

Project Registration Number (office use only)

Niagara River Greenway Commission

Consultation and Review Form

Type of Review Required:

Mandatory Consultation

Voluntary Review and/or Endorsement

PROJECT SPONSOR INFORMATION

Name: Buffalo and Erie County Botanical Gardens Society, Inc.

Mailing Address: 2655 South Park Avenue, Buffalo State: NY Zip Code: 14218-1526

Federal ID# 22-2514024 Charities Registration # 20-14-78

PROJECT TYPE

Check all that apply: Environmental Cultural/Heritage Land or Water Public Access

Cultural Trail Educational/Interpretive

Waterfront or Land Based Development Signage

Recreational Other

Funding Committee Host Community Standing Committee

Request:

Buffalo and Erie County Standing Committee

Ecological Standing Committee

State Parks Standing Committee

Unsure at this time

PROJECT INFORMATION

Project Name: Buffalo and Erie County Botanical Gardens Expansion Project

Location: Olmsted's South Park

Site Address: 2655 South Park Avenue, Buffalo State: NY Zip Code: 14218-1526

Minor Civil Division(s): N/A

County: Erie

Project Proponent Property Interest (own, lease, easement or other): Other

OWNER: County of Erie, Edward A. Rath County Office Building, 95 Franklin Street Buffalo, NY 14202

LEASEE: Buffalo and Erie County Botanical Garden Society Inc. The Buffalo Botanical Gardens entered into a 25-year management agreement with Erie County in 2004. The agreement is available upon request

AUTHORIZED OFFICIAL

Name: David J. Swarts Title: President and CEO

Business Address: 2655 South Park Avenue, Buffalo State: NY Zip Code: 14218-1526

Telephone Number: (716) 827-1584, ext 202 Cell Number: (716) 984-2884

Fax Number: (716) 828-0091

E-Mail Address: dswarts@buffalogardens.com

PROJECT POINT OF CONTACT

Name: David J. Swarts Title: President and CEO

Organization/Firm: Buffalo and Erie County Botanical Garden Society Inc.

Business Address: 2655 South Park Avenue, Buffalo State: NY Zip Code: 14218-1526

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PROJECT NARRATIVE

Please attach material which responds to the following six items in the order that they are presented.

1. In a brief paragraph, describe the project and its purpose, how and when it will be accomplished, and why it is important.

The Buffalo Botanical Gardens' mission as a living museum is to inspire curiosity and connect people to the natural world. The Botanical Gardens is open year-round and serves over 141,000 visitors annually through guided tours, exhibits, horticulture classes, art classes, yoga classes, special events, facility rentals, tribute and dedication opportunities, and hands-on educational programs for children and young adults. Special needs groups benefit from hands-on programs and tours.

The Botanical Gardens' structure currently comprises 66,550 square feet with three glass domes and nine greenhouses, all situated on 11.4 acres at the entrance to Buffalo's historic South Park. The Conservatory, which opened its doors in 1900, is listed on the New York State and National Register of Historic Places. The Botanical Gardens' collection has grown to include 22,000 plant species from around the world.

The current goals of the Botanical Gardens are a result of exponential growth that has taken place within the past decade. Annual visitation grew from 61,116 in 2008 to 141,647 in 2018 – a 132% increase. Educational programs have grown from 6,661 participants in 2008, to approximately 23,244 in 2018 – a 249% increase.

In response to this growing need from the community, the Buffalo Botanical Gardens commissioned a Master Plan in 2015 which identified institutional priorities, including a 40,000 square foot addition to the historical structure. The project is important because it addresses current facility issues, expands program space to fulfill growing demand, incorporates spaces that meet functional needs and generate earned revenue to ensure sustainability, and includes amenities that meet visitor expectations to create a positive visitor experience.

2. Referring to the Niagara River Greenway Plan, clearly document and describe how the proposed project will advance the Niagara River Greenway vision including the goals, principles, and criteria that define that vision.

