

PENNSYLVANIA HOUSE TOURISM & RECREATION DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE
Pennsylvania Public Horticulture Coalition
Longwood Gardens - Kennett Square, Pennsylvania
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Pennsylvania Public Horticulture Coalition

Nice to be with all of you this morning. Today, I represent the Pennsylvania Public Horticulture Coalition, (PPHC) as Co-Chair and Pittsburgh Botanic Garden as its Executive Director. Thank you for taking the time to learn about the organizations whose important work in public gardens in this state and across the county, provide a link to *Connect People with Plants*.

The Coalition currently has 21 public garden members throughout the state that first came together in the fall of 2020 with the common goal of being the respected and leading voice for Pennsylvania's dynamic public horticulture industry, so all citizens of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania recognize and celebrate the vital contributions these organizations make.

To carry out this mission, PPHC members engaged Triad Strategies to help develop, through collaborative efforts, a solid working connection to the legislators of Pennsylvania. Along this journey, the process of sharing the Coalitions goals have remain front and center.

These goals are:

- *Ensure Sound Public Policy*

Engage in strategies to build relationships and actively advocate public policy positions that benefit the public horticulture industry, including but not limited to tracking legislation and regulatory issues as well as the creation of funding opportunities that impact our organizations and their widespread economic, community and cultural benefits.

- *Enhance Industry Image*

Develop and implement strategies to successfully showcase the rich benefits public horticulture organizations bring to the commonwealth and the public.

- *Education and Outreach*

Educate Pennsylvania's legislative officials regarding the importance and benefit of including public gardens and public horticulture in future funding streams related to capital improvements, disaster relief, general operating, and project support.

To be a member of the Pennsylvania Public Horticulture Coalition organizations must be classified as a public garden or related entity as defined by the American Public Gardens Association – or have an interest in supporting public gardens and public horticulture.

A public garden is an institution that maintains collections of plants for the purposes of public education and enjoyment, in addition to research, conservation, and higher learning. It must be open to the public and the garden's resources and accommodations must be made to all visitors. Public gardens are staffed by professionals trained in their given areas of expertise and maintain active plant records systems. Many related entities are part of American Public Gardens Association or benefit from member organizations. These entities include botanical gardens, arboreta, conservatories, cemeteries, zoological gardens, sculpture gardens, college and university campuses, historic homes, urban greening organizations, natural areas, and city/county/state/federal parks.

Pittsburgh Botanic Garden

The member organization which I represent as Executive Director is Pittsburgh Botanic Garden. The Garden is a caretaker of 460 acres of southwest Pennsylvania's land and water located 10 miles west of downtown Pittsburgh. Since opening in 2015, dedicated staff and volunteers create and maintain this space as a habitat for native flora and fauna. In addition to ongoing conservation efforts such as mitigating acid mine drainage and reforestation projects, the Garden provides 65 acres of cultivated gardens and woodlands for the public to connect to plants. Through this innate experience: young minds are engaged, gardeners are inspired, and all visitors find a sense of calm.

Pittsburgh Botanic Garden opened its new Welcome Center and surrounding Auto Garden on April 1, 2021, completing \$12.5 million of projects to elevate the visitor experience with the addition of garden features, a café, expanded learning rooms, and gathering spaces. The 7,500 square-foot Welcome Center rises from the natural land as guests arrive surrounded by lush perennials and native trees. Bursts of color interspersed with shades of green designed to separate visitors from life's daily stresses set the tone for personalized visits.

Highlights of operational growth during 2021 includes:

- Total Admission Revenue - \$183,903; 91% growth over 2020
- Total Admission Guests - 34,082; 75% growth over 2020
- Total Membership Revenue - \$200,775; exceeded 2021 budget by 117%
- Total Membership Count – 2,880; 65% growth over 2020

Central to the story of Pittsburgh Botanic Garden is the poor condition of the site upon which it is being built. Left in a deplorable state following coal, gas and oil extraction throughout the first half of the 20th Century, the land was unfit for most uses and even dangerous in spots. Gradually, the land and water are being reclaimed and repaired. Abandoned mine features, invasive species and poor site conditions are being replaced by educational gardens, reconstructed woodlands, and lovely views.

