

Testimony
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Department of Community and Economic Development
House Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committee &
House Tourism & Economic and Recreational Development Committee
Joint Informational Meeting on
Horticulture and the Impact on the Tourism Industry in Pennsylvania
March 7, 2024

Good Morning , Chairman Pashinski, Chairman Moul, Chairwoman Daley, Chairwoman Oberlander, and members of the Agriculture & Rural Affairs and Tourism & Economic and Recreational Development committees, thank you for the opportunity to join you today and discuss the importance of horticulture, public gardens, and their impact on the state’s tourism economy.

I am so lucky to be the Executive Director of the Pennsylvania Tourism Office with the Shapiro administration at the state Department of Community and Economic Development. We are most known by our call-to-action visitPA.com and for all of our efforts to attract visitors to explore Pennsylvania from around the country and the globe.

We often jest that Pennsylvania is home to an embarrassment of riches. But it’s true and without question our public gardens are among these riches and second to none in the nation. Visiting public gardens and arboretums as part of agritourism has been an important growing industry, both in Pennsylvania and across the United States.

As you all know, Pennsylvania is the ideal road trip state. To leverage this, we at the state tourism office have built several themed travel-at-your-own-pace routes – from culinary delights to those that travel in the footsteps of Pennsylvania’s most known neighbor Fred Rogers. We have created trails to invite visitors to explore the commonwealth on guided getaways.

In 2019, realizing the wealth of public gardens and arboretums we created [Best Buds: A Garden Trail](#). This trail highlights the blooming gems from the grande dames of Longwood Gardens and the Phipps Conservatory and Botanical Garden to the historic Morris and Tyler arboretums.

We debuted Best Buds at the 2020 Philadelphia Flower Show where we sponsored a garden which included branded signage posted among plants that were all native to Pennsylvania. While attending the show, my boss Deputy Secretary Carrie Fischer Lepore and I met some lovely ladies who were a part of a group which arrived in three, count them three, chartered busses from Tioga County.

Meeting them provided our informal research – signaling we were on track with Best Buds, that public garden tourism is not only enjoyable, an escape from the day to day, and a shared experience, but one that generates a lot of dollars for the commonwealth.

We promoted Best Buds the following years at the Flower Show and are back again this year, but also through our social media outreach and through public relations efforts.

To further highlight the Commonwealth’s roots in horticulture, the state tourism office dug in and created [Bulb and Bloom](#), an online publication that shares the word about Pennsylvania’s history in gardening, showcases master gardeners, offers DIY tips, promotes garden centers and craft shops, and touts off-season gardening activities which make horticulture a four-season experience.

The launch of Bulb and Bloom germinated our relationship with the Pennsylvania Public Gardens Coalition. They have informed the content, helped us select master gardeners to interview, and have provided the inside scoop, or trowel, on what stories would connect with those who are passionate about and invested in the gardening culture.

I would also like to note that we engaged with Penn State's cooperative extension network to inform Bulb and Bloom on both content and promotion. We truly appreciate this partnership as while we have a few green thumbs on staff, collaborating Penn State and the Public Gardens Coalition has really helped us extend the reach of Bulb & Bloom and the Best Buds trail.

As we are seeing the increased, and somewhat surprising, demand for printed guides and magazines we decided to do a print edition of Bulb and Bloom. In this coffee table-worthy publication we bound all of the great online content along with some new articles to produce the first ever printed edition.

Last summer at Hershey Gardens we unveiled it at an informal reception sponsored by Visit Hershey Harrisburg where we announced that 15,000 copies would be made available at Public Garden Coalition sites. They were used as membership rewards, value-added takeaways in gift shops, and for special promotions. With 15,000 copies already distributed we are in the process of restocking supplies at Coalition member locations.

As the second largest industry in the Commonwealth, we know that tourism is big business in Pennsylvania with horticulture and public gardens as a large part of that economy.

In September of 2022, Peter Kaiser, executive director of the Pittsburgh Botanical Garden, while representing the Coalition, shared with the House Tourism Economic and Recreational Development Committee that collectively, Pennsylvania's 35 plus public gardens have a combined annual operating budget of \$164 million and a total economic impact of \$500 million. He noted, these gardens have approximately 2,000 full-time, and nearly twice that many part-time and seasonal employees.

Governor Josh Shapiro understands that the travel and tourism industry includes horticulture and public gardens and touches every Pennsylvanian by creating economic opportunities while increasing the quality of life. He is committed to boosting the tourism industry to create good jobs, strengthen businesses, and attract people to call Pennsylvania home. In 2022, the most recent statewide numbers available, Pennsylvania's tourism industry:

- Injected an estimated \$46.4 billion into PA's economy
- Generated an estimated \$4.7 billion in state and local tax revenues
- Hosted nearly 192 travelers, and
- Supported nearly 500,000 Pennsylvanians who work in the industry

I am thrilled to share that the Shapiro Administration supports the travel and tourism industry through the most significant investments in the Pennsylvania Tourism Office since the 2008 recession. With this investment we are once again able to compete with our neighbors, sending out a wide invitation to visit Pennsylvania and explore the embarrassment of riches which includes our public gardens.

Governor Shapiro's investments in tourism and recreation asset development will drive economic growth, leading to new businesses and jobs and a stronger economy for all Pennsylvanians.

Thank you so much once again for the invitation to join this hearing, we appreciate your support of Pennsylvania's tourism industry.