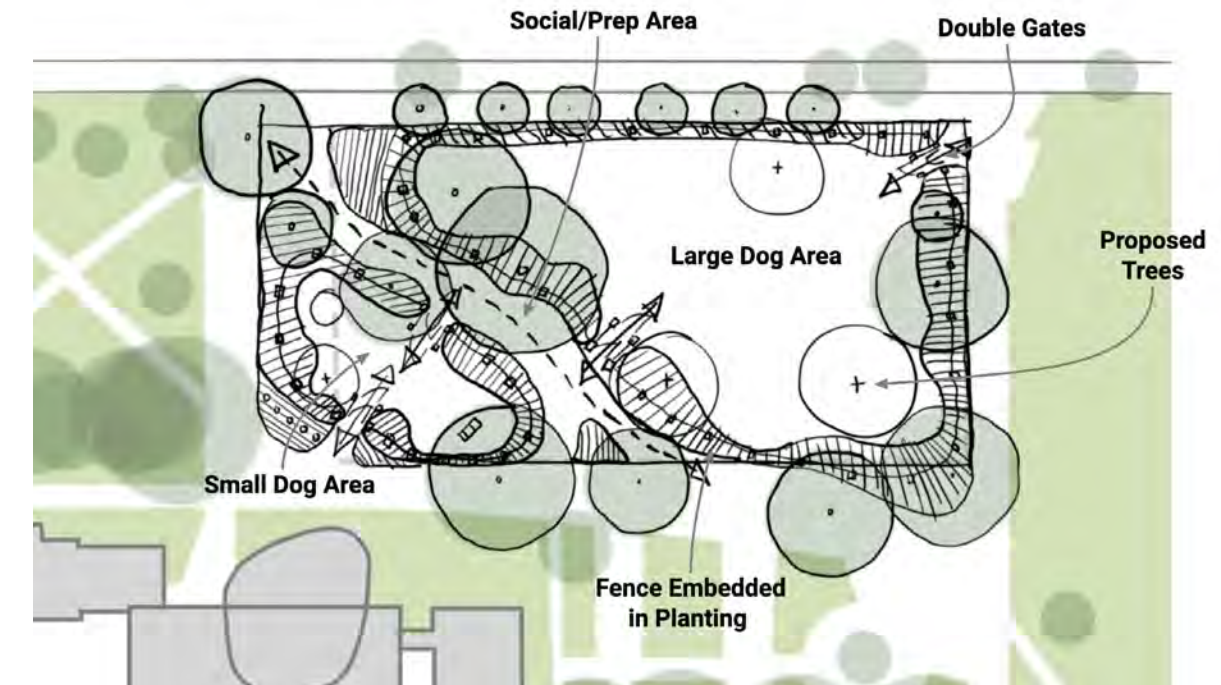
#### Did you know?

Toronto is home to 2.8 million people, and an estimated 230,000 dogs. That's one dog for every 50 people, with a greater concentration of "pet parents" in the downtown core.



↑ The current dog off-leash area of Allan Gardens

→ Two concepts for an enhanced dog off-leash area by ERA Architects. These sketches will be used as a basis for further engagement with dog park users.





## AN ECOSYSTEM OF INITIATIVES

## 4.9 Pop-up Performance Space

A pop-up performance space is proposed as a modest, temporary, and movable feature to support free, family-oriented events in Allan Gardens. In its first year, the performance space could start small, taking the form of a pop-up canopy or tent. TMU's Department of Architectural Science, which envisioned and built the core installation for the 2022 Allan Gardens festival People, Power, & the Park, and which also contribute annually to the Beaches' Winter Stations, would be a great candidate to design and install different iterations of this project as it progresses.

The imagined temporary performance space will be a gathering spot for community entertainment and cultural activities. As a pilot for this intention, the Friends of Allan Gardens programmed a series of eight weekly events in the summer of 2023. This demonstrated the Park's capacity to serve as a creative "community centre without walls," an idea advocated by TMU's Office of Social Innovation. Imagined future performances hosted in a pop-space in Allan Gardens include solo concerts, poetry readings, puppet shows, storytelling, and public talks.

