

Growing with the City

An Ecosystem of Initiatives for Allan Gardens

November 2023

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

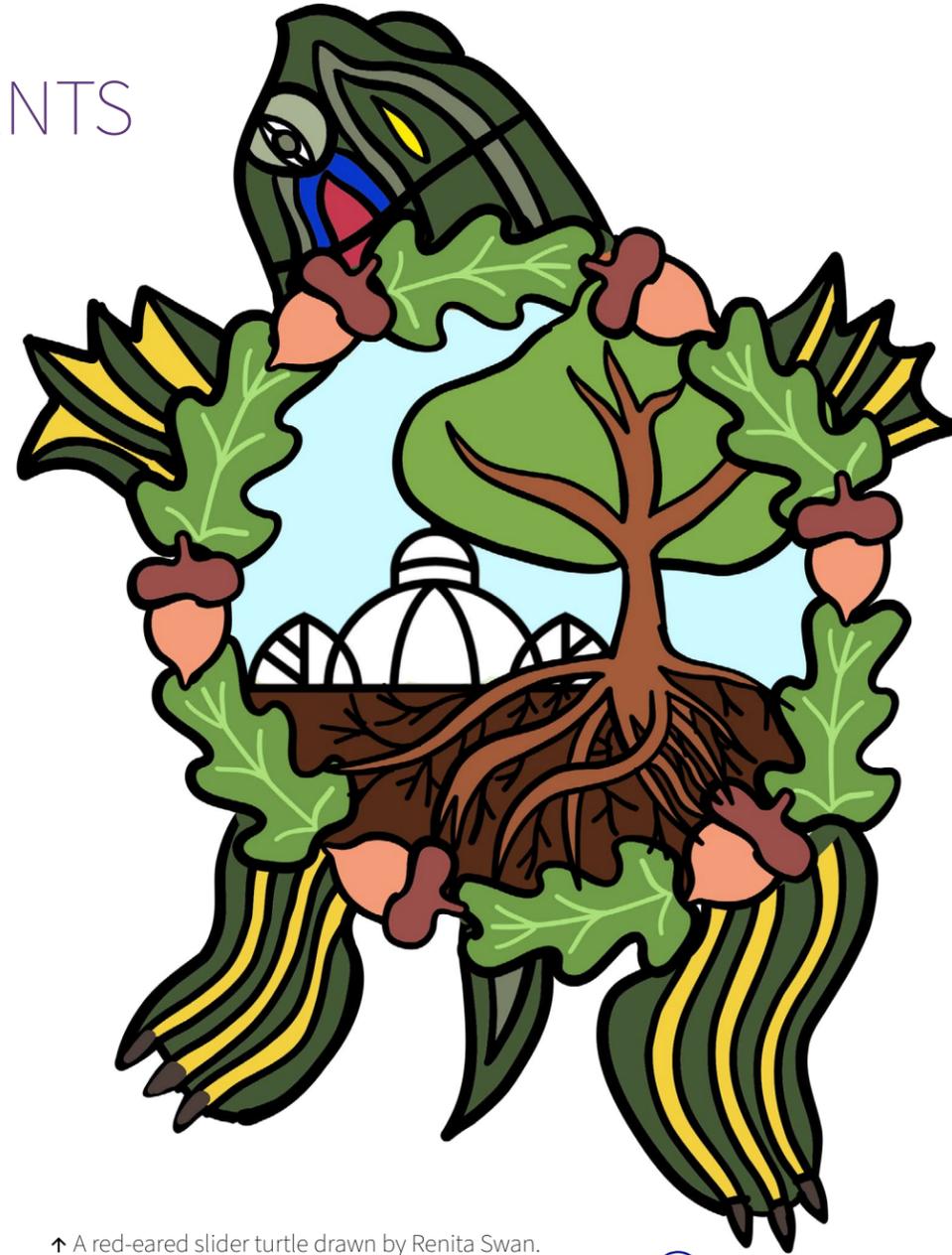
Allan Gardens is located on the Treaty Lands and Territory of the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation as well as the traditional territory of the Anishinaabe, the Haudenosaunee, and the Huron-Wendat peoples. Today, Allan Gardens is a sacred gathering place for Indigenous peoples from across Turtle Island.

We, the Friends of Allan Gardens, are grateful to work on this land. As we reflect on our role in the park, we are guided by the Dish with One Spoon treaty that asks us to not take more than our share, and commit to sharing resources with Indigenous organizations and peoples with treaty, traditional, and present-day ties to the park.

Friends of Allan Gardens recognizes the donation by George Allan to the citizens of Toronto of the five acres that became Allan Gardens, an early example of Canadian Park philanthropy.

We recognize the strong support given to the Friends of Allan Gardens by Toronto Metropolitan University and its Centre for Social Innovation.

This report is dedicated to the many volunteers who have given their time to aid Allan Gardens, to the municipal employees who work in Allan Gardens, and to all of the Torontonians whose heart belongs to Allan Gardens.



↑ A red-eared slider turtle drawn by Renita Swan. Renita served as a Community Facilitator with the Friends of Allan Gardens in 2022 and 2023.

Renita Swan

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Cover Images

Front: Dragonfruit, or Queen-of-the-Night, *Selenicereus undatus*. Photographed at Allan Gardens in June 2023.
Back: "Horticultural Grounds" by Octavius Thompson, excerpted from *Toronto in the Camera*, (1868).

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- Dana Alexandrescu
- Laura Dean
- Ionela Florescu
- Adele Freeman
- Robert McKaye
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GROWING WITH THE CITY

1.0 About the Friends of Allan Gardens

The Friends of Allan Gardens is a volunteer-based, registered charitable organization that is working to imagine and lead the revitalization of Allan Gardens: a significant, complex, and dynamic cultural landscape in downtown Toronto. Friends of Allan Gardens' charitable status is based on the following purposes:

- To benefit the public by maintaining, developing and revitalizing Allan Gardens Park, a public amenity in the City of Toronto.
- To educate the public by conducting tours of the Allan Gardens Park, and providing public outreach activities, lectures, and workshops on topics such as horticulture, urban farming, and the natural environment of the Allan Gardens Park.

Since 2017, the Friends of Allan Gardens and Toronto Parks, Forestry & Recreation have been meeting collaboratively on a monthly basis, as a Leadership Team, to further the stewardship goals for Allan Gardens and they have developed Management and Fundraising agreements for the Children's Conservatory and Teaching Garden. During that time, Friends of Allan Gardens has nurtured many valuable working relationships with community, social service, Indigenous, neighbourhood and institutional organizations around the park.



GROWING WITH THE CITY

1.1 The Purpose of Growing with the City

As a park that is now over one hundred and sixty years old, Allan Gardens faces many opportunities and challenges and must adapt to meet the needs of a 21st-century city. This document has been prepared as a foundation for focussed consultation and fundraising to seize those opportunities and address those challenges by developing and implementing the following projects:

CAPITAL INITIATIVES

- **Expand 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.

- **Reinvest in the walkways through Allan Gardens.** As we aim to improve the pedestrian experience of the park, we imagine a central path or allée linking Homewood and Pembroke streets, enlivening the Gardens and setting a standard for future path improvements.

- **Reinvest in the dog park.** Allan Gardens has the potential to have a fantastic dog off-leash area, but recently the quality of that space has been diminished. A better designed dog park is essential for the vibrancy of the community.

CULTURAL INITIATIVES

- **Enhance (horti)cultural programming.** The Friends of Allan Gardens offers many activities in the park including gardening, plant sales, family drop-in programs, and musical performances. We want to facilitate more of these types of activities and expand what we do to include things like food vending, horticulture shows, and more educational programs.

- **Support Indigenous cultural programming.** Allan Gardens is a sacred landscape for many Nations. In the spirit of the Dish with One Spoon Treaty, we commit to work with local Indigenous organizations on a variety of projects related to language-keeping, place-keeping, and ceremony. This is just the start of exploring, developing, and building positive relationships.

ECOSYSTEM OF INITIATIVES

These projects, and others represent our Ecosystem of Initiatives for Allan Gardens. You may learn more about these projects on pages starting on page 40 of this document.

The Friends of Allan Gardens sees *Growing with the City* as a *living plan* that we will use for continued community engagement and fundraising. This is a much-loved park in downtown Toronto, and through this document we aim to identify and act on the common goals that bring out the best in Allan Gardens.

Refresh

In 2017, the Friends of Allan Gardens published *Refresh*, a document that asked what a 21st-century horticultural park in downtown Toronto should look and feel like. *Growing with the City* illustrates how we continue to work to address this question.



1

GROWING WITH THE CITY

1.2 Fundraising

The projects and programs highlighted in *Growing with the City* require support and resources to come to fruition. Beginning in 2023, the Friends of Allan Gardens and Toronto Parks, Forestry and Recreation have entered into a Fundraising Agreement to secure large financial investments in the park.

Prior to our 2023 Fundraising Agreement, the Friends of Allan Gardens secured financial support for select repairs and capital projects from the City of Toronto as well as support from Toronto Metropolitan University (TMU) and Toronto Arts Council for arts and cultural programming in the park. We have also acquired a range of local, provincial, and national-level grants for capital projects, programs, employment opportunities, and more. We would like to thank the Ontario Trillium Foundation, TD Friends of the Environment Foundation, Parks People, Miziwe

Biik, and the Landscape Architecture Canada Foundation for their past and ongoing support. We would also like to thank individuals and families for their support of our programs. Grassroots support was especially important during the COVID-19 pandemic, when our ability to run programs at Allan Gardens was limited.