VISION:

The expansion project will advance many of the aspirations of the Niagara River Greenway. Already a *world-class* structure designed by the famous greenhouse designers Lord and Burnham in a Frederick Law Olmsted park, the expansion has been conceived by one of America's great female architects, Toshiko Mori, who recently was identified as one of the five great women architects in 2019. Nationally recognized, award winning landscape architect, Michael Van Valkenburgh has also been retained to design five distinct connect garden and two garden courtyards. The expansion emphasizes the *surrounding landscape* and is predicted to increase audiences significantly, not only to the historic Conservatory, but to South Park and the new Butterfly Conservatory which will be included in the expansion project.

The Greenway commission also aspires to ***celebrate and interpret our unique natural world***. The Botanical Gardens exhibits, and educational programs do exactly that. The addition will expand exhibit and education space and ***make connections*** between important resources such as the Olmsted Parks, Buffalo's cultural historic architectural treasures, and other cultural experiences aimed at young families including Explore and More at Canalside. An ***economic impact*** study suggests that the annual impact of the Botanical Gardens will grow from \$5.2 million to \$9.1 million in the region. This is particularly important because the poverty levels in the immediate Zip Codes adjacent the Botanical Gardens average 24.3% versus the state average of 15.7%, based on US Census Bureau data.

The new expansion echoes many of the principles espoused by the Greenway Commission. ***Excellence in architecture*** starting with Lord and Burnham Conservatory which is on the National and NYS Register of Historic Places and the spectacular addition designed by Toshiko Mori. ***Sustainability*** is also key for the Botanical Gardens on several levels. The new building will be Silver L.E.E.D. certified and we are currently exploring geothermal for heating and cooling. Our education programs stress the importance of plants providing nutrition, and how plants grow. Programs such as *Not A Drop to Drink* emphasize the importance of maintaining our water quality. ***Accessibility*** is also important to the Botanical Gardens which is open 363 days a year. The Botanical Gardens offers off-site programming for schools, libraries, and clubs. ***Ecological integrity*** is important to this institution with the use of advanced technology such as an ETFE in the new addition, as the membrane will significantly decrease our carbon footprint. The

Greenway Commission also espouses the importance of **public well-being**. Our educational programs stress the importance of the natural world, specifically for the thousands of children that participate each year, the importance of plants, nutrition, and their life-sustaining qualities. In a recent article in the New York Times, deceased neurologist and writer Oliver Sacks, stressed the positive psychological and mental impact of botanical gardens. Staff at the Botanical Gardens have seen firsthand, and heard from patrons, the psychological benefit the exhibits have, especially on those suffering from distress or depression, as well as during the region’s long, cold, and dark winters.

Connectivity plays an important role for the Botanical Gardens. Located in the southernmost part of Buffalo, near communities such as Lackawanna and Blasdell, this cultural institution plays an important part in drawing together neighborhoods and reinforcing the unique identity of south Buffalo. The Buffalo Botanical Gardens connects an array of cultural organizations in the immediate vicinity including Tiff Nature Preserve, Our Lady of Victory Basilica, Graycliff Conservancy, and Canalside with its cultural amenities just 6 miles away.

The Buffalo Botanical Gardens provides an **authentic experience** with this living collection. It continues to maintain wide reaching **partnerships** involving libraries, scout troops, special needs audiences (Inspire, People Inc., the Office of Persons with Development Disabilities, etc.), providing them with educational opportunities, and in some cases, vocational training to support independent living. Finally, the Botanical Gardens is **celebrating** the 120th anniversary of opening its doors in 1900. Over its 120 years it has celebrated its relationship with the living world of plants, focusing on biological, psychological, intellectual, and aesthetic connections.

The planned expansion will **improve access**, spike **revitalization and renewal**, promote long-term **sustainability, extend the legacy of Frederick Law Olmsted** and celebrate history and heritage of the region. The expansion is **seen as a priority** by the broad community in the County of Erie with approximately \$8.2 million being raised to date.