**Did you know?**

Over the years, Allan Gardens has hosted many noteworthy events, including a royal visit from the Prince of Wales (later King Edward VII), a lecture by Oscar Wilde, the inaugural meeting of the National Council of Women of Canada, and even a Communist Party rally. (Source: Toronto Star, 2015.)

→ Music and dance performances at Allan Gardens in Summer 2023. Artists and groups pictured include (top right) Cotee Harper, (bottom left) Samba Squad, and (bottom right) Seylon Stills.







# AN ECOSYSTEM OF INITIATIVES

## 4.10 Moccasin Identifiers

Allan Gardens is often thought of as a Victorian-inspired botanical garden. However, the land’s histories, communities, and uses are much older and more diverse. We recommend adding to the park’s a visual narrative to better reflect the layered experiences of the contemporary communities that use it.

To that end, the Moccasin Identifier Project was developed by Elder Carolyn King, in partnership with Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation and the Ontario Green Belt, to promote public awareness of significant cultural historic sites and the ancestral presence of First Nations, Métis, and Indigenous communities on the land. Stencilled moccasins, collaboratively painted along walkways and other surfaces, will offer a visual reminder of Indigenous peoples’ presence in the park and encourage others to meaningfully explore and connect with the land by walking along their path.



↑ → These photographs were captured during TMU’s People, Power, and the Park event in September 2022. Event participants painted hundreds of Moccasins all over Allan Gardens during the event.







## AN ECOSYSTEM OF INITIATIVES

### 4.11 Indigenous Language Keeping & Tree Naming Project

As an important gathering place for Indigenous communities from across Turtle Island, the Friends of Allan Gardens aims to support Indigenous cultural reclamation initiatives in the Park. We are working with Elders, Knowledge Keepers, Language Carriers, and audio recording technicians to learn, document, and share tree names and stories with community members.

Tree names will be thoughtfully shared in multiple Indigenous languages including Anishinaabemowin, Cayuga, Mohawk, Wendat, Wyandot, and potentially more languages represented in the advisory circle and present

in the community. This project will encourage everyone in the park community to engage with Indigenous language learning, ensuring these words are heard, seen, and felt on this land, forever. This project aims to create permanent interpretive signs in the park along with digital audio recordings to share information about the trees, and about Indigenous ways of knowing.

Friends of Allan Gardens would like to thank the Landscape Architecture Foundation Canada, the TD Friends of the Environment, and donations from individual community members for their financial support of this project thus far.

#### The Great Tree of Peace

Onę'dagó:wah is the Cayuga name for the White Pine Tree. The literal English translation of this term is the Great Tree of Peace, exemplifying the significance and sacredness of this tree in the creation of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy. The term gó:wah is used to signify greatness. For example, the bald eagle is known in the Thanksgiving Address as the head of the birds; it's name in Cayuga is Awęhe'gó:wah. This is just one example of the language and culture that the community of Elders, Language Carriers, and Knowledge Keepers has shared with us. We recognize that we still have much to learn, and this project is just the beginning of a journey.

→ Elder Donna Powless's Tree and Plant Talk at Allan Gardens in June 2023. Elder Powless shared some of the Cayuga names and the stories of plants important to her culture.







## AN ECOSYSTEM OF INITIATIVES

### 4.12 Volunteer Programming: Growing Together

The Friends of Allan Gardens host many different volunteer programs, united in service to the park community and a love for the natural world.

With the support of a 2017 Ontario Trillium Foundation seed grant, the Friends of Allan Gardens established a volunteer program to build a culture of citizen stewardship for the park. The first full-time employee, Diana Teal, was hired to develop the program, and in just five years, over 500 volunteers (including Friends of Allan Gardens’ Board of Directors) have contributed over 12,000 hours to the Gardens. Between 2018 and 2023, the volunteer team delivered over 300 public programs and special events, engaging over 35,000 participants and park visitors.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the volunteer program became a key source of community as neighbours came together to plant gardens, grow food, and give back. Post-pandemic, the Friends have worked to resume programming that was paused, including indoor workshops, winter plants sales, and the docent program. In addition, the Friends of Allan Gardens have developed new programs designed to build bridges between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities, including partnerships with Indigenous organizations to create and care for medicine gardens. In future years we hope to build on the success of these programs and grow the community we serve.

