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RUTGERS GARDENS VISION PLAN

OCTOBER 2025



R | **RUTGERS-NEW BRUNSWICK**
**School of Environmental
and Biological Sciences**



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Rutgers Gardens Vision Plan

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We wish to thank everyone who shared their time, thoughts, expertise, and passion over the course of the Vision Plan project and helped in the creation of this document.

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FRANCINE CONWAY
*Chancellor of
Rutgers–New Brunswick*

A national horticultural landmark located on the vibrant Cook campus, Rutgers Gardens is both a living laboratory and welcoming greenspace for education, engagement, and enjoyment. Under this transformative vision plan, Rutgers Gardens will strengthen the green space network across the Rutgers University–New Brunswick campus, broadening collective impact and ensuring the long-term sustainability of the garden spaces that enrich the University experience. This strategic linkage, enabled by the SEBS Campus Stewardship initiative, enhances alignment with the Rutgers–New Brunswick Academic Master Plan. This vital reinvigoration of Rutgers Gardens will vastly increase opportunities for students, volunteers, and visitors to ground themselves in wellness and ensure ongoing development of Rutgers Gardens as a leading public garden in New Jersey and the region.



LAURA LAWSON
*School of Environmental and
Biological Sciences Executive Dean*

Rutgers Gardens is a cornerstone of our school's many and varied living laboratories, with its designed and natural landscapes providing an ideal applied educational setting for students and community to learn not only about public horticulture and sustainable agriculture, but more widely the connection between plants, human health and nutrition, wellness, and the arts. Integration with other teaching-focused gardens, farms, and greenhouses within the School of Environmental and Biological Sciences ensures that Rutgers Gardens enriches the academic experience for students within SEBS and beyond. It is a vital hub for community outreach—offering programs and events that connect the university with the broader community—thereby serving as a welcoming and informative gateway to Rutgers University–New Brunswick and Cook Campus.



LAUREN ERRICKSON

***Director of Rutgers Gardens
and Campus Stewardship***

For decades, Rutgers Gardens has been a defining element of many students' experiences within our School of Environmental and Biological Sciences. Our plant specimens, and the land itself, have been cared for by generations of students and their mentors working alongside community members, collectively lending their hands to shape Rutgers Gardens into the special place that it is today.

As we face new opportunities and challenges of the 21st century, we embrace this redefined vision to inspire and guide Rutgers Gardens forward, broadening our education and engagement in a way that is meaningful and connected. In collaboration with ETM Associates, we have outlined not only this new vision, but also an action-oriented pathway toward implementation of the plan to revitalize how people experience Rutgers Gardens.

The history of Rutgers Gardens coupled with input shared by hundreds of current university-affiliated and community-based stakeholders form the foundation of the plan, which reflects a strengthened alignment of Rutgers Gardens with all of Rutgers—New Brunswick. We hope that this new vision presents opportunities for enhanced educational experiences along with expanded partnerships, volunteerism, and philanthropic support toward helping Rutgers Gardens thrive as a welcoming space for current and future generations of students and community members.

The vision planning process quickly brought to light how deep the connections to Rutgers Gardens run amongst our university and public communities. To all who have contributed toward shaping this new vision, I offer my sincere thanks for your dedication to Rutgers Gardens. Your thoughts, perspectives, and voices will move us forward toward a bright and vibrant future. We look forward to seeing you soon!

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CSA – Community Supported Agriculture
DOT, DOTs – Department(s) of Transportation
EJB – Edward J. Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy
FCHS – Family and Community Health Sciences
G.H. Cook campus – George H. Cook campus
IP&O – Rutgers University Institutional Planning & Operations
MGSA – Mason Gross School of the Arts
NJ – New Jersey
NJAES – New Jersey Agricultural Experiment Station
NJLCA – New Jersey Landscape Contractors Association
NJNLA – New Jersey Nursery and Landscape Association
NJSHPO – New Jersey State Historic Preservation Office

OCPE – Office of Continuing Professional Education
RADR – Rutgers Access and Disability Resources
RCE – Rutgers Cooperative Extension
RCFM – Rutgers Community Farmers Market
RComm – Rutgers Communications and Marketing
RU, University – Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey
RUF – Rutgers University Foundation
RU-NB – Rutgers–New Brunswick; the New Brunswick campus of Rutgers University
SAS – School of Arts and Sciences
SEBS – School of Environmental and Biological Sciences
STEM – Science, technology, engineering, and mathematics



