

PROVIDING OPPORTUNITIES
TO INCREASE PEOPLE'S
KNOWLEDGE & APPRECIATION
ABOUT THEIR RELATIONSHIP
WITH PLANTS FOR A
SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

Monk Botanical Gardens Strategic Plan
2019-2023

Approved October X 2018??

Monk
Botanical Gardens



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2018 Monk Botanical Gardens Board (served as Strategic Planning committee)

Sandi Cihlar	Chelsea Trinkner	Steve Monk	Marcus Narvaez	Bob Reinertson	Vicki Richmond Hawkins
Shar Soto	Carolyn Wilde	Kris Weirauch	Shelley Wells	Paul Whitaker	

Staff

Lead Staff: Darcie Howard
Other staff: Wes Ebert, Elise Schuler

Volunteer Facilitator: Joanne Kelly

Monk Botanical Gardens, 518 S 7th Ave, Wausau, WI 54401 (Garden at 1800 N 1st Ave, Wausau
P: 715-261-6309 Email info@monkgardens.org; Web site www.monkgardens.org
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Background

Garden Beginning

In just a few years, the Monk Botanical Gardens has grown into an exciting community attraction. This year (2018) marks 15 years since the Monk Botanical Gardens was donated by Robert W. Monk. Community volunteers and investors have been building and growing the garden ever since. Today, the Monk Botanical Gardens occupies a 30-acre property on the West Side of Wausau, Wisconsin, at 1800 N. First Ave.

Fifteen years ago, in 2003, the garden achieved a non-profit status and has built a solid reputation for delivering on its commitment to provide a premier garden focused on education. The mission statement defined by this plan is consistent with the garden's beginning and states that **the Garden is seeking to be a premier botanical garden, providing opportunities to experience plants and understand their significance.**

Volunteers and donors have created a one-of-a-kind environment where all have opportunities to visit and enjoy the beauty of the unique gardens which have become an urban sanctuary for education, appreciation of our environment, relaxation and recreation. One visitor on Facebook recently wrote, "What an absolutely awesome place...a magical escape into nature...".

Visitors to the Gardens are now able to relax in the contemplative environment of the Memory Garden and Memorial Plaza, climb the magnificent Treehouse, bring lunch and enjoy it under the roof at the "Potager" pavilion in the Kitchen Garden, view unusual plantings in the Meditation Garden, and explore the foot trails that wind through the fields and woods, and border the pond.

These features are just the start of what the vision is for development of the garden. Already thousands of children, students, and adults currently participate in programs and events all year long. The Gardens are an official Monarch butterfly, chimney swift and geocaching site and a member of the American Public Gardens Association.

Planning and the Commitment for Growth and Expansion

To accomplish the progress to date, 13 years ago, a master plan and a strategic plan were developed. In 2017 we estimate that over 10,000 people visited the garden and that 6,500 attended programming at the garden. We expect in 2018 to see a 20% growth in visitors as our reputation grows.

This 2018 planning process and the report represent the next steps in the journey of growth for the gardens. The direction set quantifies what we aim to achieve, and the value of our role in the community.

During this planning process, more than 2700 people from the database were emailed a questionnaire and asked to complete a survey. The result was a 16.6 % response rate, or 461 individuals provided input by responding to the survey. This planning process was based on using constituent feedback, understanding where we've come from, assessing trends in the environment and in our community to determine the next steps for the Gardens. Included, as part of the process and in this report, is a new a modified vision and mission, and the development of values, goals, objectives and strategies that will help the organization make continued progress to achieving our vision and mission.

Delivering on this plan will require the strong dedication and commitment of volunteer and staff leaders. Key to our success will be to create increased awareness of the value of the gardens and connecting with our visitors, investors, and other groups within the community. For a newer organization, looking to create sustainable funding sources makes implementing this plan a challenge. The steps outlined here will help develop the support needed to grow and expand the opportunities provided at the gardens.

The Gardens values its engagement with community groups as partners and has a strong desire to offer those groups opportunities to use the gardens, attend programs or develop programs that meet their needs and our mission. It is a

win/win situation for the community when organizations collaborate and coordinate programs with other groups, educational institutions, and public entities.