Going forward, the Friends of Allan Gardens is excited to be working with the Veritas Foundation who is guiding us in undertaking a large-scale fundraising campaign that will ensure a stable financial future for the Friends of Allan Gardens and for park development projects. We continue to engage with the City of Toronto, TMU, community partners, and individual donors to see these initiatives come to life.

Visit friendsofallangardens.ca/donate to donate and learn more about our fundraising goals.

Grassroots Fundraising from the Local Community Data from the Veritas Foundation

Number of Donors to Friends of Allan Gardens:
2021 = 163 donors
2022 = 196 donors
representing a 20% increase

Value of Individual Donations:
2021 = \$16,920
2022 = \$19,290
representing a 14% increase

Average Donation Size:
2021 = \$104.00
2022 = \$100.00

Number of Quarterly Recurring Donors
2021 = 28 individuals
2022 = 35 individuals
representing a 25% increase

Value of Recurring Donations Received Each Quarter = \$1,935

Value of Recurring Donations Received Year-To-Date = \$7,970

Average Recurring Donation Size = \$60.00

→ These images highlight our grassroots fundraising and outreach efforts in the community.



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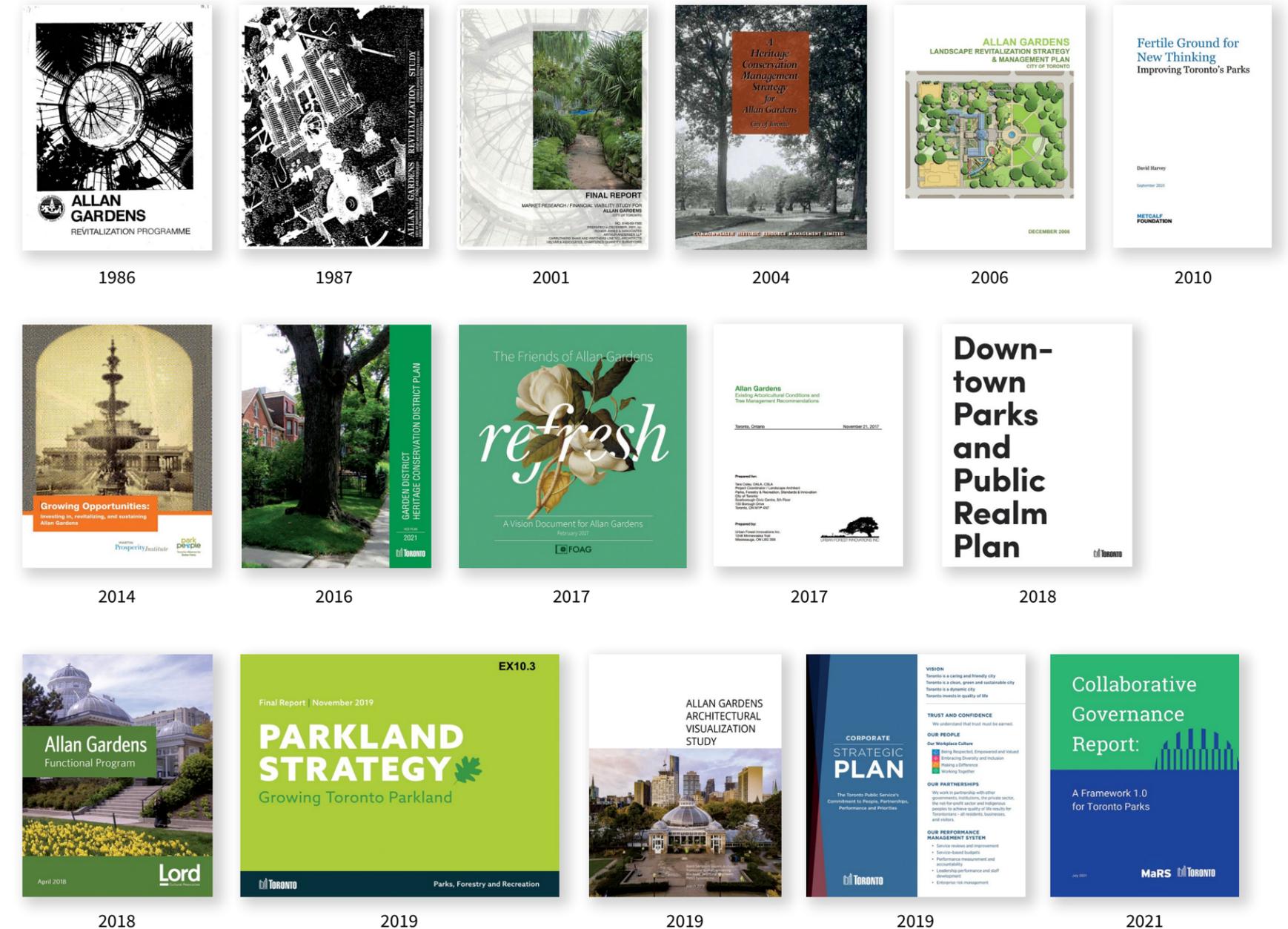
GROWING WITH THE CITY

1.3 Planning in Context

Refresh was grounded in several policy documents and studies related to Allan Gardens. In the years since *Refresh*'s publication in 2017, the City of Toronto and the Friends of Allan Gardens have commissioned a series of insightful reports regarding both Allan Gardens specifically and Toronto's parks generally. *Growing with the City* is guided and informed by the findings and recommendations of the following studies:

- The City of Toronto's current "Corporate Strategic Plan" which outlines a vision to guide the public service toward the City's overall long-term goals. It highlights the importance of creative and effective partnerships between the City and other organizations.
- In 2018, the landscape firm Public Work produced the reports "Downtown Parks and Public Realm Plan" and "Park Districts" as part of the TOCore series of documents. They address how public space can enhance quality of life in the urban core, citing the Friends of Allan Gardens' *Refresh* document and outlining the need to "prioritize flexible uses, recognizing that space constraints demand more out of each square metre of park to enhance its benefit to a growing and diverse population."
- Toronto Parks, Forestry & Recreation's 2019 "Parkland Strategy Report" outlines the importance of a healthy, accessible, and interconnected park system in the rapidly growing city. Key tools include developing partnerships with community stakeholders to address inequities by ensuring access to these spaces for all Torontonians.
- Two studies were commissioned by Parks, Forestry & Recreation in direct response to the *Refresh* document "Link Building" for the Greenhouses. Lord Consulting undertook a Feasibility Study on the idea of an expanded Greenhouse and in 2019, BSN Architects prepared a visualization study of this proposed "Link Building" Greenhouse, providing much-needed additional space for educational programming, exhibitions, demonstrations, and horticultural activities.
- In 2020, the students at TMU, through the Office for Social Innovation, conducted three detailed studies for Allan Gardens: Establishing Roots, Neighbourhood Profile, and a literature review.
- In 2021, MaRS Solutions Lab and the City of Toronto published "Collaborative Governance Report: A Framework 1.0 for Toronto Parks," which emphasizes the importance of "collaborative governance" partnerships such as the ongoing relationships between the City and groups like The Friends of Allan Gardens.
- Current concerns around homelessness and tents in the park are being addressed by a series Allan Gardens Community Partners Meetings in which the Friends of Allan Gardens are participating.

→ Policy documents and reports considered in the creation of this document, *Growing with the City*.



2

ALLAN GARDEN CONTEXT 2.0 Allan Gardens History

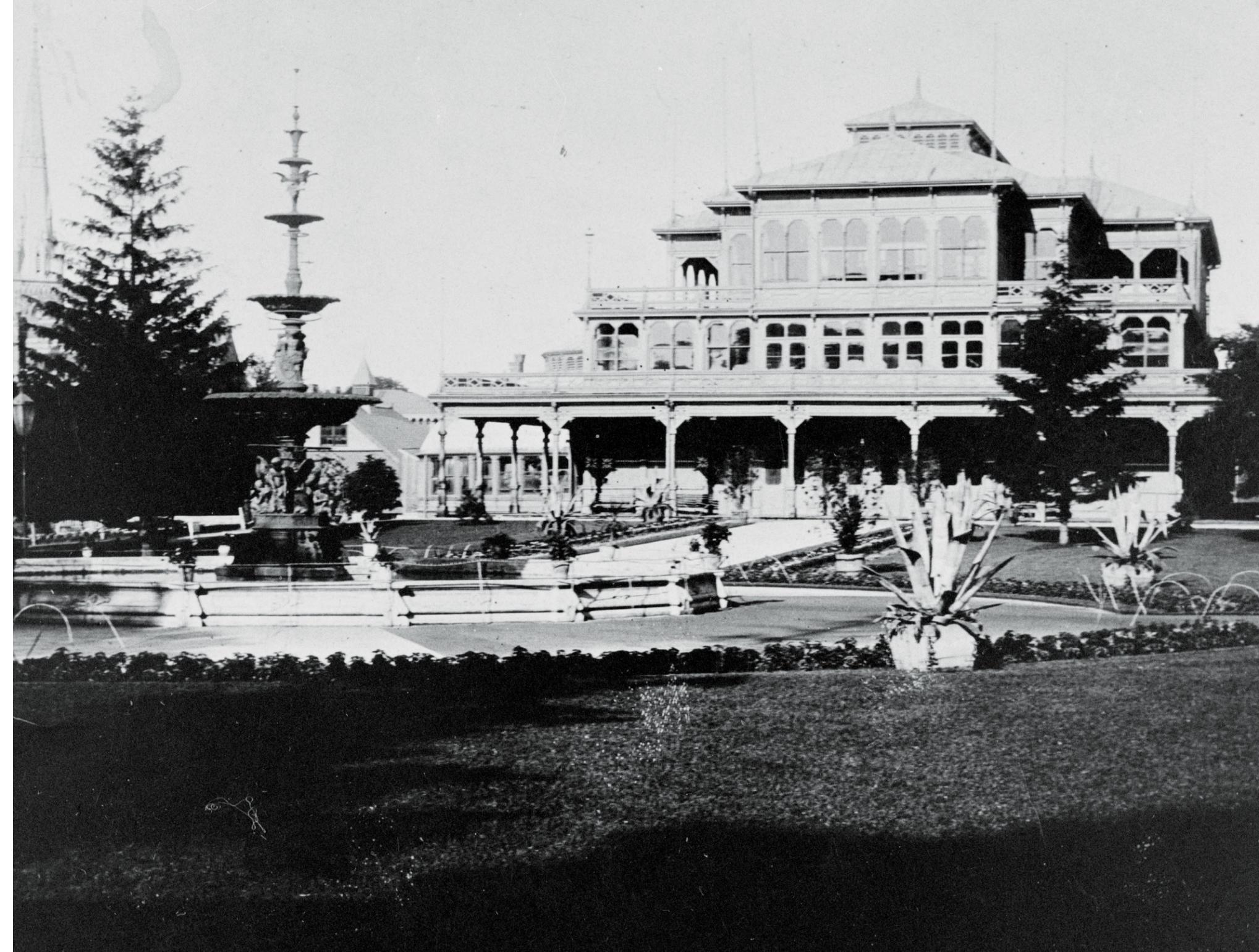
Established in the 1860s as a Victorian horticultural garden, and conceived as the centrepiece of an upscale residential district, the park and surrounding neighbourhoods have evolved significantly over the past 160 years into a complex and layered cultural landscape.