**Did you know?**

The proportion of Toronto residents who volunteered for any organization within a 12-month period decreased by 12 percentage points between 2018 and 2022 (from 37% to 25%), making it especially critical to foster community connections and cultivate neighbourhood volunteerism post-pandemic (Source: Toronto Social Capital Study 2022).

→ Cotee Harper of Walks Across Collective leads a collaborative dance with the Allan Gardens community at the Sounds Like A Park music series in 2023.







# AN ECOSYSTEM OF INITIATIVES

## 4.13 Volunteer Initiatives

### Child & Family Programs

Family programs were launched in the Park in 2018 to engage children with urban nature through hands-on activities. The selection of volunteer-led family drop-in programs has grown to include Growing Up Green in the Garden, Mud-Day Mornings in the Garden, and special events year-round, including Family Fun Day, the Pumpkin Carve-a-thon, and winter holiday events. Youth and families are amongst the most enthusiastic members of the Friends community as we offer authentic hands-in-the-dirt programming for highly urbanized audiences.

### Edible Allan Gardens

In 2019, the Friends of Allan Gardens assumed responsibility for the Edible Garden, including planting and maintenance, volunteer and partner engagement, and public programming. Toronto and York Region Métis Council and Centre Francophone have raised beds that are tended to with care by their volunteers. Each season, the garden’s harvest is donated to local food banks. During the pandemic, volunteers grew and donated close to 2,500 bunches of food. Dozens of bunches are harvested and shared every week of the growing season.

### Giizis Gitigan at Miziwe Biik

In 2022, Miinikaan Design & Innovation, TMU, Spruce Labs, and the Friends of Allan Gardens collaborated to restore a garden at Miziwe Biik Aboriginal Employment and Training Centre, located south of the Park. Giizis Gitigan is an Anishinaabemowin name that translates to “Sun Garden.”

### Growing Gardens in the Park

The Friends of Allan Gardens have worked with community horticulturalists and the City to design and plant several gardens throughout the park. In 2018 and 2019, volunteers planted hundreds of native and ornamental perennials in the Medicine Garden east of the Palm House. Designed by municipal horticulturalists to attract and feed pollinators, these gardens have since been tended by volunteers organized by Native Women’s Resource Centre of Toronto. Additionally, the Pollinator Playground was planted in 2021 by local families and volunteers, with funding support from PollinateTO. Located within the Children’s Playground, these native plants provide an important urban habitat for native bees, butterflies, and birds.

### Seasonal Plant Sales

Since 2018, Friends of Allan Gardens volunteers have propagated thousands of plants for sale and raised over \$55,000 at 12 seasonal events and pop-up sales. Our plant sales attract patrons from both the local community and the wider city. People attend Allan Gardens’ plant sales because they know they can find unusual plants, often sourced from the Conservatory and the gardens itself. Dragonfruit, carnivorous plants, and hard-to-find herbs such as tulsi, curry leaf, and black marigold are among the crowd favourites.

→ A collection of images highlighting Friends of Allan Gardens community and volunteer events in the Park.







## AN ECOSYSTEM OF INITIATIVES

### 4.14 Programming: Arts and Culture

#### Artist in the Park

In 2022, the inaugural Artist in the Park residency offered Indigenous artists an opportunity to develop work reflecting upon the continuous Indigenous presence in the area of Allan Gardens. Michel Dumont, a multi-disciplinary, two-spirit, disabled artist from Thunder Bay was selected by a jury of his peers to spend two months on site creating River of Pride, a mosaic inspired by the park and its history. Park visitors interacted with Dumont throughout the work's creation, an opportunity the artist described as "career-changing". This residency resulted in his representation by a leading Toronto art gallery and participation within a future exhibition at the Art Gallery of Ontario.

#### Imagine the Park

Between 2020 and 2022, TMU's Office of Social Innovation (OSI), with the support of the Friends of Allan Gardens, piloted Imagine the Park: a multi-disciplinary series of activities and events in Allan Gardens.

Imagine the Park envisions Allan Gardens as a "community centre without walls," creating opportunities for local residents and visitors to connect through powerful experiences that resonate across differences, via bi-monthly Storytelling in the Park, biannual Sundays in

the Park, an annual artist's residency, and special programs.