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

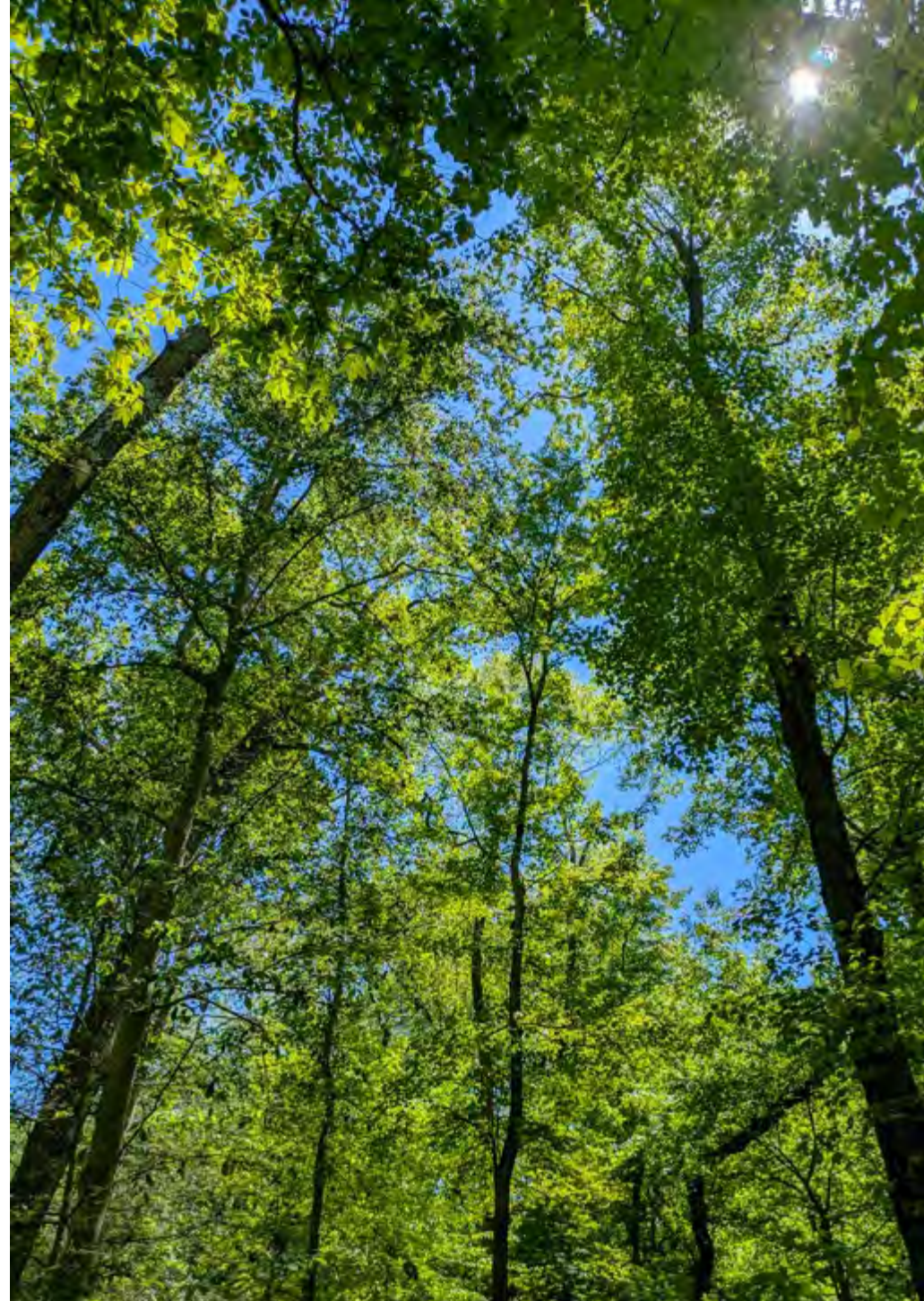


WHY A VISION PLAN?

Rutgers Gardens is the 180-acre botanic garden of Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey. It is located on the G.H. Cook campus within New Brunswick and North Brunswick, New Jersey. Rutgers Gardens features public display gardens, natural areas, a student vegetable farm, and university research areas. Rutgers Gardens is a “living laboratory” for both university and community learning and engagement with opportunities to expand its reach and impact.

Rutgers Gardens aspires to become a core academic resource for university students across disciplines, as well as to achieve recognition as a welcoming, educational hub for community engagement. To advance, the Gardens need fresh vision, clear direction, and an innovative yet sustainable operational plan, all developed within the context of the site itself.

Presented here is a newly developed strategic vision plan, which will position Rutgers Gardens for future long-term success, both with respect to Rutgers University and public stakeholders, as it evolves toward achieving this redefined horticultural and educational vision.