3. Define the budget for the total proposed project and include costs for the following:

Planning	<u>\$4,148,000</u>
Construction	<u>\$15,006,000</u>
Acquisition	<u>\$300,000 FF&E</u>
Administration	<u>\$0</u>
Operation and Maintenance/Year	<u>n/a</u>
TOTAL PROJECT COST	<u>\$19,454,000</u>

Identify all sources of funding and the amount of funding expected from each source. Identify and quantify

NYS	\$8,350,000
County and City	\$3,870,000
Foundations	\$4,790,000

Corporate	\$1,355,000
Individual and Families	\$1,207,173
TOTAL	\$19,572,173

Funds that are already on hand or have been allocated for the proposed project. Explain how the project will be operated and maintained.

NYS	\$1,750,000
County and City	\$2,500,000
Foundations	\$2,110,000
Corporate	\$705,000
Individual and Families	\$1,022,173
TOTAL	<u>\$8,087,173</u>

- A proforma has been completed and accepted by the Finance Committee of the Board. With the expansion, earned revenue is expected to rise significantly through increased admissions, memberships, space rentals, and retail sales. Data collected from Botanical Gardens in other cities that added a Butterfly Conservatory show large increases in attendance. With the current demand outpacing supply, the addition of conference/meeting/events space will also generate significant increased income. Our operating margin is projected to grow to 11.9% in 2023.

4. Describe the measures taken at the local level to gain community and government support for this project (hearings, petitions, public surveys, resolutions of support or other methods). If this project has been cited or described in a local planning document or some equivalent thereof, attach copies of that documentation

Extensive planning was conducted for both the Buffalo Botanical Gardens Master Plan and the Capital Campaign Feasibility Study.

A Master Plan Steering Committee was assembled to prepare an RFP which was forwarded to potential consultants. The proposals were scored using the County’s review process. Toshiko Mori Architect was awarded the contract to complete the Master Plan. Issues to be analyzed, and goals for the Master Plan were identified. Hundreds of people, including staff, volunteers, board members, community and foundations leaders, and elected officials were consulted through interviews and “town hall” style meetings. Analysis of the current facilities, grounds and operations was undertaken. Other comparable botanical gardens were evaluated as to their facilities and operations. The final study, completed in 2016, presented facility and operational options and recommended the most effective solution to address facility issues, meet the increasing demand for program space, and satisfy the high expectations of a public with many choices in how they spend the leisure time.

The Master Plan is 153 pages and available upon request.

The final plan was presented to dozens of groups including Rotary and Kiwanis Clubs, garden clubs, elected officials, and at three gatherings at the Buffalo Botanical Gardens.

The Master Plan was presented at gatherings on and off-site on November 6, 2018 (50 guests), February 6, 2019 (65 guests) and on October 17, 2019 (60 guests).

Special presentations were arranged for City of Buffalo, Mayor Byron Brown and Andrew Raab, Deputy Commissioner for Parks and Recreations. Additional one-on-one presentations were given to New York State elected officials.

Attached are highlighted sections that are relevant to the proposed project.

Through the review, it became clear that the plan needed to address the following:

- Introducing accessible classrooms with a direct relationship with the Conservatory
- Physically connecting the growhouses to the Conservatory
- Providing a café, retail space and flexible events space
- Streamlining the entry sequence for visitors, cars and buses
- Separating service circulation from public circulation
- Increasing the physical and implied connection between the Conservatory and the surrounding South Park

In addition to resolving these organizational challenges, the plan also afforded the opportunity for qualitative improvements to the visitor experience and programing potential for the Buffalo Botanical Gardens.