Used by various communities who have strong and distinct connections to the park, and affected in an often acute way by larger socio-economic forces, Allan Gardens has remained a place of significant social and cultural history as the city has evolved and changed around it.



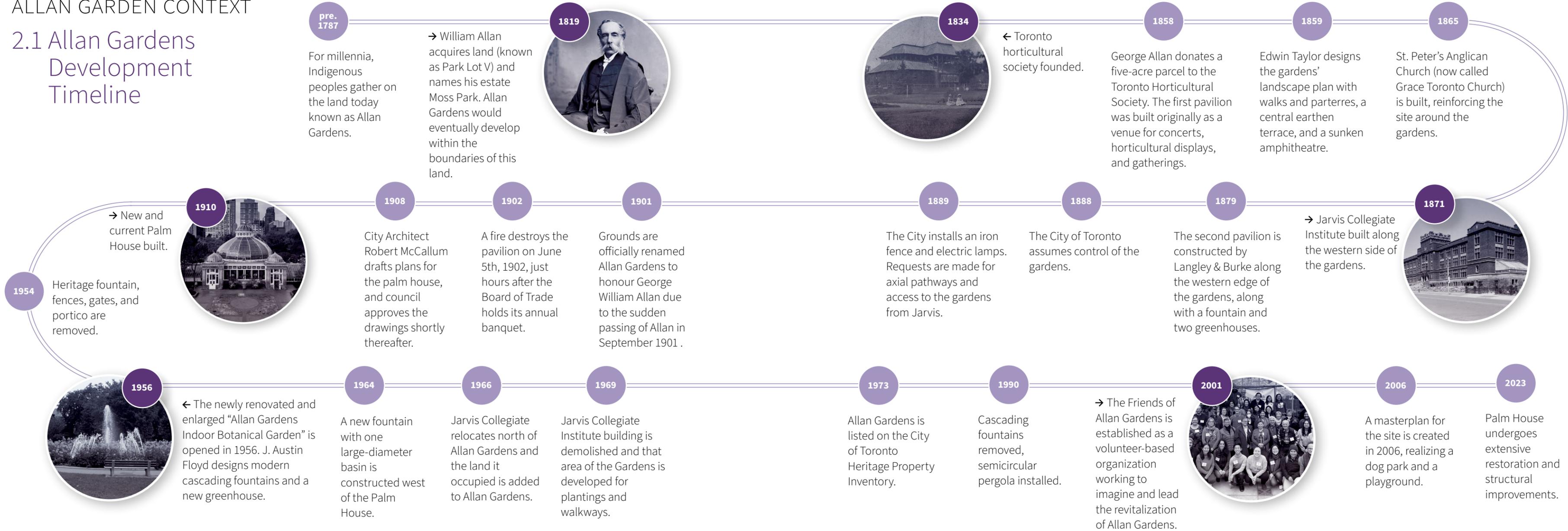
↑ The interior of Allan Gardens pavilion in 1890; courtesy Toronto Public Library

→ Photographs of Allan Gardens' original pavillion in the early 1900s; courtesy City of Toronto Archives.



ALLAN GARDEN CONTEXT

2.1 Allan Gardens Development Timeline



ALLAN GARDEN CONTEXT

2.2 Allan Gardens Scale Comparison

Allan Gardens is an amazing public park and garden within the downtown core of Toronto. This scale comparison highlights the size of Allan Gardens next to other notable parks in Toronto. It demonstrates that Allan Gardens is one of a limited number of public green spaces within the dense fabric of Toronto. Given its location, Allan Gardens' size of about 13 acres is considerable. It is one of the only horticultural sites in downtown Toronto, allowing residents to enjoy botanical gardens steps from their home. This scale comparison illuminates the uniqueness and importance of Allan Gardens as a large green space within a dense urban core.

When Allan Gardens officially opened in 1860, the population of the entire city of Toronto was 40,000. Downtown Toronto has since experienced meteoric growth: as of 2016, "close to 250,000 people live Downtown, with more than 7,500 residents added annually over the past five years. By 2041, Downtown, in combination with its shoulder areas...has the potential to reach...as many as 475,000 residents." This presents both important opportunities and crucial social considerations for central public spaces like Allan Gardens. Given its static size, how do we prepare Allan Gardens to address the capacity issues of this much larger population with its complex needs?



ALLAN GARDEN CONTEXT

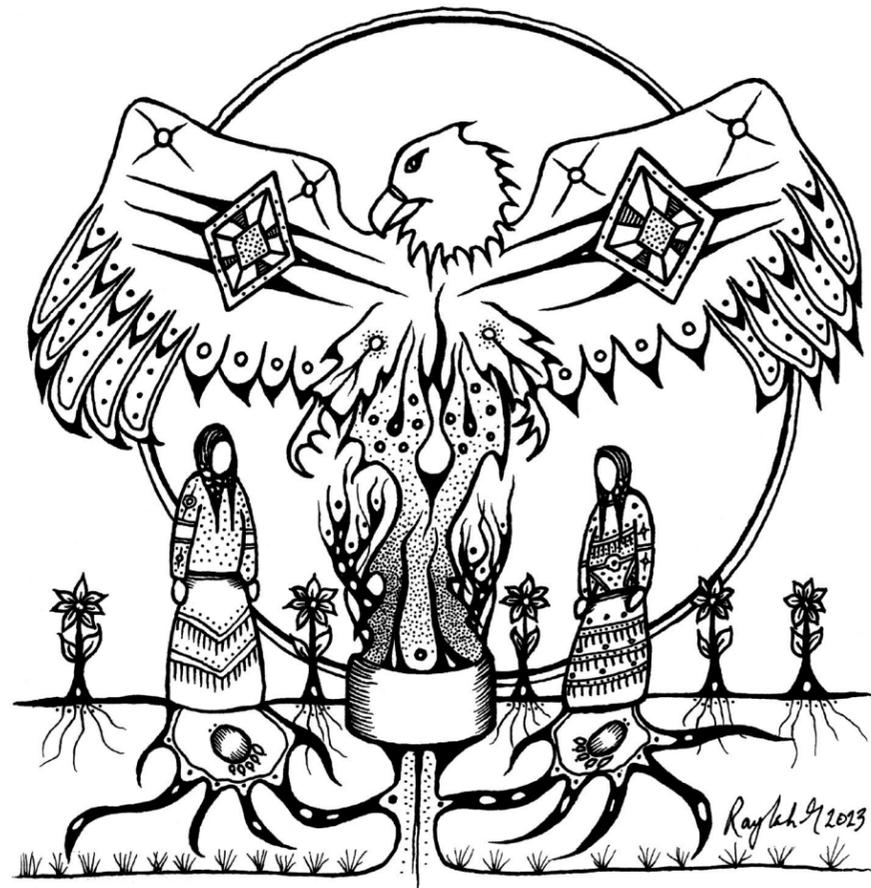
2.3 A Sacred Landscape

Allan Gardens is a sacred landscape. This park is a historical and contemporary gathering place for many Indigenous peoples and organizations.

In 2022, the City's Indigenous Affairs Office announced that Allan Gardens would be one of three designated sites for its new Sacred Fires program, where First Nations, Inuit, and Métis community members can host a sacred fire ceremony.

While the Sacred Fire program in Allan Gardens has since been paused, the presence of these fires in the park, developed through grassroots efforts into official policy, illustrated the significance of Allan Gardens to Indigenous communities and created a platform for cross-cultural dialogue about Indigenous placekeeping.

Since November 2022, the fire in Allan Gardens has been burning daily in remembrance of children taken away from their families during the Sixties and Millennium Scoops. The Fire was given the Anishinaabemowin name Mishkiki Abinoonjiinh Skode, which translates to Medicine Children's Fire.



↑ “Path” by Raylah Moonias, 2023. This piece represents the many directions and choices that we’re presented with in life. We feel pressured to choose one direction over another, but in reality, we’re supposed to go right through the centre.

→ In 2019, the Red Embers art project took over Allan Gardens with 13 banners created by 15 Indigenous artists. This art installation was a sacred memorial to the Missing and Murdered Indigenous women, girls, and trans and two spirited people.