WHAT NOW? WHERE RUTGERS GARDENS IS TODAY

Context & Background

The role and landscape of Rutgers Gardens has been shaped over time by both research and public interests. During the 1910s and 1920s, the primary focus on the land that would become Rutgers Gardens was agricultural research. Since then, in parallel to increasing urbanization throughout New Jersey, the site has incorporated more elements of ornamental horticulture while transforming into a space that welcomes public visitors and learners. Research continued during this transformation, with various university-related groups conducting notable plant breeding research (some of which continues today). The intention for Rutgers Gardens to serve as an educational site for the university can similarly be traced to the past, with the 1969 Campus Master Plan proposing the site as a “Living Laboratory.”

Today, Rutgers Gardens is part of the School of Environmental and Biological Sciences (SEBS) within Rutgers—New Brunswick. As such, it receives support from SEBS, and fundraising efforts are conducted through the Rutgers University Foundation. Additional support is provided through revenue-generating activities at the Gardens and via the engagement of members, volunteers, and partners.

As evidence of its significance, Rutgers Gardens was granted a Horticultural Landmark Award by the American Society for Horticultural Science in 2017.

Currently, visitors to Rutgers Gardens engage with the site primarily for learning and general enjoyment. On-site programs reflect the broad range of stakeholders, and include food production and education at the Rutgers Gardens Student Farm, a seasonal weekly farmers market, a nature-based youth 4-H Camp, university and community classes, ongoing and emerging university research, and occasional venue rentals for private events.

Research & Site Analysis

A critical part of developing the Vision Plan included gathering input and information from a variety of sources and stakeholders to best inform the future direction for Rutgers Gardens. Having multiple types of information streams provided a range of insights and analyses to expand beyond single-source or limited data input, thereby driving an expansive vision planning process.

Our research and data gathering included the following:

- » Reviewed over 20 related documents and projects
- » Analyzed 688 survey responses from multiple stakeholder groups
- » Benchmarked 22 similar and aspirational institutions
- » Conducted 37 interviews to gather input from 71 stakeholders
- » Completed an on-site assessment based on multiple site visits

Key Takeaways

There is a strong desire for Rutgers Gardens to be successful, to be increasingly recognized as an integral part of the Rutgers experience, and to be a greater asset to the public. However, Rutgers Gardens is still perceived as a “hidden gem” by many or as an exclusive or entirely unknown space by others, primarily due to its limited accessibility at present. Rutgers Gardens faces key challenges around access, site maintenance and improvements, and broad awareness and engagement of stakeholders with its offerings. Moving forward, Rutgers Gardens will also have to continue to navigate broader outside influences, including both recognized and unanticipated trends across environmental, social, and economic areas.

Rutgers Gardens’ current site conditions and programming, while limited in some ways, provide a strong base on which to build. There is a plethora of opportunities to expand partnerships, integrate more closely with RU-NB and the RU-NB Academic Master Plan, draw inspiration from other university botanic gardens and arboreta, and to be more engaging, educational, and an asset to all.

WHAT'S NEXT? ESTABLISHING A FUTURE VISION FOR RUTGERS GARDENS

Defining Vision, Mission, and Values

Though far-reaching impacts are desirable, Rutgers Gardens cannot be everything to everyone. With finite resources and grounding within a public land grant university, transforming Rutgers Gardens into a destination botanical garden (e.g., Longwood Gardens) is not feasible, realistic, or appropriate. Nor is returning Rutgers Gardens to function solely as a research farm, given its ingrained public connection and teaching applications. A vision to engage different groups across multiple uses should be holistic and unified; importantly, the Gardens should meet current and future university and community needs.

To address current challenges and better capitalize on its full potential, Rutgers Gardens defines a new vision that charts a course forward toward a sustainable future. This vision is further supported by a revised mission statement and key values for the Garden's educational and visitor experience, internal practice and partnership, and overall organization.



MISSION: *Growing from our research roots to thrive as a university botanical garden for all, providing nature-based experiences to educate, engage, and delight*



Path to a New Vision

Developing a path to implement the new vision is key. This document serves as a roadmap to guide implementation, with recommendations grouped into four broad themes that reinforce the Vision Plan values and aim to address key challenges and opportunities at Rutgers Gardens. Within each theme are several goals to drive actions moving forward to be considered as actionable steps over the next one to five years.