Imagine the Park is grounded in three key principles: the importance of free, family-oriented cultural programs to overall neighbourhood wellbeing; the need to transition from "one-off" events in the park to predictably recurring programs; and the imperative to ensure direct participation by local community members at all stages of program development and production.

#### People, Power, & the Park

People, Power, & the Park was a four-day festival celebrating the many roles that Allan Gardens has played over the past 125 years: as a village commons, a city park, and a speakers' corner. Created through the contribution of TMU faculty, staff, and students, with support from the Friends of Allan Gardens and local participants, the festival's core installation, Time Frames: Allan Gardens, comprises multiple display cases illuminating the influential people, organizations, and events that have historically enlivened the park—from Victorian suffragettes and WW1 veterans to 21st-century activists and Indigenous groups. The installation has since travelled to multiple locations.

#### Storytelling in the Park

Storytelling in the Park (STIP) is a collaboration between OSI and The Children's Book Bank. Beginning in the fall of 2021, and taking place on every second Saturday, STIP welcomes children and their caregivers to an hour of storytelling, readings, and literacy-based games, after which every child is offered free books to take home and keep. The demographics of participating families are as diverse as the neighbourhood itself, bringing new Canadians facing language and adaptation barriers together with young native English speakers.

#### Sunday in the Park

Another collaboration between OSI and the Friends of Allan Gardens, the first Sunday in the Park took place in October 2021 and featured a hugely popular plant giveaway and pumpkin carving, along with other family activities. The community response was overwhelming, with well over a hundred participants of every age and demographic. Becoming a regular addition to the local calendar, Sunday in the Park is scheduled to take place biannually, in the spring and the fall.







## AN ECOSYSTEM OF INITIATIVES

### 4.15 FOOD IN THE PARK

“If you want to seed a place with activity, put out food”.

-William H. Whyte, *Social Life of Small Urban Spaces*, 1980.

2017’s *Refresh* introduced the potential for food at Allan Gardens, envisioning a café situated within the new Greenhouse Link Building with an accompanying terrace of ample seating. The document also called for pop-up vendors and food trucks to trial the concept.

In addition to further activating the park, serving food at Allan Gardens highlights the abundance of the existing gardens—inside and out. There is a wide range of edible plants from all over the world being grown in the greenhouses including dragon fruit, guavas, lemons, bananas, tamarind, cardamom, taro, coffee, and more. The harvest from the outdoor vegetable gardens is endless. Food vendors at Allan Gardens could conceivably use the food grown in the greenhouses and vegetable gardens to inspire, and include in, their menus. Where else in Toronto might you enjoy a papaya salad where the main ingredient is grown onsite?

Since we can grow food from all over the world at Allan Gardens it makes sense to have facilities



↑ A café space in Glasgow’s People’s Palace. Photograph by Brent Wagler.

→ The bounties of the Edible Garden.

in which to prepare and serve it. The park would benefit from a demonstration kitchen to host classes on how to prepare its harvests, activities that build community and promote cross-cultural learning. Both the demonstration

kitchen and the café could celebrate the culinary heritages of Toronto’s world-renowned diverse population. The Friends of Allan Gardens envision a future where guests come to the Park for the plants but stay for the food.