ALLAN GARDEN CONTEXT

2.4 Institutions, Community Organizations, and Health & Housing Services

Many community-based, faith-based, and institutional organizations are located within the park's immediate vicinity. These include resident ratepayers associations, business improvement areas, and faith communities such as Saint Luke's Church at the northeast corner of the park who, since the spring of 2020, have been convening community conversations about how to make Allan Gardens an inclusive public commons. These important dialogues have resulted in a number of new connections and relationships within the community.

Toronto Metropolitan University (TMU; formerly Ryerson University) is the largest major institutional neighbour of Allan Gardens. The Friends of Allan Gardens have been collaborating with TMU's Office of Social Innovation on programming in the park as well as a longer term partnership strategy. This longer term strategy would leverage University resources toward programs and initiatives in the park while engaging TMU faculty and students in community based service, research, and experiential learning.

The park has served a significant population of people experiencing homelessness, some of whom are Indigenous. During the pandemic, an encampment community established itself throughout the park, highlighting a number of layered socio-economic issues including the urgent housing affordability crisis in the city.

This issue of homelessness raises important and complex questions about access and use of public space by the most vulnerable in society during times of crisis, questions about police and community relations, and questions about reconciliation with Indigenous communities. The Friends of Allan Gardens is dedicated to working with City Council and local institutions and community organizations to help where possible and appropriate.

→ A map by Daniel Rotsztain (the Urban Geographer) of the condition of Allan Gardens in 2022, at the commencement of the *Growing with the City* report. Since 2020, the park has been the largest encampment for homeless people in the City of Toronto.



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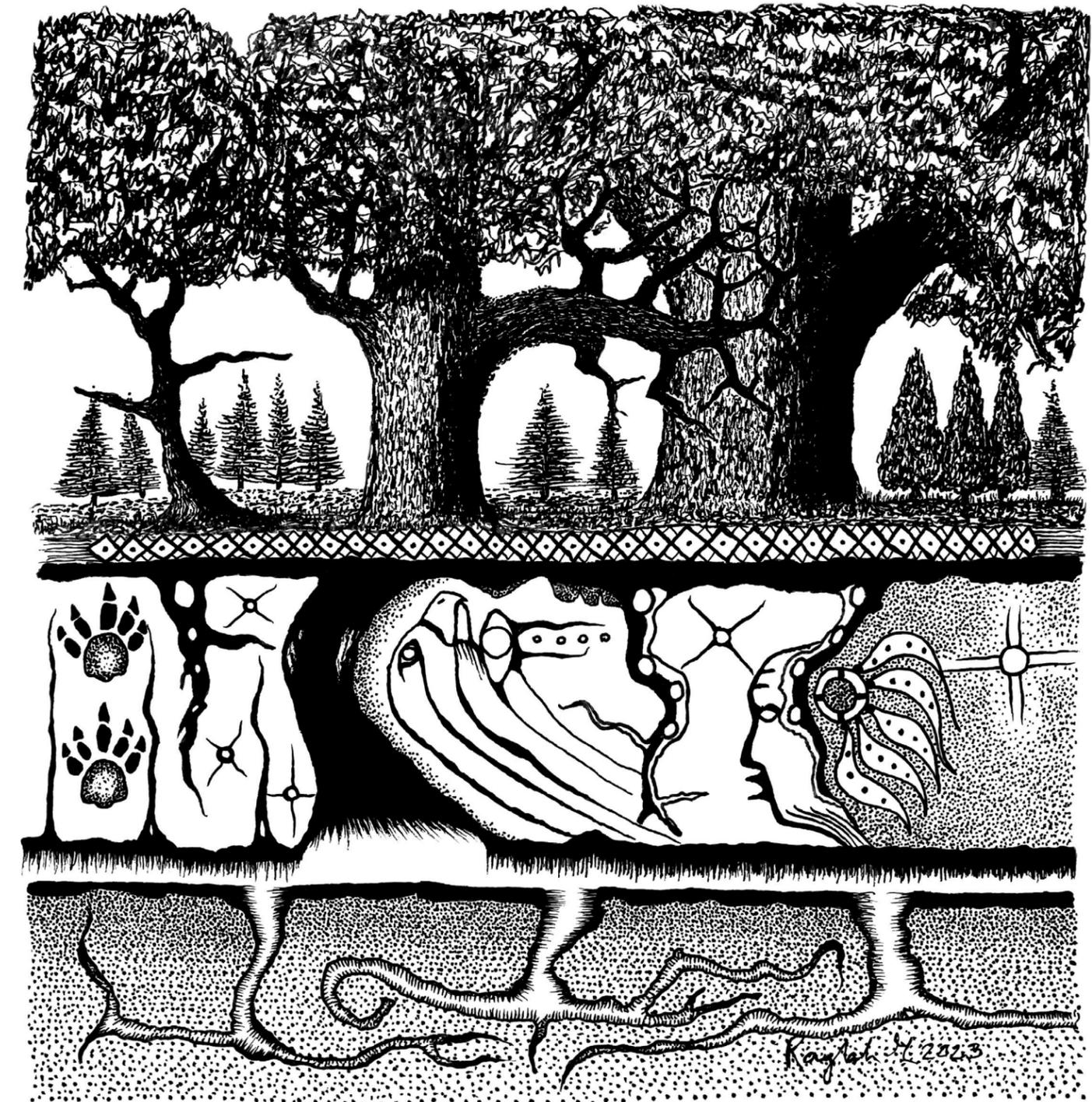
THE FRIENDS OF ALLAN GARDENS 3.0 Stewards of the Park

The Friends of Allan Gardens think of our efforts to harmonize and coordinate the many interacting forces in the park as mirroring connections within a healthy, complex ecosystem. One ecological metaphor in particular brings this parallel to life for us: that of mycorrhizal fungal networks.

Over the past decade, forestry scientists like Suzanne Simard and Peter Wohlleben have identified the existence of a symbiotic relationship between some forest root systems and a root-like fungus called mycelium. By intertwining beneath the soil, the trees supply the fungus with food and in turn the fungus shares water and nutrients with the trees.

It takes time for a mycorrhizal network to develop, but when it does the relationships it fosters transform a group of trees into a forest, uniting single organisms into a larger, coordinated super-organism. We can think of these networks as a form of ecological infrastructure that protects and stewards the forest. In this way, the Friends of Allan Gardens envision ourselves playing a similar role: we connect those who use Allan Gardens with the diverse facets of the park and with each other to form a social and physical ecosystem that's more than the sum of its parts.

→ "Seek" by Raylah Moonias, 2023. This piece serves as a reminder that nourishment often comes from what's hidden or buried underneath.



3

THE FRIENDS OF ALLAN GARDENS

3.1 Community Partners

The Friends of Allan Gardens rely on the local neighbourhood knowledge and deep community connections of many respected collaborators, who help to inform park programs and initiatives for the benefit of the diverse publics they serve. Get to know Allan Gardens' community partners:

Centre Francophone

The Centre Francophone du Grand Toronto (CFGT) is the gateway for Francophones who live in Toronto or who come to settle there. The Centre is a non-profit organization that offers a diverse range of community health, social, and housing services that improve the well-being of all Francophones in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). The Friends of Allan Gardens support Centre Francophone by providing space for children's horticultural programs in the Children's Conservatory and Edible Garden.

Common Boots Theatre

Common Boots Theatre is an independent not-for-profit professional theatre company that has been creating timely and playful experiences for 40 years. Collaboration, play, comedy, and community are central to their approach and work, which ranges from traditional plays to outdoor winter spectacles. Common Boots partners with Friends of Allan Gardens to bring fun, accessible theatrical activities and events to a wide audience, and to activate Allan Gardens as a welcoming public space.

Dixon Hall Neighbourhood Services

Dixon Hall is a multi-service agency located in the heart of downtown Toronto. Dixon Hall serves more than 10,000 people annually, impacting the lives of the most vulnerable and the most at-risk members of our community. They began providing food and support services in 1929, and have continuously worked to build a city where everyone thrives. They have evolved as an organization to meet the needs and demands of the community through a wide range of integrated programs and services. The Friends of Allan Gardens frequently consult with Dixon Hall on the topics of safety and well-being of residents living in and around the park.

Garden District Residents Association

The Garden District Residents Association (GDRA) is an organization made up of volunteers who are dedicated to creating a safe and healthy environment in Toronto's eastern downtown. The association's name references the close proximity of two of Toronto's oldest public parks, Allan Gardens and Moss Park.

The committees and initiatives of the Association are related to safety, urban planning and development, private and public housing, rooming houses, social services facilities, traffic regulations, and community recreation. The GDRA and the Friends of Allan Gardens have a shared belief that attractive green spaces, protected landmarks, safe children's playgrounds, and well tended parks, streets, and sidewalks are a right.

Green Thumbs Growing Kids

Green Thumbs is a for-impact food and nature literacy program in three adjoining dense urban neighbourhoods in eastern downtown Toronto. They work with schools and community agencies including the Friends of Allan Gardens to foster urban agriculture, greenspace enjoyment, and physical and mental health benefits. The Friends of Allan Gardens support Green Thumbs by providing them with space to run their children and youth programs.

Miziwe Biik

Miziwe Biik is committed to assisting all persons of Aboriginal ancestry—First Nations (status and non-status), Inuit, and Métis—to attain a better quality of life. Miziwe Biik provides training and employment opportunities in a supportive environment in which people can affirm their Aboriginal identities and develop to their fullest potential. They believe that community needs and aspirations are paramount and are committed to strengthening the community through partnerships that promote equality and self-reliance. Miziwe Biik believes that it is through traditional and cultural values, practices, and resources that Aboriginal people will reclaim their destiny.