Enhancing Educational Experience & Engagement

- » Revitalize garden areas for improved education and engagement
- » Expand educational potential through partnerships and programs
- » Facilitate engagement through program offerings, including programs by others
- » Integrate research that aligns with garden experience
- » Improve visitor amenities to enhance experience



Increasing Awareness & Communications

- » Increase student and faculty awareness of utilizing the Gardens
- » Regularly communicate with stakeholders
- » Expand types and methods of marketing
- » Improve branding and image
- » Increase promotional signage and presence
- » Improve engagement of website and social media
- » Showcase historical contributions and importance



Improving Access & Navigation

- » Improve non-automobile access to Rutgers Gardens
- » Ensure safe and accessible parking and vehicular access
- » Improve circulation and increase navigability around Rutgers Gardens
- » Enhance accessibility within the Gardens
- » Create a clearer and more welcoming entry



Strengthening Capacity & Operations

- » Expand staff and resource capacity
- » Continue enhancing membership and volunteer programs
- » Improve analysis and delivery of services
- » Add to operational partnerships
- » Clarify Advisory Board role and structure
- » Expand revenue and fundraising opportunities
- » Capitalize on Vision Plan momentum

Resource & Implementation Needs

This Vision Plan opens the door to new opportunities for resources and funding, both internal and external to the university, that will help to facilitate sustainable operations and support a garden for all. Carrying out all components of the Vision Plan will require resources beyond Rutgers Gardens' current capacity. Addressing this gap can be done using a variety of strategies, such as:

- » expanding services and resources through partnerships;
- » contracting selected landscape and professional services;
- » further engaging community and university volunteers;
- » hiring additional staff, interns, and student workers; and
- » increasing industry connections for support services.

Strategies should consider what resources may be best suited for certain work, and that some resources may not be able to perform certain tasks.

As a public university and community asset, not all programming at Rutgers Gardens is expected to generate revenue or a direct financial return on investment; many activities may instead yield important educational and engagement outcomes. As such, it is important that Rutgers Gardens not operate strictly for financial gain but instead make use of a variety of funding sources to support its ongoing operations. More strategic spending to achieve Vision Plan recommendations will need to be coupled with overall operating budget increases and capital funding to best support ongoing care for the Gardens and new improvements resulting from the Vision Plan. Such funding support may come from a variety of sources, including grants, gifts of varying sizes and types, internally generated revenue, and University support. More opportunities may also become available as Rutgers Gardens aligns with larger University initiatives through the Vision Plan.

Living Our Vision

MEASURING PROGRESS

Tracking and evaluating progress toward achieving the goals and recommendations set forth will be key to the overall success of the Vision Plan. Progress and success should be measured by multiple metrics. These may include identifying completed recommendations, collecting and tracking evaluations and surveys by different user groups over time, and analyzing trends of data collected in association with programs, class use, research, etc. A small group, whether the Advisory Board in a revised role and/or a university-based committee, could help further implementation of the Vision Plan and evaluation of progress over time.

CELEBRATING THE NEW VISION

A series of events and programs that highlight and celebrate central aspects of the Vision Plan are recommended to invite participation and generate excitement among the university and public communities. These may capitalize on implemented short-term recommendations and could include farm-to-table receptions, an inaugural ride on a bus that would connect Cook campus to Rutgers Gardens, open houses featuring student-led projects at Rutgers Gardens, launch of a new visitor map, and restoration of the popular green chairs as a central Gardens feature.



PART 1:
What Now?
Rutgers Gardens
Today

CHAPTER 1

CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND



Rutgers Gardens is the 180-acre botanical garden of Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey. It is located on the G.H. Cook campus within New Brunswick and North Brunswick, New Jersey. Rutgers Gardens features public display gardens, natural areas, a student vegetable farm, and university research areas. Rutgers Gardens is a “living laboratory” for both university and community learning with opportunities to expand its reach and impact.

Rutgers Gardens aspires to become a core academic resource for Rutgers students across disciplines, as well as to achieve recognition as a welcoming, educational hub for community engagement. To advance, the Gardens need fresh vision, clear direction, and an innovative operational plan that considers ecological and organizational sustainability, all developed within the context of the site itself.

Presented here is a newly developed strategic vision plan¹, which will position Rutgers Gardens for future long-term success, both with respect to Rutgers University and public stakeholders, as it evolves toward achieving this redefined horticultural and educational vision.

¹ - While some aspects of physical site planning will be included in the Vision Plan, it is not intended as a physical master plan for the site, which is recommended as a later phase that develops as a result of the Vision Plan.



RUTGERS GARDENS HISTORY

The role and landscape of Rutgers Gardens has been shaped over time by both research and public interests.