## AN ECOSYSTEM OF INITIATIVES

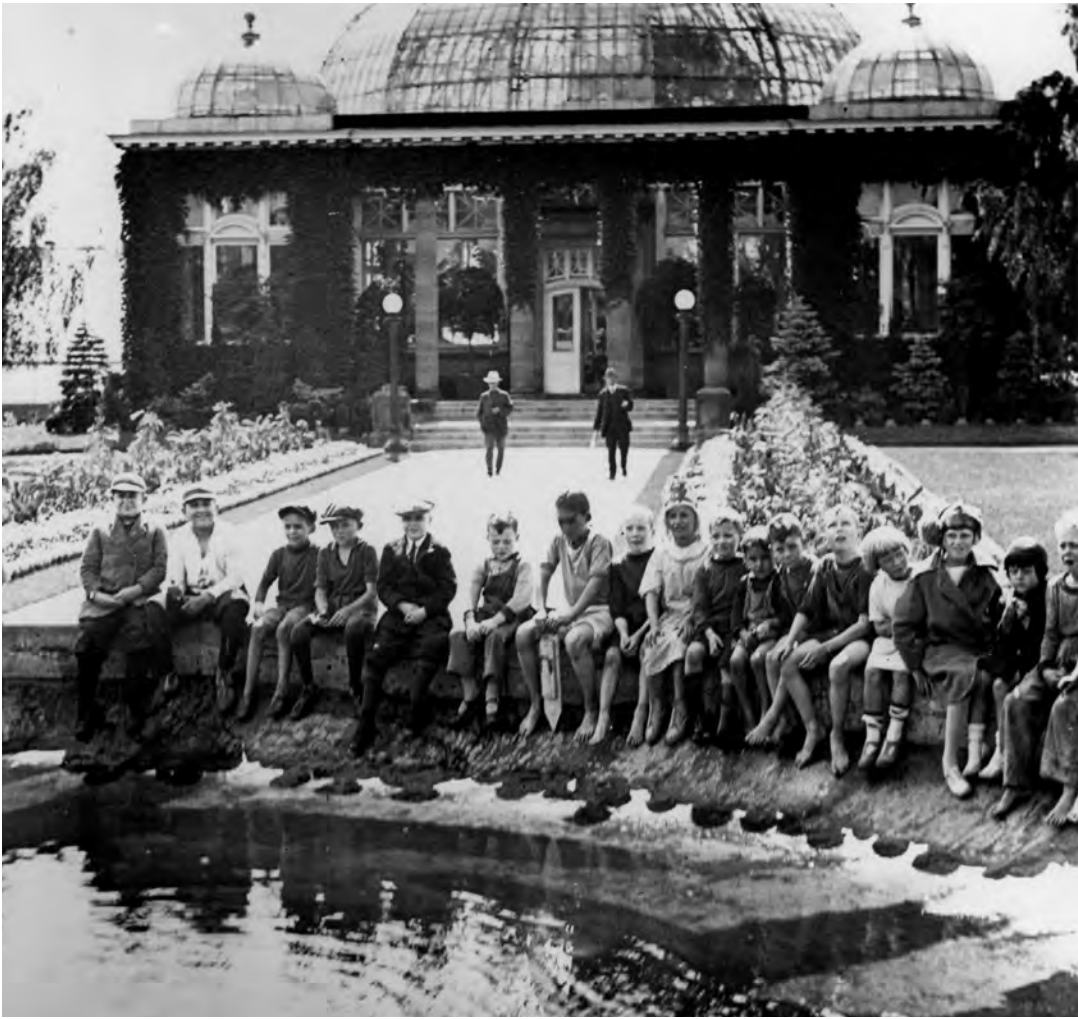
### 4.16 Water in the Park

Allan Gardens was once famous for its Victorian fountain and later for its pools of water designed by landscape architect J. Austin Floyd. Water is an essential feature of any park, whether for playing, drinking, misting, cooling, or watering the plant that make the space green.

Working with multiple departments of TMU, the Friends of Allan Gardens will undertake research on the significance of, and possibilities for, water in Allan Gardens. This includes scholarly research into the historic presence of water in the park and the significance of water to Indigenous people and other cultural communities, as well as environmental studies and experiential learning opportunities to support best practices for comprehensive water management within the park.

**Did you know?**

Fountains can decrease surrounding air temperatures by an average of 3°C and their cooling effect can be felt up to 35 metres away, making them functional (and beautiful) ways to manage rising temperatures in urban spaces. (Source: Climate ADAPT.)



↑ → Images from the City of Toronto Archives showing the original water fountain in Allan Gardens. The water feature was a popular gathering place for local children, especially on hot summer days.







## AN ECOSYSTEM OF INITIATIVES

### 4.17 Music in the Park

*Refresh* called for Allan Gardens to serve as a venue for music and other performances, and since then, Allan Gardens has hosted several musical performances, including Indigenous drumming circles, open mic nights, band practices, and informal jam sessions.