The Friends of Allan Gardens is grateful to Miziwe Biik for their support. Miziwe Biik currently funds a full-time Community Facilitator role at our organization. This allows us to create opportunities for young Indigenous people interested in a career in horticulture and community development as well as increase our capacity to more effectively serve this park.

Native Women's Resource Centre

The Native Women's Resource Centre of Toronto (NWRCT) provides a safe and welcoming environment for all Indigenous women and their children in the Greater Toronto Area. NWRCT aims to build self-sufficiency and develop collective capacity to make positive change. NWRCT's second

home is Allan Gardens, and they run events and host ceremonies in the park. In 2019, NWRCT led a project in the park called Red Embers. The project was envisioned and designed by an all-women team of designers and Indigenous artists as a sacred memorial to missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls, and trans and two spirited people. In 2023, the Friends of Allan Gardens have committed volunteers to support NWRCT in the growing of sacred medicines in the park.

Saint Luke's United Church

Saint Luke's United Church, the House of Friendship, is an Affirming Ministry where all are welcome regardless of age, gender, sex, race, ethnic origin, sexual orientation, differing abilities, and economic circumstances. The Friends of Allan Gardens have partnered with Saint Luke's to conduct engagement exercises to better understand the needs of the community. Like many neighbourhood partners, Saint Luke's prioritizes the health, safety, and well-being of all who use the park.

Sherbourne Health

Sherbourne Health strives every day to meet the needs of the people and diverse communities they serve. Their extraordinary team of dedicated and passionate staff and volunteers—the driving force behind many of Sherbourne's programs and services—ensures the health and wellness of every person who walks through their doors.

Toronto & York Region Métis Council

As part of the Métis Nation, the Toronto & York Region Métis Council (TYRMC) represents Métis people in Toronto and York Region. They aspire to provide cultural events and education and build healthy and reciprocal relationships in the spirit of reconciliation. The Friends of Allan Gardens is pleased to share space in the Edible Garden with the Toronto and York Region Métis Council that allows them to offer horticultural programming to their members.

Toronto Food Not Bombs

Toronto Food Not Bombs provides mutual aid survival programs assisting the houseless and hungry, and stands in opposition to the violence of war and poverty. On Sundays, Friends of Allan Gardens volunteers donate freshly harvested herbs and vegetables to Toronto Food Not Bombs who distribute the harvests in the park that evening.

3

THE FRIENDS OF ALLAN GARDENS

3.2 Collaborative Governance Partnership with Parks, Forestry and Recreation

In July 2021, the City of Toronto's Parks, Forestry & Recreation (PF&R) division commissioned a document called the Collaborative Governance Report. Written during the COVID-19 epidemic, this document outlined the clear need for creating collaborative alliances between PF&R and local community organizations. These alliances were deemed crucial in enabling parks to fulfil the broadest mandate for how parks could provide for their citizens. The report was subtitled "A Framework 1.0 for Toronto Parks" as it recognized much work still needed to be done. *Growing with the City* is a response to that call to action.

In 2022, Toronto City Council unanimously adopted a report from PF&R to enter into formal management and fundraising agreements with the Friends of Allan Gardens. These agreements, currently in progress, are the next step in building the framework as described in the Collaborative Governance Report.

In 2023, the Friends of Allan Gardens and the City of Toronto agreed to enter into a Fundraising Agreement to secure large financial investments in the park, such as the ones outlined in the 2017 *Refresh* document, and the ones outlined in the Ecosystem of Initiatives section of this document.

→ Friends of Allan Gardens trains docents to give tours and answer questions from the public in the City of Toronto's display houses. Our collaborative relationship with the City means a more positive experience for visitors to Allan Gardens. Pictured here are some of the trained docents at Allan Gardens.



3

THE FRIENDS OF ALLAN GARDENS

3.3 Partnership with Toronto Metropolitan University (TMU)

Toronto Metropolitan University's 2020-2030 Campus Plan reaffirms its commitment to education that powers progressive social transformation and its explicit commitment to the priority neighbourhoods that surround it. In particular, the Plan commits TMU administration to pilot new approaches to the kind of intractable urban issues present in cities worldwide.

Adjacent to TMU, Allan Gardens is a dynamic crossroads of old and new, planned and accidental, affluent and marginalized. In spite of the large greenspace and its iconic conservatory, this neighbourhood grapples with the tensions that increasingly threaten our social well-being and entrench our sense of separateness from each other.

The mission of TMU's Office of Social Innovation (OSI) is to address complex social issues and, in partnership with those most affected, explore new pathways forward. Our work in

Allan Gardens grows out of the OSI's commitment to support the vitality of the neighbourhoods surrounding the University and to help bridge the chasms of race, class, and culture that undermine the community's potential to flourish.

In the spring of 2020, OSI approached the Friends of Allan Gardens to learn more about our work and history, and especially about plans moving forward from *Refresh*. That was the beginning of an important partnership bringing together these two diverse but powerfully complementary organizations in the service of a common goal: to make Allan Gardens a healthier, more creative, and more inclusive point of convergence in the heart of the city. This partnership is grounded in a shared vision of Allan Gardens as a magnet for neighbourhood interaction on a day-to-day basis, creating a new and dynamic cultural, social, and intellectual pulse for the city.

→ TMU's People, Power & The Park display set up at Allan Gardens in September 2022. Image provided by TMU.



THE FRIENDS OF ALLAN GARDENS

3.4 Commitment to Truth and Reconciliation

Friends of Allan Gardens is committed to working with the City and Indigenous communities to further the goals of Truth and Reconciliation.

Education, Employment, and Economic Reconciliation

In November 2022, the Friends of Allan Gardens, with the support of Miziwe Biik, hired Renita Swan as a Community Facilitator. This position was created to provide a young Indigenous person the opportunity to find meaningful work in horticulture and community development. In 2023, after Renita moved to British Columbia to be closer to her family, the Friends of Allan Gardens began employing Charles Leonard as its Community Facilitator. Later in 2023, Tiana Osborne joined the staff team as a communication specialist. Today, the small-but-mighty staff team at the Friends of Allan Gardens workforce is 50% Indigenous.

Culture, Ceremony, and Language Keeping

In addition to creating employment opportunities for Indigenous people, the Friends of Allan Gardens is committed to providing resources and space for cultural expression, language keeping, and ceremony. We assist and facilitate Indigenous organizations if they wish to host ceremonies in the Children's Conservatory, Edible Garden, and other locations in the park. We are also working with Elders and Language Carriers on an Indigenous tree interpretation project that aims to share the names and stories of trees in multiple Indigenous languages.

Growing and Preparing Medicines

The Friends of Allan Gardens supports four Medicine Gardens in and around the park. We work with Native Women's Resource Centre, Medicine Children's Fire, Miziwe Biik, Toronto and York Region Métis Council, and their respective Elders and Knowledge Keepers to plant, manage, harvest and prepare these traditional medicines. We have much to learn about gardening with traditional medicines, and about the cultural practices related to these plants. The Friends of Allan Gardens staff and volunteer teams are both grateful and humbled to be gardening in partnership with so many Indigenous organizations in the community.



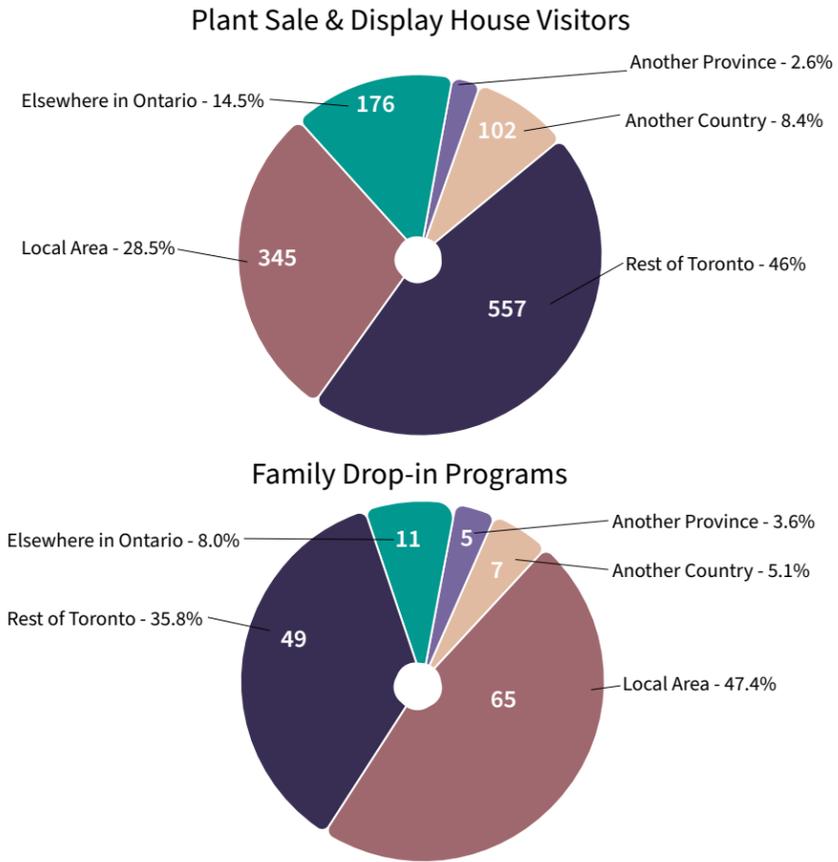
→ Two of our Indigenous staff, (left) Charles Leonard, Community Facilitator, and (right) Tiana Osborne, Communications Specialist.