In developing the plan, we recognize that today's political climate regarding environmental education struggles for public funding. At the same time, we also see this as an opportunity. Our community wants to be more connected with the natural world, as we assess this through the strong farm to table movement, the embracing of outdoor activities such as whitewater kayaking, cross country skiing and hiking, as well as the need to find ways to improve our physical and mental health. The Gardens will play an essential role in connecting our community with plants through exploration of themed gardens and a variety of mission focused educational programs and events. We also recognize that in order to make change in our community, we must provide all children with access and space to explore and discover the natural world around them. Providing engaging environmental educational programs will connect children with nature and plants and provide the foundation to develop them into informed citizens that care for their environment and natural resources. Our role in increasing awareness of the environment and the role of plants will help our community to build a sustainable future.

People value the outdoors and nature, but are also living in more urban settings, are more plugged into electronics, the web and work life. With more living in apartments closer to work the opportunity to have a natural garden in an urban center provides people with a tranquil setting, and opportunities to become connected to plants and gardening. These opportunities also lead to improved physical and mental health.

The garden serves our community but is also working to become a destination for people throughout the region and the state. Visitors' dollars enhance the area's economy and make our community a more appealing place to live and visit. Tremendous progress has been made toward this ambitious goal. There is a dedicated staff and an outstanding volunteer group. The Board hired its first Executive Director, Darcie Howard in August 2017, and has three part time staff members; a half time Education Coordinator, a bookkeeper and a seasonal Grounds Supervisor. This equates to 1.6 full time equivalent staff.

The Board and staff are committed to further growing and developing the site to provide a unique premier botanical garden in the region and state. In doing so, we are challenged to balance the use of resources for development of the site, while still moving forward on the mission and journey to grow the programming and its value.

Overview of Strategic Direction – 2019-2021

Vision of Monk Botanical Gardens:

Connect people to plants for a sustainable future.

Mission of Monk Botanical Gardens:

Monk Botanical Gardens is seeking to be a premier botanical garden, providing opportunities to experience plants and understand their significance.

Offer Programming that increases our awareness of the importance of plants

- Increase attendance at adult, family and children programming by 10% each year.
- Increase the number of school group visits to the garden by 10% each year.
- Develop an outreach program that provides Environmental Education to classrooms.
- Offer summer camp for youth starting in 2019.
- Increase the number of private groups that visit the gardens by 10% each year.
- Expand and grow programs as evaluation and other reports indicate what is most effective and what generates revenue for the garden.
- Research the feasibility of a Nature Preschool program and begin implementation.

Expand Gardens, Facilities and Site Development

- Evaluate Master Plan and determine new plan for facility priorities, and short-term options for inside education and office space. Complete by end of 2019.
- Support and facilitate the completion of the Hosta garden in 2019 and integrate into operations.
- Support Sara's Garden installment and completion by 2020
- Work to implement the steps in master plan.
- Expand educational signage implemented by 2020.
- Research feasibility of long-term goal of a Visitor Center by 2021 and integrate into operations.
- Begin pond rehabilitation in 2021.
- Hire a Horticulturist in 2022 or sooner as funds allow.
- Grow Garden and Site as prioritized and funding allows.

Operational Goals

Resource Development:

Increase Financial Resources
See objectives, strategies and action plans.

Marketing /Communication:

Create Top of Mind Awareness to increase visitors and use of the Gardens.
See objectives, strategies and action plans.

Operations/ Governance:

Excel at Governance and Operations
See objectives, strategies and action plans.

Process Overview

The following steps occurred during this Strategic Planning Process:

PREPARATION: The Board engaged a volunteer facilitator, and together they set a timeline and goals for the planning process, conducted a SWOT analysis, environmental scan, a stakeholder survey, an assessment of the external environment and a review of best practices at other botanical gardens. These notes and documents from this process are available for review upon request.