In the summer of 2023, the Friends of Allan Gardens and TMU's Office of Social Innovation co-hosted a music series in the park with support from a grant from the Toronto Arts Council. This was a three-part series that saw local bands perform in underutilized spaces in the park, including on the lawns to the north of the Children's Conservatory and inside the Children's Conservatory itself. This music series was titled *Sounds Like A Park* and people from all walks of life participated in the festivities.

The Friends of Allan Gardens recognize that music can help break down social and economic barriers and create a friendly and inviting atmosphere for everybody to enjoy. We would like to see musical events, and other artistic performances, become a central part of the Park's programming.



↑ Samba Squad delivered a high-energy performance on the north lawn of Allan Gardens, where the music venue and hang-out spot Larry's Hideaway used to be.

→ Counterpoint Community Orchestra—the first 2SLGBT+ orchestra in the world—performed in the Children's Conservatory during a stormy evening. Flexible indoor spaces at Allan Gardens ensure events and activities may proceed regardless of weather. Both of these images were captured during the *Sounds Like A Park* music series in 2023.







## CONCLUSION

2017's *Refresh: A Vision Document for Allan Gardens* asked, "What does a 21st century horticultural garden in the centre of downtown Toronto look and feel like?" For the Friends of Allan Gardens, it looks and feels a lot like the city itself.

Both the park and the city around it are complex and layered cultural landscapes. Sites where Indigenous and colonial tensions, socio-economic diversity, and the differing requirements of residents and visitors create an urgent need to arrive at shared values, community connections, and a greater capacity for care and cooperation if we're to seed improvement over time.

*Growing with the City* positions Allan Gardens as an ecosystem unto itself; however, it will never be removed from the realities of Toronto as a whole. As the city evolves, the park must also grow.

At the heart of this 21st-century horticultural garden is an historic greenhouse, whose benefit is that it enduringly protects those most vulnerable living things. Beauty grows in Allan Gardens that may not necessarily survive—let alone thrive—in the city at large. Here it can be seeded and nurtured; here it has room to take root and grow. The Friends of Allan Gardens are proud to be the network that helps make that possible. To be the social infrastructure that connects, integrates, shares resources, and improves resilience. But we cannot do it alone.

The growth and renewal of Allan Gardens isn't something to be forced, it's something to be fostered—transparently and collaboratively with community engagement; through innovative partnerships, programming, and pilot projects that evolve at their own pace. We hope you'll join us in creating the conditions to plant those seeds.

Together we can tend to our shared future at Allan Gardens.





RESOURCES

1986	“Allan Gardens Revitalization Programme” Dept. of Parks and Rec.	2007	“Conservatory Programme Models” by Landplan Collaborative Ltd. et al	2016	“Rebalancing Parks & Public Realm” in TOcore; Planning Downtown Proposals Report
1987	“Allan Gardens Revitalization Study” by Arcop Architects [large link greenhouse proposed]	2009	“Allan Gardens Conservatory Plant Study” by Landplan Collaborative Ltd. et al	2017	“FOAG Refresh: A Vision Document for Allan Gardens” by the Friends of Allan Gardens
2001	“Final Report: Market Research/ Financial Viability Study for Allan Gardens” by Roger Jones [link building proposed]	2010	“Fertile Ground for New Thinking; Improving Toronto’s Parks” by David Harvey for the Metcalf Foundation	2019	“Allan Gardens Architectural Visualization Study” by Baird Sampson Neuert Architects et al.
2003	“U of T Greenhouse Relocation to Allan Gardens” (Children’s Conservatory) Staff Report	2012	Allan Gardens Heritage By-Law Designation and Heritage Evaluation Report	2022	“Allan Gardens Co-Design Conversation Report” by Jim Keenan & Rina Fraticelli
2006	“Allan Gardens Landscape Revitalization Strategy and Management Plan” by The Landplan Collaborative Ltd et al	2014	“Growing Opportunities: investing in, revitalizing and sustaining Allan Gardens” by Martin Prosperity Institute and Toronto Park People		
2006	“Technical Appendices – Archaeology, Servicing & Tree Inventory and Management Strategy”	2016	“Garden District Heritage Conservation District Plan” by City of Toronto Planning		

→ “The Keeper” by Raylah Moonias, 2022. This piece reminds us to keep what’s sacred, to guard what sustains us, and to be at grace with the balance of the world.