Reforestation efforts are aimed at re-establishing woodland habitats that will once again support diverse bird and wildlife populations and create a shaded site for the future generations to connect with nature through the botanic garden. Through this program, the Garden is providing long-term benefits, including carbon capture, superior soil conservation and lasting habitat improvement.

A few conservation highlights since beginning its land and water reclamation efforts in 2014:

- 15,000 native tree seedlings were planted to reforest an abandoned mine site. The Garden collaborated with Western Pennsylvania Conservancy, United States Office of Surface Mining and Plant Five for Life.
- The Garden's efforts are successful with more than 80 percent of the planted trees thriving. Horticulture staff and volunteers continue to tend to and monitor this future forest.
- With no chemical treatments or energy inputs, and minimal maintenance, mine water once considered 'dead' now supports a healthy aquatic ecosystem. The Garden operates three passive, water filter systems which neutralize more than 25 million gallons of acid mine discharge each year, prior to it entering the region's watershed and then onto the Ohio River and beyond.
- The first innovative filter system to be installed creates the Garden's Lotus Pond, a focal point of the Japanese Garden. The Garden was recognized for this system as the recipient of the 2014 Pennsylvania Governor's Award for Environmental Excellence.

- The Garden's work in mitigating acid mine drainage is recognized by the U.S. Office of Surface Mining as a national model and has since been duplicated elsewhere.

Pittsburgh Botanic Garden has been able to conduct these conservation efforts through public and private funding. The Garden acquired this land in 1998 in a lease agreement with Allegheny County, Pennsylvania. Development of the Garden and its features is possible with the support from regional foundations, corporation, and individuals along with funding from U.S. Department of Environmental Protection's Abandoned Mine Land Economic Revitalization (AMLER) pilot program. Over \$2M has been received from both state and federal for reclamation projects since 2016.

One successful recent outcome of this work was the transitioning of 5 acres of this restoration into an Exhibit Garden. Last year the first exhibit *Carbon Cycle: An Earth Art Exhibit* opened on this site. Bringing art into our gardens continues to play a large impact in many of our Pennsylvania public gardens. In Western Pennsylvania one of our neighboring botanical institutions Phipps Conservatory and Botanical Garden, showcases its 129 year old Victorian glass house conservatory, an architectural wonder itself, along with many seasonal and art-based exhibitions.

With education a cornerstone of its mission, Pittsburgh Botanic Garden is able to use its restoration of former coal mining land as a living laboratory for adults and children to engage in environmental stewardship and develop a conservation mindset. One of the largest educational opportunities the Garden provides, as well the majority of public gardens across the state, is school field trip programming. We are happy to have surpassed the number of students that visited so far this year, before the fall visits begin, to above the pre-COVID numbers.

Exposure to nature in a beautiful and safe environment through guidance of mentors helps foster connection with the natural world. In an era of increased time spent indoors, children and young adults need an opportunity to connect with nature for their personal growth and to develop the stewardship behaviors that will contribute to a healthier, more sustainable and just future.

As a 501c3 non-profit organization, raising every dollar every year of our \$2.6M budget is a reality. Financial contributions from individual, foundation, corporations as well as, earned revenue from admissions, membership, educational programming, community events and rentals contribute to our bottom line. The economic impact of our operation is far reaching beyond the annual operating budget. One area alone, the rentals we host on site, which in 2022 is over 110. Consider how this effects the hotels, the caterers, the rentals, music, etc. which all provide economic impact to our local community.

One example to consider is the economic impact Pennsylvania Horticultural Society has through the presenting of the Philadelphia Flower Show. With its average attendance of 250,000 individuals from across the country and globe, their economic impact is considered to be \$60M annually.

Collectively, Pennsylvania's 35+ public gardens have combined annual operating budgets of \$164M along with a total \$500M economic impact. These same gardens have approximately 2,000 full-time, and nearly twice that many part-time and seasonal employees.

To conclude, I hope you have gained a stronger understanding and appreciation for the role public gardens provide in the importance of the connection to plant in everyone's day-to-day lives. Thank you.