At its inception in 1916, the Rutgers University land that would eventually be known as Rutgers Gardens was focused on fruit and vegetable research. Following this initial agricultural focus on what was then referred to as Horticulture Farm No. 1, increasing elements of ornamental horticulture were included beginning in the late 1920s to address evolving public and landscape industry interests. While the public was invited to the site at times (such as for public display events and field days), the facility did not operate as a public garden during these early years. Initial display events were generally linked with then-current research of the university's Horticulture Department. As time went on, public visitation expanded from special events to include wider access; events also became less specialized (e.g., events tied to specific plants or areas) and more general (e.g., open houses). Campus maps of the 1960s and 1970s used "Ornamental Display", "Gardens of Horticulture Farm No. 1", and "Display Gardens" to denote the area now known as Rutgers Gardens.

The intention for Rutgers Gardens to serve as an educational space can be traced to the 1969 Campus Master Plan, which proposed Rutgers Gardens as a "Living Laboratory." Over the following decades, more use by the public was fostered through renovated and expanded facilities (notably the Holly House and Log Cabin Pavilion), rentals for private events, and the addition of new

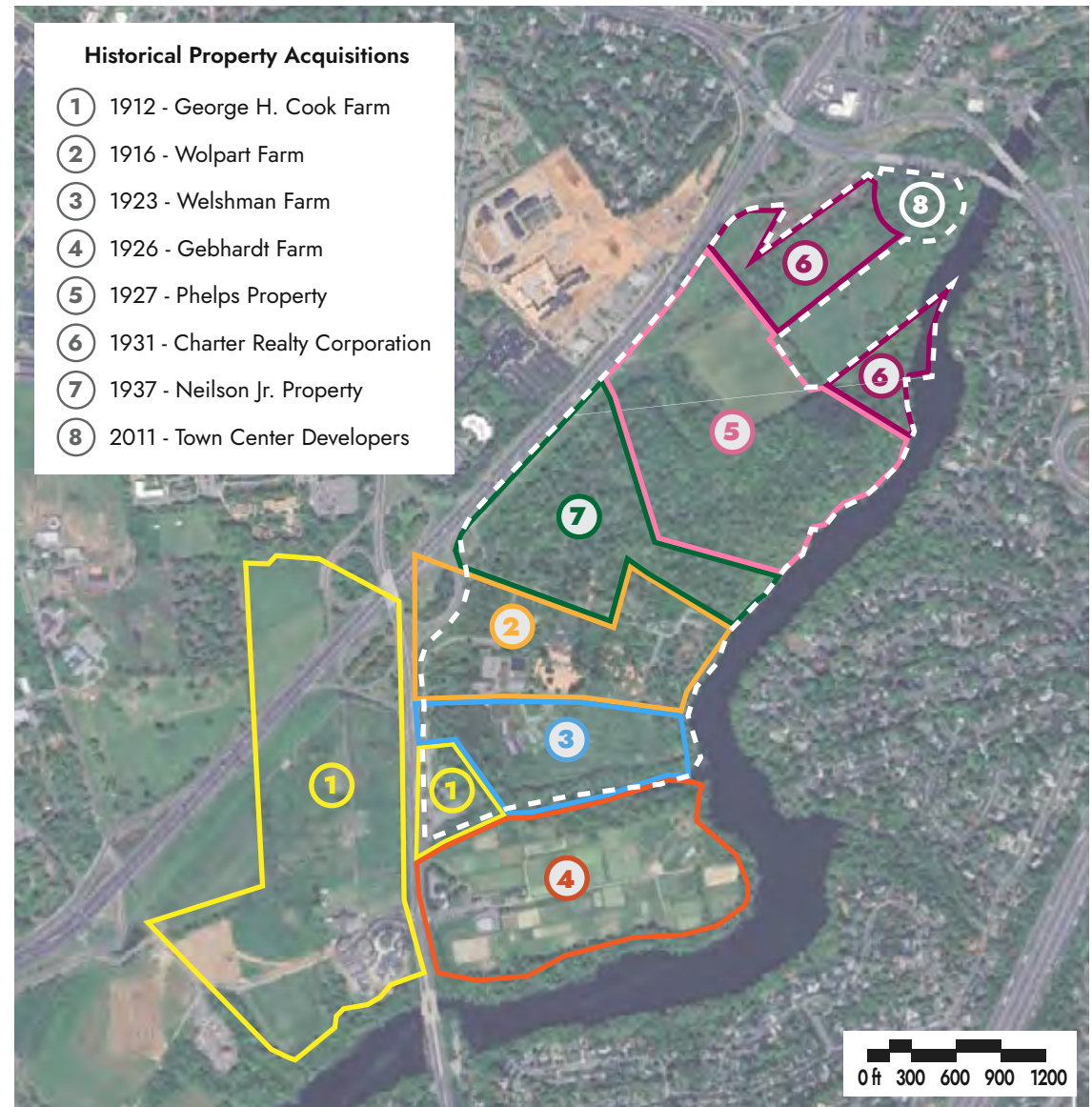


Figure 1. Land Acquisition Boundaries & Dates for Parcels Within and Adjacent to Rutgers Gardens (current boundary in dashed white line)