The qualitative goals were the following:

- ✓ Amplify the beauty and history of the Lord & Burnham structure and clearly delineate between old and new
- ✓ Approach the project with the same spirit of discovery, invention, and material innovation as demonstrated in the Buffalo Botanical Garden's inception as an institution
- ✓ Consider exhibits as a flexible system to meet the changing needs of the Buffalo Botanical Gardens
- ✓ Create an approach to exhibits, landscape, and architecture which is distinctively part of Buffalo and Western New York
- ✓ Respond to the needs and interests of the Buffalo community providing experiences that will delight, educate, and sustain local visitors

The Capital Campaign Feasibility Study included interviewing 62 people who represented stakeholders, leaders in business, tourism industries, and foundations. 165 additional individuals responded to an e-survey. The final report was completed March 28, 2017. The 82-page document is available upon request. On June 15, 2017, the results to the Feasibility Study were presented to 40 guests.

Describe the role of municipal agencies, stakeholder groups, consultants, volunteers or others who will be involved in the proposed project.

Because of the public-private partnership between the County of Erie and the Buffalo and Erie County Botanical Gardens Society Inc., the Society is fully engaged with the County in the planning of the expansion, retaining the construction manager, examining energy solutions with NYSERDA, and will be involved with overseeing construction.

The City of Buffalo will be involved in discussions surrounding changes in road usage, acquiring the right of way over a small parcel of land adjacent the property owned by the County.

An important long-term partner has been the Buffalo Olmsted Parks Conservancy. They have been extensively involved in the planning of the expansion and the surrounding land use. This positive relationship has been recognized by the Buffalo Botanical Gardens receiving the Conservancy's 2019 William Dorsheimer Community Partner Award.

5. Describe and document the environmental setting and existing conditions at the proposed project site. If you are not the owner of the property include a letter(s) or resolution(s) evidencing support for the project by the owner.

See attached minutes of the meeting of the County Legislator of May 23, 2019.

<http://www2.erie.gov/legislature/sites/www2.erie.gov.legislature/files/uploads/pdfs/minutes/Meeting%2012%20from%202019%20minutes.pdf>

(see page 455)

Provide photographs, conceptual plans and drawings that show the site as it presently exists and how the site will change with the addition of the proposed project. Describe how your project will comply with the, State Environmental Quality Review Act (SEQRA). The existence of wetlands, significant upland and aquatic, habitats, and plant or animal species that are classified as rare, threatened, or endangered should be noted.

The SEQRA is completed and is clean but we are expecting one piece of technical data from Wendel Engineering which will be available within a week.

Neither the surrounding wetlands nor wildlife will be disturbed, as this expansion is largely in a non-forested section on the south east portion of the 156 acres that is Olmsted's South Park.

The Buffalo Botanical Gardens has nearly completed a SEQRA as part of its planning process.

Explain how such natural resources will be protected and/or enhanced. Cite any relevant project-related studies.

Fredrick Law Olmsted's design for South Park and the Arboretum included a Conservatory which was opened in 1900. The design included radial gardens that were never installed. The expansion project has given the architect and project leadership the opportunity to engage the award-winning landscape architect Michael Van Valkenburgh and his team to design six gardens and naturally landscaped areas as well as two enclosed courtyards (see attached project highlights). The expansion will provide "view-