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THE FRIENDS OF ALLAN GARDENS 3.5 Community Engagement: Dot Maps

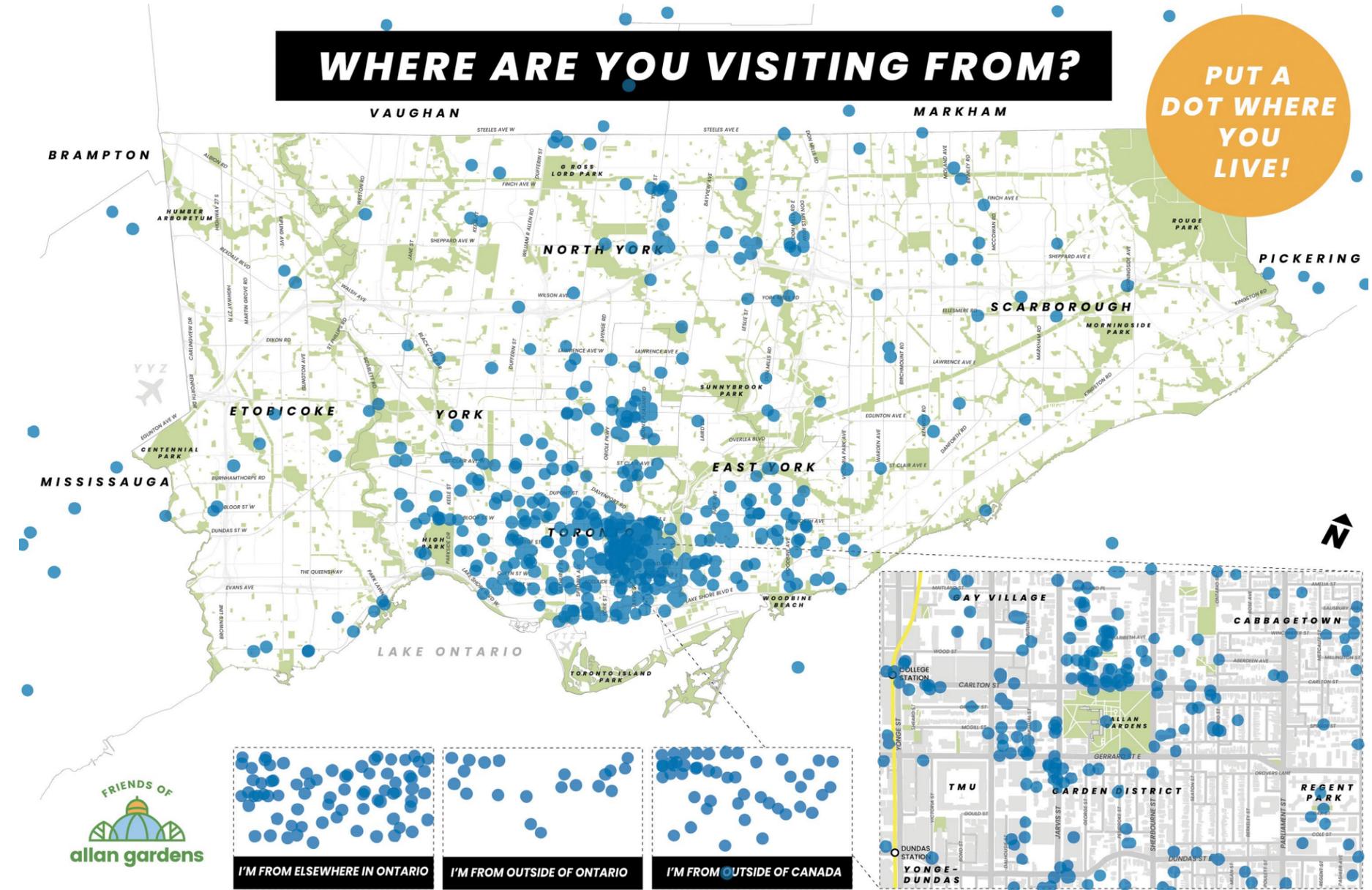
Between September 2022 and March 2023, Friends of Allan Gardens volunteers asked visitors to put a dot on a map indicating where they were coming from to visit the park. We engaged with over 1,000 visitors to the park for this exercise, helping us better understand the community we serve. We ran dot 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!



↑ Pie charts summarize the results of our dot map exercises asking where people came from when they were visiting the park. The distance people travelled to visit Allan Gardens depends on the type of program or event.

→ Over a six month period, Friends of Allan Gardens volunteers collected over 1,000 dots from park visitors at 12 different events, helping us to understand the importance of the park and our programming to a regional and local audience.



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

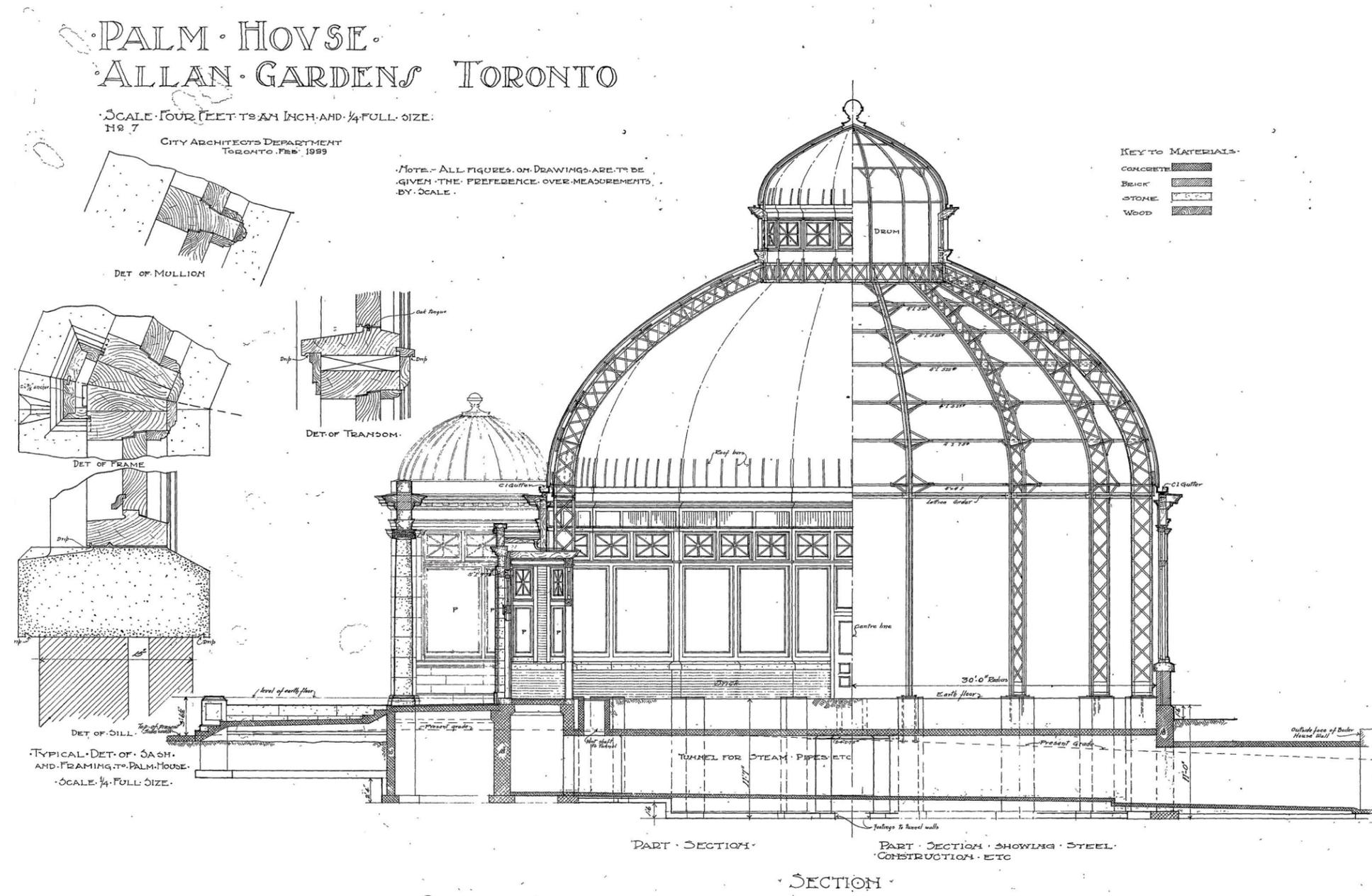


↑ Palm House restoration, 2023. Photograph by Brent Wagler.
 → Drawings by the City Architect Robert McCallum for the original Palm House that opened in 1910. Image courtesy of the City of Toronto's Parks, Forestry and Recreation department.

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.



4

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.