display gardens. More public engagement was also encouraged through volunteer opportunities, community events, plant sales, and philanthropy in order to help support the ongoing care of an evolving Rutgers Gardens.

In 2003, a portion of Rutgers Gardens was included in the New Jersey State Historic Preservation Office (NJSHPD) designation of the New Jersey Agricultural Experiment Station College Farm Historic District (ID#5452); boundaries of the district are shown in the associated map. More recently, Rutgers Gardens was granted a Horticultural Landmark Award by the American Society for Horticultural Science (ASHS) in 2017.²

Throughout its history, notable plant breeding research conducted at Rutgers Gardens by various University-related groups has focused on peach, holly, dogwood, and hazelnut trees/shrubs; some of this breeding research continues today through the efforts of the New Jersey Agricultural Experiment Station and the Department of Plant Biology.³

The past century of Rutgers Gardens and the development of its plant collections were important to post-war suburbanization: as many areas of New Jersey shifted from rural traditions toward increased development, the desire for ornamental landscape plants similarly expanded. Now, there exists a need for Rutgers Gardens, its plant collections, and its programming to be shaped to address 21st century issues such as ecological horticulture, climate resilience, and food security.

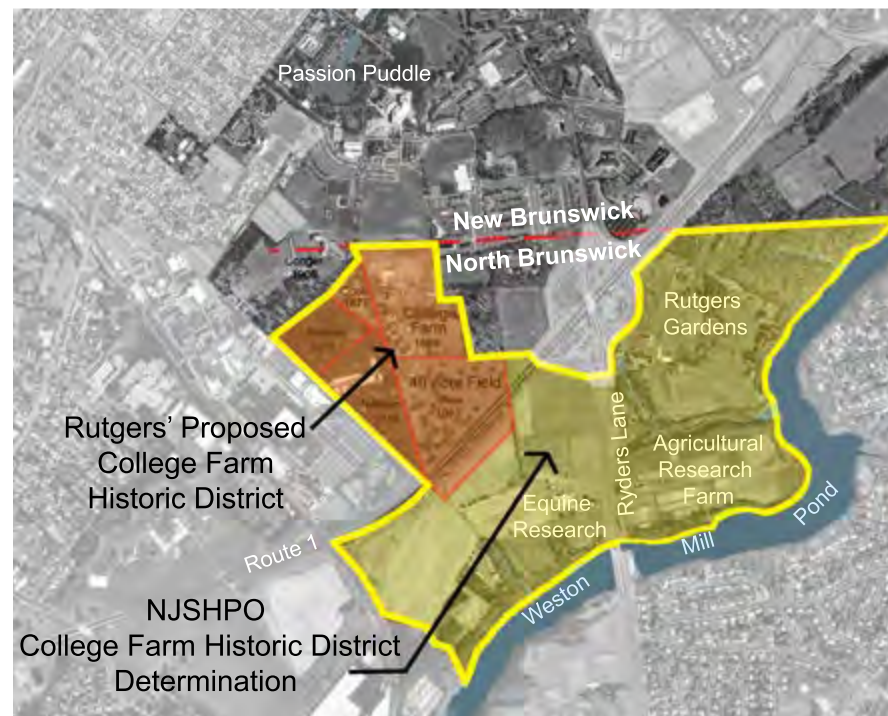


Figure 2. Proposed College Farm Historic District and District Determination Boundaries

2 - Other notable ASHS Horticultural Landmarks include New York Botanical Garden, Monticello, the US Botanic Garden, Arnold Arboretum, and Longwood Gardens.

3 - More information on Rutgers Gardens history and the role of plant research in shaping Rutgers Gardens can be found in David Hanrahan's graduate thesis "Hybrid Territory: The Shaping of Public Display at Rutgers Gardens". Additional history can be found on the Rutgers Gardens website.