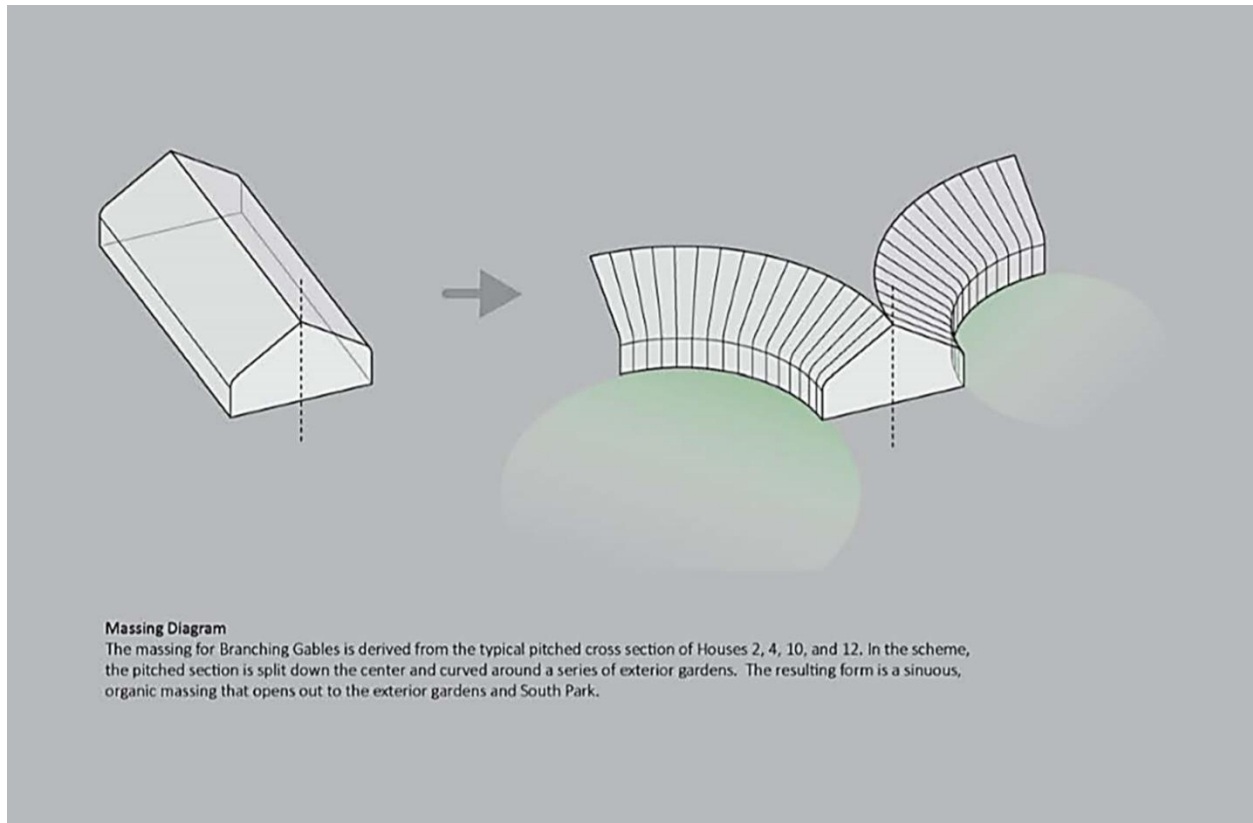
sheds” from the interior space of the surrounding gardens. Details regarding the concept design are available upon request. (see aerial view attached)

6. Please attach the proposed project timeline, identify any relevant milestones, and provide an estimated date for project completion/opening. If funded, it is expected that the project sponsor or point of contact will notify the Commission of the project opening date as it nears completion.

Completed Concept Design Phase	Spring 2019
Completed Land Survey commissioning	Summer 2019
Completing SEQRA	Fall 2019
Completed Schematic Design Phase	Fall 2019
Finalizing costs estimates	November 2019
Complete Construction Drawings	Spring 2020
Complete bid documents	Spring 2020
Confirm contracts	Summer 2020
Commence construction	Fall 2020
Complete construction	Summer 2022
Open expansion	Fall 2022

Map, schematics and photos of the model to follow:

Origin of the Design Concept

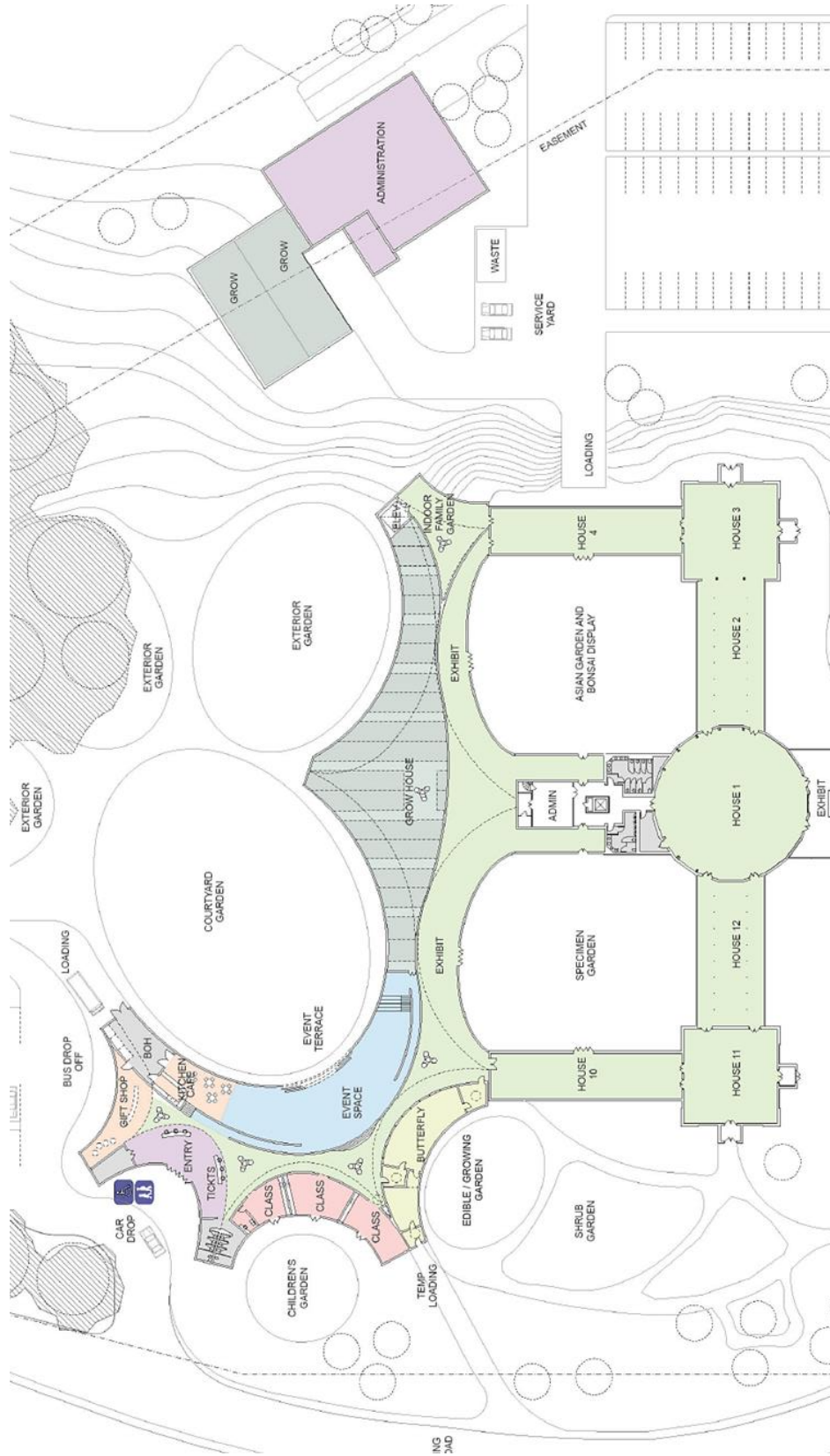


The Model Concept as would be Seen from the South West

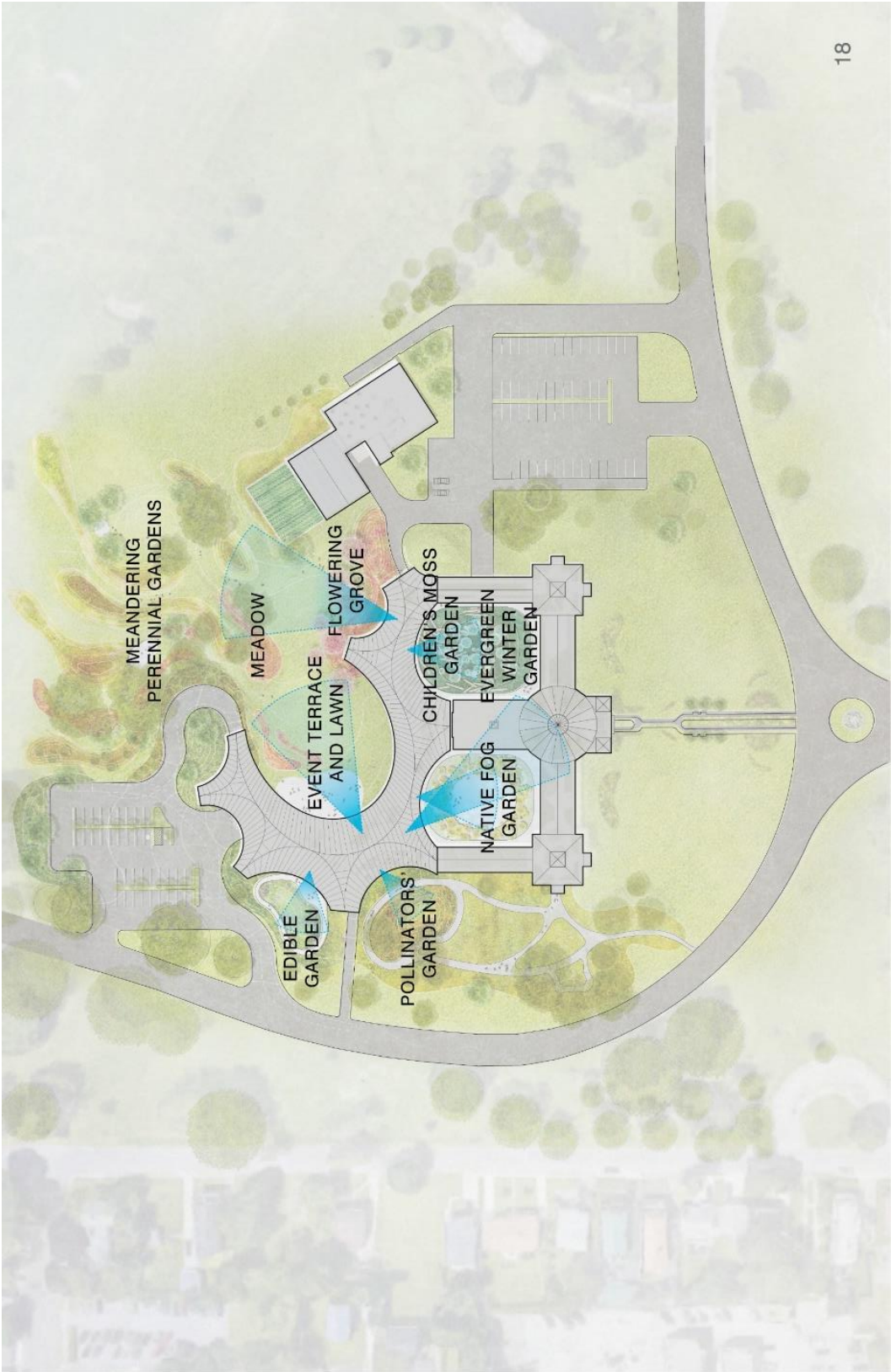
Model Photos



Schematic Identifying Spaces and Program



Views of the Designed Gardens from Interior Spaces



The Botanical Gardens and the planned Expansion Depicted in South Park's Ring Road