INPUT FROM OVER 400 STAKEHOLDERS:

- A public survey was sent out in May of 2018 and kept open for seven weeks. Over 2767 people in our database were emailed a survey and asked to provide input for the garden's development and programming. This included educators, visitors, donors, and partners. Being a partner with University of Wisconsin-Marathon County allowed us to use Qualtrics for survey and evaluation. In addition, any public visitors to our web site, gardens or events were asked during those seven weeks to go online to complete the survey. We received 461 responses to help guide our direction, representing a 16.6% response rate.
- A board self-evaluation survey was conducted and results discussed with the Board.

COMMITTEE AND BOARD INVOLVEMENT:

- The Board met 5 times with the facilitator and did some work via email. Considerable time was spent writing the proposed Vision, Mission and Values to provide guidance and inspire our future work.
- Board discussion steered the plan and the Board has endorsed the direction established. At all of the meetings, at least 9 of the 12 members were present.

STAFF INVOLVEMENT

- The Executive Director attended all meetings and the two other part time staff participated in the discussion of developing goals, strategies and action plans.
- After the plan direction was approved, staff worked together to draft and present work plans to the Board for approval.

Key Findings from Research, Board Knowledge and Stakeholder Input

MARKETING, RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT & OPERATIONAL EXCELLENCE:

- The web site, Facebook, and e-newsletters are a key way to communicate with our visitors and investors.
- 79% of survey respondents had visited the website.
- The social media used most frequently is Facebook, utilized by more than half of our survey respondents
- Advertisements most seen were in City Pages and Wausau Daily Herald (City pages was cited 3X more than The Wausau Daily Herald)
- A key age group engaged with us are age 55 and over, they represented about 60% of the survey respondents
- 35% of respondents indicated that they donate to the Gardens. The top answers as to why they do not give include; give to other cause, don't have the means, or wasn't asked or aware that the Gardens needs funds.
- Majority of survey respondents would buy a membership.
- 90% of respondents indicated they would pay a fee to access the gardens
- People visit because they enjoy being outdoors and connecting with nature, and enjoy the beautifully themed gardens, or because they like the event or program offered, and they bring other visitors or friends to the garden.
- To be cost effective, using volunteers to help expand our services is essential to our growth. (In our history we have had much success here, but also risk burnout if we don't expand and manage the people involved).

EXPANDING EDUCATION AND PROGRAMMING

- Survey results indicate the top priority for programming was environmental/plant ecology and educational programming for the community.
- Growth most desired for site use or site development included outdoor space for public events, having themed gardens, a visitor center, and a children's discovery area
- The top 4 educational programs to achieve the mission based on the survey were listed in the following order; adult workshops, farm to table classes, classroom field trips grades K-12; and family programs.
- Increased opportunities for volunteering is an important way to involve people, achieve our goals and increase their understanding of our work.
- The programs people are most interested in attending were ranked as follows; concerts, adult garden workshops or lectures, and garden tours. Family programs ranked lower because the age of over 60% of the respondents was 55 years or older.
- The garden is unique locally with a variety of settings in one urban location. (botanical gardens, kitchen, treehouse, pond, woods)
- The University and their involvement in the garden is an asset to site and program development.
- Interns and school projects could expand and enhance the garden's offerings.
- Partnerships with schools and organizations is a win/win for the community

Vision/ Mission/ Values/ Core Operating Principles

Vision: Connect people to plants for a sustainable future.

Mission: Monk Botanical Gardens is seeking to be a premier botanical garden, providing opportunities to experience plants and understand their significance.

Monk Botanical Gardens believes in:

- **Stewardship:** We promote environmental sustainability, biodiversity, and the protection of our natural resources. We commit ourselves to understanding how our actions create change in the world.
- **Awareness:** We offer experiences to the public that inspire increased appreciation and understanding of plant communities and the relationship between these plant communities and people.
- **Inclusiveness:** We provide a welcoming educational garden for a diverse population of people.
- **Respect:** We have a culture of cooperation and support among staff and volunteers working together to carry out the organization's mission.
- **Excellence:** We excel at innovation, creativity, collaboration, reliability and accountability.
- **Aesthetics:** We provide a variety of beautiful gardens and plants that engage visitors because of their unique landscaping, design and plant selection.

Stakeholders: To achieve its mission, the Garden is building a connection with many groups and individuals who have an interest in the organization's success.