Notable dates:

1912 — portions of land of the Cook Farm on Ryders Lane purchased by Rutgers University; a small portion of this land is included within the current boundaries of Rutgers Gardens

1916 — Wolpart Farm (35.7 acres) purchased and re-sold to Rutgers University by Jacob and Cecilia Lipman for use as a facility for pomology and vegetable research (Horticulture Farm No. 1), with a 4-acre plot for ornamental horticulture

1922 — Iris Garden established as the first display area

1923 — Welshman Farm (22.7 acres) purchased by Rutgers University, expanding the extents of Hort. Farm 1

1927 through 1930s — initial planting of the Shrub Garden and lilac collection (which later became the Alice B. Harding Lilac Walk), with additions by Ben Blackburn following until the early 1950s

1929 — New Jersey State Highway Route 25 (now U.S. Route 1) constructed

1927 and 1937 — approximately 70 acres of farm and woodland donated to Rutgers University (1927 via Charles Phelps and 1937 via the will of James Neilson Jr.) for research and education; woodland named Helyar Woods in 1961 honoring Frank G. Helyar

1931 — additional tracts of land acquired by the Trustees of Rutgers College from Charter Realty Corporation northeast of the Phelps property

1935 (approximate) — Civilian Conservation Corps construct “Horticulture House” (now Holly House) and likely the potting shed and tool shed to support research on Hort. Farm 1

1936 — Log Cabin constructed by Works Progress Administration

Late 1930s — Rhododendron Garden created

1930s and 1940s — peach breeding program conducted on Hort. Farm 1

1940s — bamboo grove planted as a wind screen for honeybee colonies

Late 1940s and early 1950s — “Holly Orchard” planted for future holly breeding to serve the cut-stem industry, replacing vegetable and small fruit plots



Figure 3. Aerials of Rutgers Gardens and Surrounding Area

1958-60 — Roy H. DeBoer designs and installs the Evergreen Garden (garden was later named after him in October 1997)

1960 — Dr. Elwin Orton begins work on breeding holly species crosses

1964 — Iris Collection converted into the Donald B. Lacey Display Garden

1965 — Dr. Elwin Orton begins work on breeding dogwood species crosses

1965 — first Open House held in July

Mid-1960s — Ryders Lane and Route 1 cloverleaf constructed, and Rutgers Gardens entry/exit reconfigured

1969 — Campus Master Plan proposes Rutgers Gardens as a Living Laboratory

1981 — official opening and dedication of Holly House as the Garden Club of New Jersey Headquarters

Late 1990s — Log Cabin Alumni Pavilion structure and infrastructure improvements donated by Cook Community Alumni Association

1996 — start of hazelnut genetic improvement program by Dr. Thomas Molnar

2003 — NJSHPO designation of New Jersey Agricultural Experiment Station College Farm Historic District (ID#5452), which includes portions of today's Rutgers Gardens





1936 photograph of orchards, vegetable gardens, and display gardens



Vegetable and fruit research near the current site of the Holly Collection

2005 to present — new gardens, including the Otken Garden, Rain Garden, and Pollinator Garden, constructed, enhanced, and renovated over time

2007 — Rutgers Gardens boundaries expanded to incorporate Helyar Woods, additional research land, and sections along Route 1, to encompass 180 total acres

2016 — the Student Farm moved to Rutgers Gardens from prior Horticulture Farm #3 location

2017 — Rutgers Gardens granted a Horticultural Landmark Award by the American Society for Horticultural Science

2018 — Cook's Market living roof construction completed to enhance farmers market operations and demonstration of green infrastructure

2018 — Student Farm production expands to include upper and lower fields; beginning of partnership with Rutgers Student Food Pantry

2023 to present — Expansion of Rutgers Gardens operations to encompass wider campus stewardship efforts focused on "living laboratories" serving educational and demonstration purposes throughout G.H. Cook campus

2024 — Student Farm begins process toward receiving organic certification

2024 — Installation of new tree collection representing species native to the Northeastern, Mid-Atlantic, and Southeastern U.S.