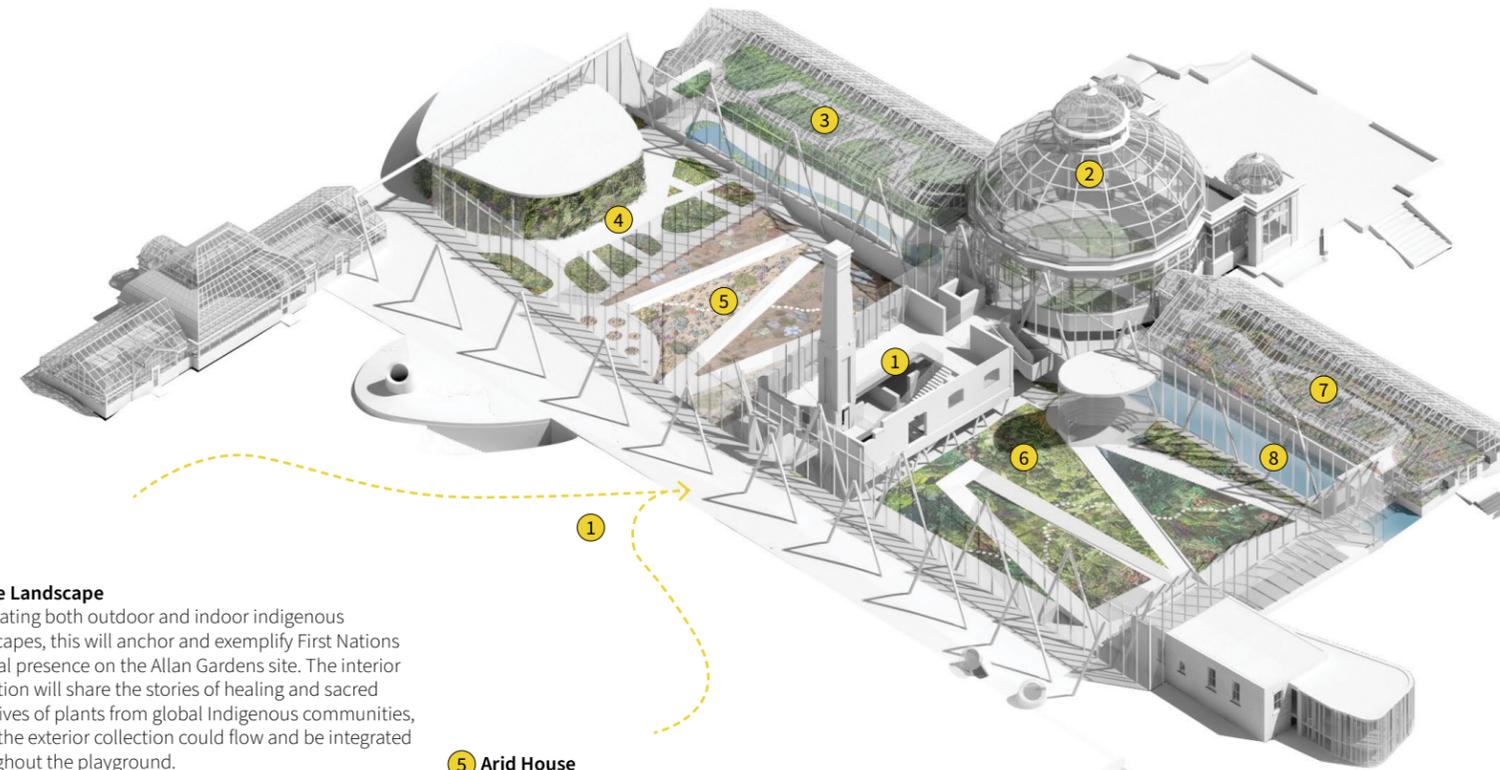
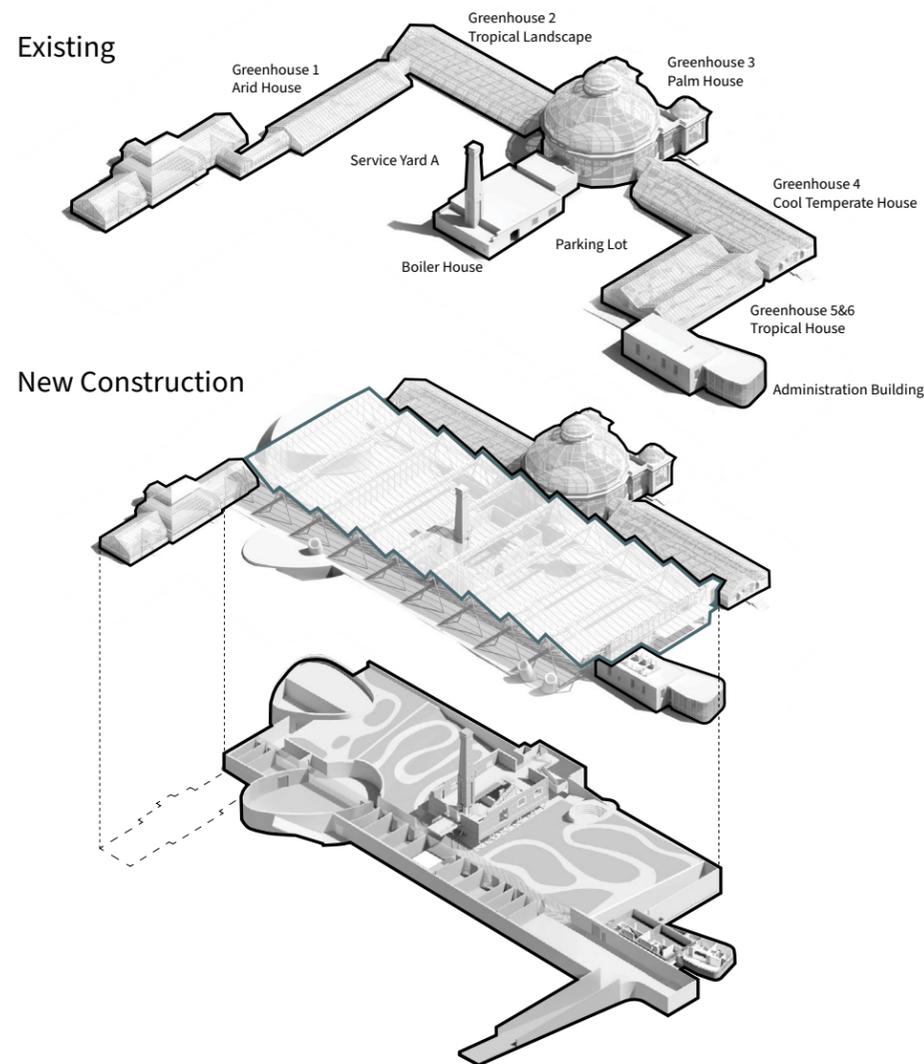
AN ECOSYSTEM OF INITIATIVES

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 subtropical 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

↑ 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 complements 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.



4

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.

AN ECOSYSTEM OF INITIATIVES

4.5 Experimental Garden

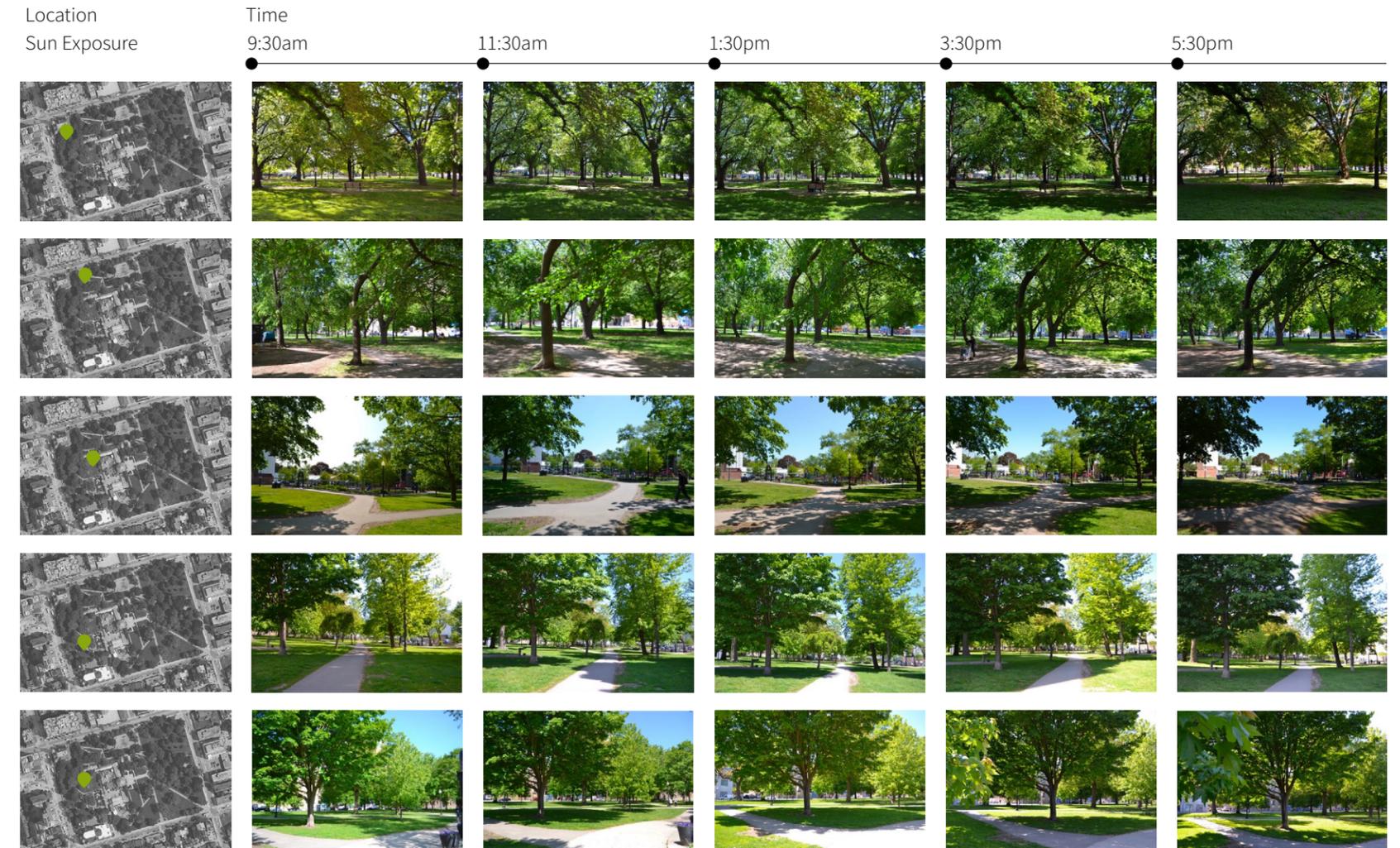
Building on Allan Gardens' history as a place of education and horticultural innovation, the Experimental Garden is imagined as a space for exhibiting land-based solutions to address the major issues of our time, including climate change, biodiversity loss, and socio-economic inequalities. These defining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

