



## **Pennsylvania Horticultural Society**

**Remarks: March 7, 2024**

**Matt Rader**

**President & CEO, PHS**

Good morning, Chairs Daley, Pashinski, Oberlander, and Moul, and members of both esteemed committees.

My name is Matt Rader and I am honored to co-host you today as President of the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society (PHS), and a founding member of the Pennsylvania Public Horticulture Coalition (PPHC). We are grateful for your presence here at the 195<sup>th</sup> Philadelphia Flower Show one of Pennsylvania's marquis events and tourism draws.

The Philadelphia Flower Show is the United States' longest running and most prestigious flower show and ranks as one of the top five flower shows in the world. We're proud to celebrate 195 years of horticultural excellence. Last year, we welcomed over 185,000 visitors and designers from across world building back to a pre-COVID audience of 250,000. This is a vital contribution to tourism in the Commonwealth building Pennsylvania's claim as America's Garden Capital.

PHS's purpose is using horticulture to advance health and wellbeing by improving the social, environmental, and economic conditions that underlie healthy life. We call this Gardening for the Greater Good and we practice it on the ground in 250 neighborhoods.

Our work includes creating world-class gardens in parks and public spaces, cleaning and greening 13,000 vacant lots, planting and tending street trees, sustaining hundreds of community gardens, training and placing people in green jobs, and building green businesses let alone producing this magnificent flower show. The Flower Show is our most significant fundraiser for our work in communities.

**I want to make sure you take away one message from your visit today: gardening is a powerful, effective, and under-tapped tool to positively transform Pennsylvania's economic, environmental, and social outcomes.** The members of PPHC know how to make this impact happen and are eager to partner with you to unlock the potential.



Why do I believe this? I see it every day through the work I do at PHS.

- Here at the Flower Show, I see Pennsylvanians from amateur gardeners to professional firms and high school and college students coming together to hone their horticultural skills and present excellence to visitors from around the world. These born-in-Pennsylvania ideas transform the world of horticulture. Experiences at the show build strong people-to-people connections that fight loneliness and expand opportunity, grow strong businesses, raises money to invest in our communities, and drive revenue for local In addition to tourists, we welcome government, non-profit, and business leaders from around the world whose only reason to be in Pennsylvania is the Flower Show.
- In the 250 city and suburban neighborhoods we serve, I see neighbors coming together to plant and tend trees and community gardens, small businesses growing and employing neighborhood residents as they clean and green vacant land and turn it into a community asset, and violent crime dropping by up to 29% while self-reported depression falls by up to 76% where we invest in horticulture. Over the next six weeks alone, we will train and place in green jobs more than 100 people.
- In our 20 public gardens and landscapes, I see people of all backgrounds enjoying the best in ornamental horticulture close to home while increased biodiversity leads to thriving ecosystems in parks and public spaces.

Our peers and competitors around the world see Pennsylvania's expertise in this area. In the past five years, me and my team have visited with people seeking to mimic our work from as close as Detroit and Baltimore and as far away as China, Pakistan, and South Korea.

Every Flower Show ticket purchased supports PHS's year-round work to advance the health and well-being of our shared community through gardening. From increasing access to fresh produce and economic opportunity to creating social connections and improving inequitable living environments -- PHS provides support, tools, resources, and community throughout the Philadelphia region. We serve more than one million people each year through our work alone in neighborhoods, at the Flower Show, and in our public gardens and landscapes. This work is also supported by our members; local, state, and federal government; philanthropy; and corporate partners.

PHS is a proud founding member of the Pennsylvania Public Horticulture Coalition because we want to see the positive impact of horticulture grow across the Commonwealth. *Please remember that PA's public gardens and horticultural institutions are year-round operators, cultivating and sustaining life for plants and people. We ask lawmakers to avoid simple comparisons to standard tourism venues.*



While PPHC members present horticulture in diverse ways, most offer year-round, open-air, public access. These qualities were not well understood by the Commonwealth during the COVID-19 pandemic, thus, many gardens and horticultural institutions were forced to close their doors despite offering similar social distancing experiences to golf courses! This meant significant loss of revenue critical to sustaining these institutions and their impact in the community and recovery is a slow and ongoing process.

I would be remiss if I did not take this opportunity to thank you, the Legislature for broadening the eligible requirements for the recently released COVID-19 ARPA PA Arts and Culture Recovery Program. Because, back in 2020, PHS and the Flower Show, this unique tourist destination that attracts visitors from both near and far, did not qualify as an eligible applicant and was unable to receive funding under the COVID-19 Cultural and Museum Preservation Grant program.

For the good of the people we serve, PHS rallied to the COVID challenges. We delivered vegetable plants door to door, rallied 10,000 people to grow food at home and share it with neighbors in needs through food pantries, and continued to invest in our network of gardens and green spaces. We grew our Healthy Neighborhoods program by more than 40% since 2019.

In 2021 and 2022, we moved our Flower Show outside for the first time in nearly 200 years. At great financial cost, we sustained the show's premium quality to ensure it remains a vital tourism driver for the Commonwealth into the future. The hunger for the show was notable, attracting strong crowds in its new setting. In 2023, we were elated to bring the show back to full capacity in the Philadelphia Convention Center. Our theme, "Garden Electric", was inspired by the thrill of experiencing gardens and offered a happy homecoming to all its visitors.

As you have seen today, the Flower Show is a representation of the transformative power of gardening and PHS makes that transformation happen every day of the year. Imagine if we worked together to unlock that potential in all the towns and cities of this Commonwealth seeking economic, social, and environmental resilience as they invent the future?

We hope you will join us year after year in our efforts to sustain, train, and grow a healthy future for Pennsylvania.

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CC: Members of the House Agriculture & Rural Affairs and House Tourism & Economic & Recreational Development Committees