Investors/Members - Those who put their dollars into making a difference at the garden.

Potential Investors: Area residents or visitors, businesses and organizations who could become more engaged as visitors, volunteers and program attendees.

Volunteers: Those who work closely with Monk Botanical Gardens and serve on its board, committees, work at the gardens, help with special projects and activities.

Staff & Interns: Those who work at Monk Botanical Gardens.

Community Partners: Those organizations, government and educational institutions who value the outdoor plant environment that is offered at the Gardens and Partner with us to expand opportunities for people to enjoy the benefits of the gardens.

Potential Partners: Marathon County or regional citizens, businesses and organizations who could become engaged partners.

Visitors/ Consumers: Those who visit the gardens, attend programs or rent facilities at the gardens.

Entire Community: All of us benefit when opportunities exist to partake in the benefits of the great outdoors and enjoy programs or the peaceful beauty of the gardens.

State and Region: Those who might come and visit the area because of the reputation, beauty and events held at the garden.

3 Year Goals, Objectives and Strategies for Growth and Organization Success

These goals, objectives and possible strategies will be further detailed and prioritized in multi-year and annual work plans to provide specificity and accountability. The ideas below are to be considered and prioritized by the Board, staff and committees.

GOAL 1: Grow Educational Programming and Attendance and Show Outcome Results

❖ Increase educational programming

- Offer class field trips.
- Offer summer camps.
- Expand high school programs and extend to more than Wausau School District.
- Be a valued partner on the itinerary when out of town groups are visiting the area for other reasons (e.g. schools coming to the theater).
- Expand assessment tools to measure the program outcomes.
- Set goals and report to the Board quarterly the number of visitors as well as outcomes.
- Continue to expand adult classes, lectures, and workshops.
- Expand and continue tours.
- Investigate a Nature Preschool (Revenue generator)
 - Develop a curriculum with measurable goals
 - Build relations with local families
 - Identify legal requirements

❖ Increase and improve access to information on-site regarding the plants and themed gardens

- Provide literature, signs, possibly with QR Codes.
- Investigate interactive kiosks - include what's happening in the garden, events & plants that are in bloom.
- Consider a virtual tour or an app that gives an audio tour.
- Investigate whether these ideas can be implemented as a student project and research best methods/ what visitors want and will use.

GOAL 2: Continue Garden and Site Development

❖ Revisit and update the Master Site Plan

- Revisit current plan and note changes to property, etc. Evaluate whether the Monk house or other options are best suited and affordable for short-term education and office space vs long term development of a visitor center.
- Prioritize the plans based on where we are now and modify the plan accordingly.
- Make sure the master plan includes the list of current and needed improvements in infrastructure (Utilities, irrigation, electrical plumbing, technology).
- Ensure the plan includes ways to make the gardens handicapped accessible.

❖ Continue current garden development that expand and enhance the Garden areas

- Oversee and coordinate installation of Hosta Garden and Sara's Garden.
- Complete remaining phases of the Meditation Garden as funding allows.
- Install irrigation in the gardens as planned in the Master Plan.
- Complete the gardens by utilizing volunteer assistance.
- Develop and implement a process that creates a consistent design for signs that are kid friendly.
- When installing new gardens, develop and use in development a "new garden" checklist.
- Raise funds to complete existing design, use memorial funds, as well as develop a list of plants and places to buy plants for donation.
- Prepare a memorial plan that includes a list of items needed and the recognition offered.
- Decide if the meadow garden completion is a priority and if funding and space are available.

❖ Develop a plan for pond rehabilitation and maintenance

- As a first, find out environmental issues related to the pond. The University or a class might be able to do this.

GOAL 3: Increase Financial Resources

❖ Increase members and potential members

- Improve on-site information about membership and donations that are needed for the development of garden areas (Project, \$ needed, progress, how to donate).
- Have a very prominent donation box with a sign saying we are dependent on donations (a suggested entry amount should be posted for non-members).
- Make sure people are asked to give and lists are expanded.
- Investigate timing of charging an entry fee.