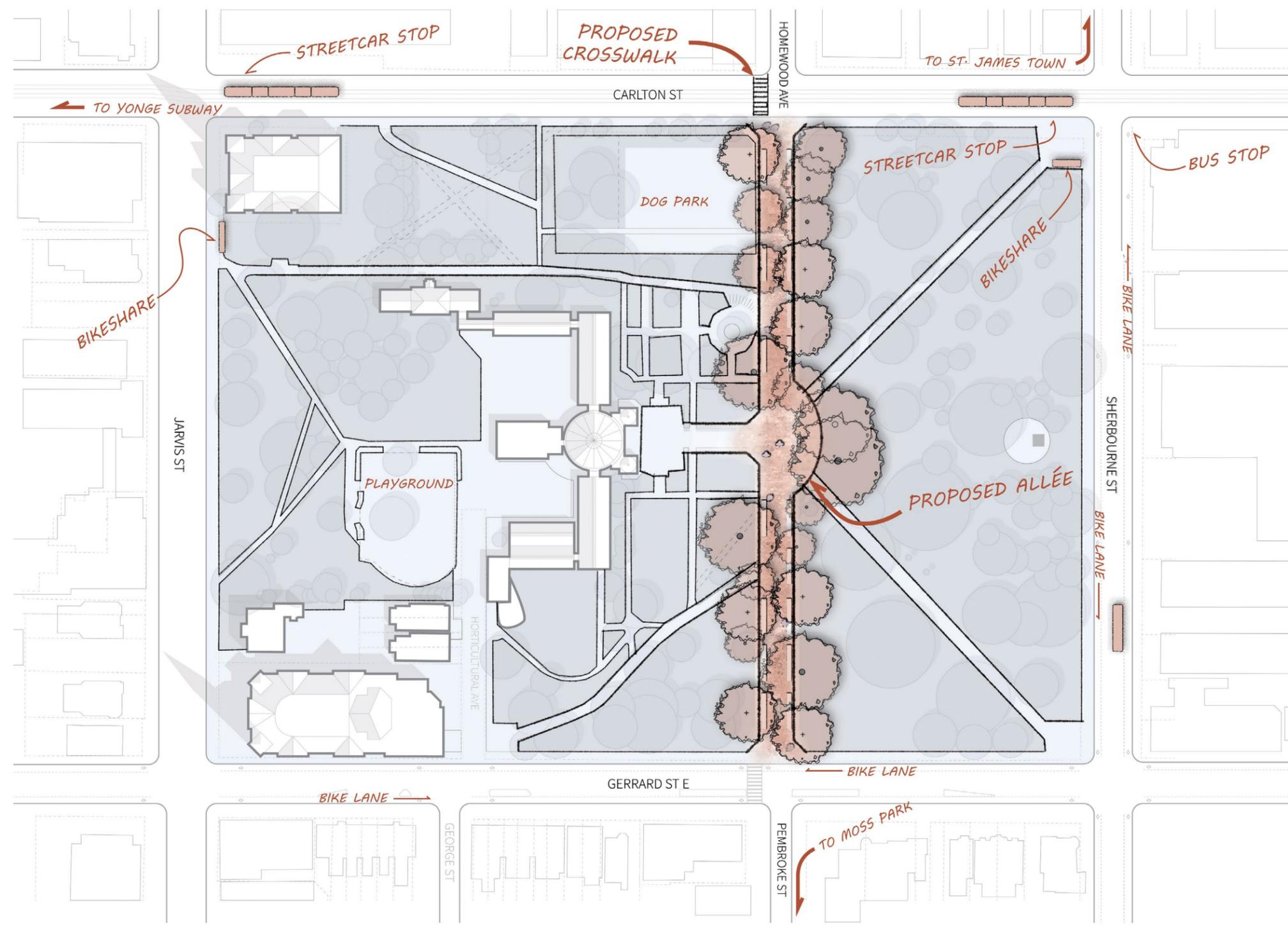
As we aim to improve the pedestrian experience of the park, we imagine a central path or allée linking Homewood Avenue and Pembroke Street, enlivening the Gardens and setting a standard for future path improvements.

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.

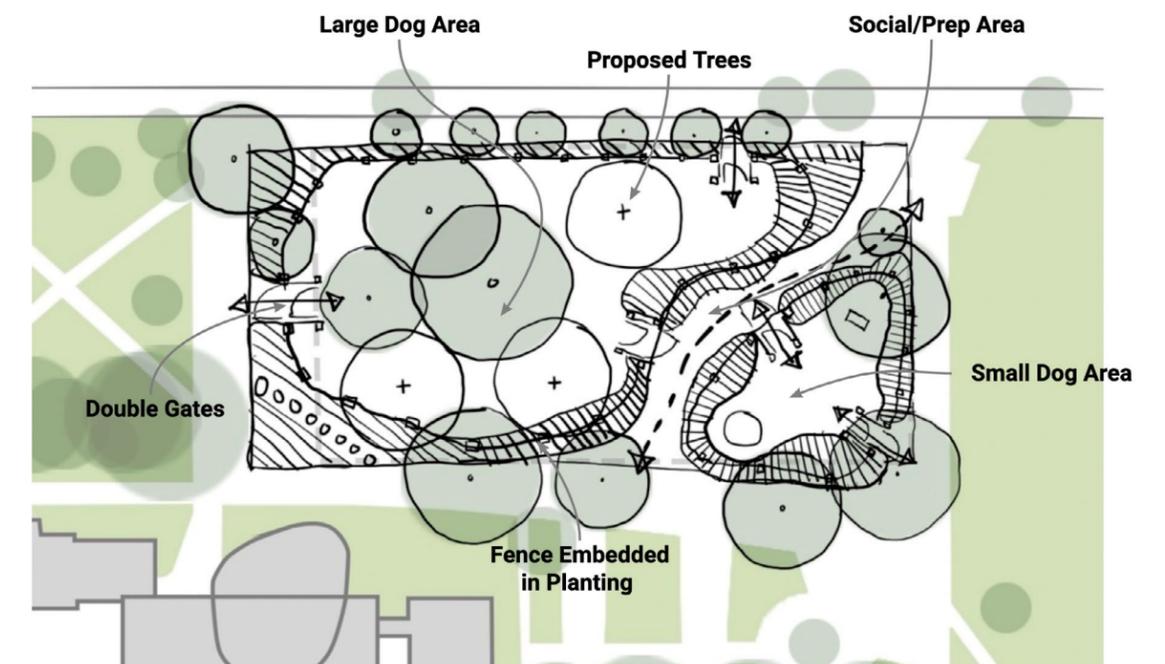
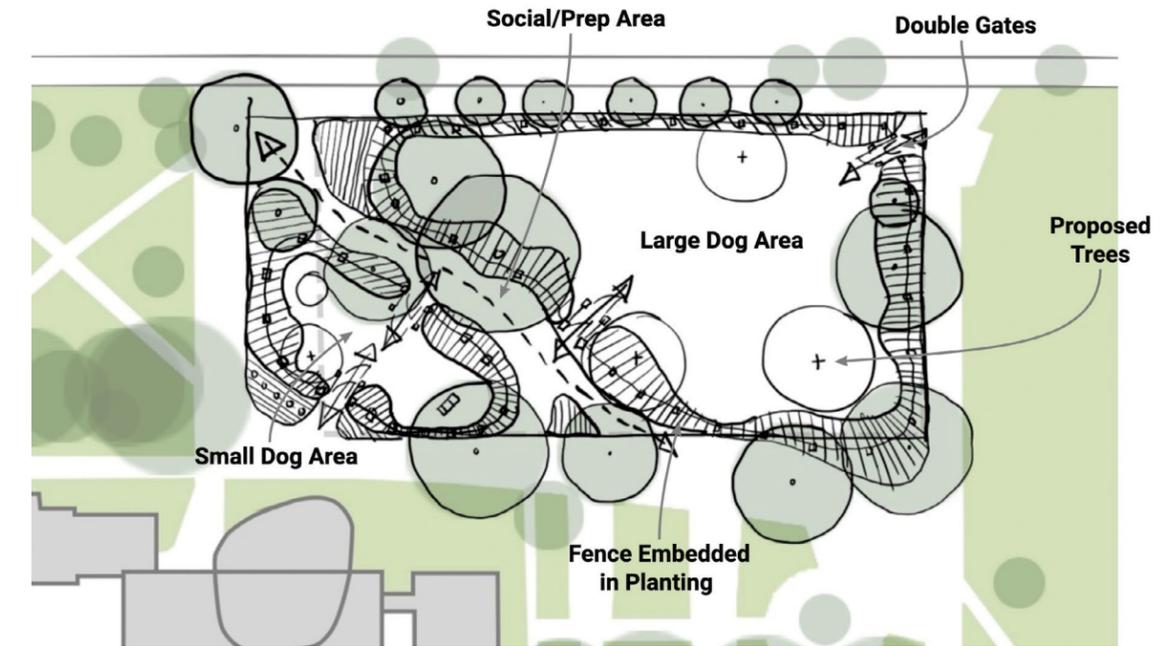
Did you know?

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.





4

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.





4

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

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| 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.