❖ Expand fundraising

- Expand people involved in fundraising, including a greater involvement of board members and fund-raising committee members.
- Develop a fundraising plan to include a plan for needed capital, an endowment and consistent and sustainable revenue streams for operations.
- Expand corporate donors.
- Use several events as fundraisers – charge more when possible and build these events (use volunteers to create and implement these events, as they require a lot of time and it is not generally a best use of limited staff time).

❖ Expand and increase rental income – managing costs and return

- Provide coordinated management with a package with applicable vendors.
- Improve the marketing of site for events – include photos – attend wedding shows.
- Have a FAQ of possible uses (e.g. weddings, birthday, anniversary graduation, etc.)
- Utilize volunteers to manage these events and hire if needed a weekend staff to be on site.

GOAL 4: Create Top of Mind Awareness of the Role and Value of Monk Botanical Gardens and Increase Visitors

- ❖ **Increase visibility and visitors from throughout the community, region and state**
 - Target events for families, finding times and activities that work.
 - Offer programs that attract young professionals (Millennials) such as farm to table type programs (Taco Tuesdays with local veggies, workshops on preserving fruits / veggies Cooking/gardening/composting).
 - Provide a 2-3 family friendly concerts/theatre (coordinate with other community concerts).
 - Continue to attract kids through programming and site development.
 - Consider developing programs to draw people from outside the area, such as a light show (if we have the electricity capacity) or a Garden Expo (like Madison) which might be funded with a Visitor and Convention Bureau grant that includes marketing.
 - Hold events attractive to our donors and the public. With any visitor activity or event, when appropriate and possible have an educational component – recognizing that sometimes when expanding visitors, the goal is first to engage people and get them to the garden.

- ❖ **Develop a clear marketing plan that includes defining audiences, providing a consistent message and a timeline/frequency for message.**
 - Include plan elements that define how the Garden will use email, Facebook/social media, website, e-newsletter, printed mail (annual report or newsletter), media (Include media has a broader reach – e.g. Wisconsin Gardener, visitor bureaus, other gardens, NPR, etc.), The plan should also include improved signage at Campus Drive and 1st Ave. and other areas, and how to best reach community groups by speaking, visiting, engaging, etc.

- ❖ **Develop collaborations and partnerships with other schools, groups and organizations**
 - Coordinate scheduling events.
 - Help other groups see the benefits of the Garden by holding a networking event – board to board (Pizza night in the kitchen).
 - Plan co-sponsored public events with other organizations.
 - Identify groups that might be good as collaborative partners to share planning, facilities, funding for garden development.
 - Consider a wide variety of partner groups to include youth, similar organizations, arts, schools, and seniors, and health care.
 - Market the rental of the garden.

GOAL 5: Excel at Governance and Operations

- ❖ **Maintain current staffing and have a plan for additional staff and program expansion when finances are secured**
 - Consider how much staff support is needed to implement the goals and objectives in this plan. While use of interns and volunteers is desirable, there will be a need for additional staffing to support the work. Positions discussed include, hiring a full time Education Coordinator, a full time Horticulturist, a part time Communication staff, Volunteer Coordinator and an Event Coordinator.

- ❖ **Increase volunteers for committees (events, fundraising, etc.) and those who work onsite or in various other capacities.**
 - Recruit a volunteer coordinator to manage the volunteers to coordinate interviews, train and scheduling them. Begin with a volunteer and, as funds become available, hire a staff person in this capacity.
 - Publicize the need for certain volunteer positions to a variety of organizations including United Way.
 - Ensure volunteer roles are specifically spelled out as it's easier to recruit and ask people when that is in place.
 - Expand the intern program (UWSP) in multiple areas (environmental education, horticulture, marketing, technology).

- ❖ **Improve policies and board functioning**
 - Strategically recruit board and committee members to meet needs of the organization and define the desired number of board members.
 - Develop job descriptions for all committees and board members, as well as an orientation plan.
 - Consider moving to policy governance.
 - Offer board training and committee training in fundraising, governance and other topics as needed.
 - Review committee structure and responsibilities and be clear on what is needed from each group.
 - Have the Finance Committee draft financial policies and procedures.
 - Improve internal communication between committees, board, other groups and staff so everyone knows what's happening.