Sources:

- Rutgers Gardens website History page: <https://rutgersgardens.rutgers.edu/about/history>
- Hybrid Territory: The Shaping of Public Display at Rutgers Gardens by David Hanrahan; accessible at <https://rucore.libraries.rutgers.edu/rutgers-lib/40588/>
- Internal IP&O documentation
- <https://sebsnjaesnews.rutgers.edu/2017/04/rutgers-gardens-receives-prestigious-national-horticultural-landmark-award/>
- https://www.nj.gov/dep/hpo/Identify/nrsr_lists/MIDDLESEX.pdf

PRESENT-DAY RUTGERS GARDENS

While not originally designed as a botanical garden, Rutgers Gardens has transformed from its university-focused research roots into a well-loved public green space. Currently, two primary ways people engage with the Gardens include general enjoyment by community and university visitors and use by Rutgers faculty, staff, students, and others for teaching and learning. Similarly, current Gardens stakeholders fall into two broad categories: those affiliated with Rutgers University and those unaffiliated. In addition to faculty, staff, and students affiliated with various academic departments, university stakeholders also include the New Jersey Agricultural Experiment Station (NJAES), including Rutgers Cooperative Extension (RCE), and other schools at Rutgers University—New Brunswick (RU-NB) as well as alumni. Broad partnerships demonstrate the relevance of Rutgers Gardens beyond STEM-focused stakeholders to also include collaborations in the arts, health and wellness, and more. On-site programs reflecting this broad array of stakeholder interests include food production and education at the Rutgers Gardens Student Farm, a seasonal weekly farmers market (Cook's Market), 4-H Camp at Rutgers Gardens (a nature-based summer youth development day camp), ongoing and emerging university research, and occasional venue rentals for private events. Expanding on university and community connections, collaborative efforts such as the recognition and ongoing restoration of the Alice B. Harding Lilac Walk at Rutgers Gardens seek to engage stakeholders by highlighting sociological and cultural relevance to New Jersey horticulture — past, present, and future.

As a part of the School of Environmental and Biological Sciences (SEBS) at RU-NB, Rutgers Gardens integrates with the school and the wider university to help advance the collective mission of each. Beyond the primary physical location of Rutgers Gardens, land stewardship efforts and student engagement extend to living laboratories that include display gardens, urban farms, greenhouses, and forested areas throughout Cook campus. This vision plan aims to highlight and expand upon the role of Rutgers Gardens as a connection point through which RU-NB expands its efforts toward achieving increased scholarly leadership, innovative research, student success, and community engagement.



Organization

Based in the School of Environmental and Biological Sciences, Rutgers Gardens staff are university employees and consist of a mix of full-time and part-time horticulture, agriculture, administration, and education professionals, as well as students who are engaged as interns, experiential learners, and employees.

Rutgers Gardens is overseen by the Director of Rutgers Gardens and Campus Stewardship, who reports to the Executive Dean. Her responsibilities include leading the development, programming, and operation of Rutgers Gardens, as well as engaging key stakeholders to ensure the demonstration gardens, farms, and natural areas of Rutgers Gardens serve as educational resources for all. Additionally, the Director leads outreach initiatives to promote Rutgers Gardens and educational efforts to increase public knowledge related to horticulture, ecology, food, and wellness. As part of an initiative to create synergies and expand the concept of living laboratories across the G.H. Cook campus, the Director's responsibilities have expanded in recent years to include initiatives to develop teaching and display gardens, as well as expanded urban agriculture opportunities (e.g., the Rutgers Gardens Student Farm and campus-based community gardens), and teaching greenhouses that feature experiential learning opportunities for students. This restructuring is aligned with the recommendations of this Vision Plan, with the implications discussed in more detail in "Part 2 – What's Next?"

The Director oversees multiple staff teams. The administrative team supports all facets of Rutgers Gardens operations and programming. Two key areas of ongoing focus are Horticulture and Grounds, and Sustainable Agriculture; recently, Greenhouses and Indoor Cultivation was added as a Rutgers Gardens area of focus. A fourth area comprised of primarily forests and encompassing other natural ecosystems is also being explored as part of the Rutgers Gardens and Campus Stewardship structure. Within each area, dedicated full-time staff support foundational and developing initiatives of Rutgers Gardens. At the time of publication,

there are ten professional staff positions affiliated with Rutgers Gardens.

The Director has an Advisory Board that provides guidance and insight from the university, horticulture industry, and non-profit sector perspectives, among others. Though structured bylaws and standardized terms are currently in place, the Advisory Board does not have fiduciary or governing responsibilities for Rutgers Gardens operations or programs but rather provides council aimed to enhance the success of Rutgers Gardens. As a recent example of Board engagement, Advisory Board members have partnered with Garden staff to foster relationships, research historical connections, and develop educational programming for special projects, such as the Alice Harding Lilac Walk (currently undergoing restoration).

In addition to partaking in key educational initiatives, students are also an important part of expanding capacity for overall stewardship of the main Rutgers Gardens site and the affiliated campus-based horticulture, agriculture, and greenhouse teaching areas. Rutgers Gardens offers a paid 15-week seasonal summer internship program, through which students engage in hands-on learning while actively contributing to the care and programming of Rutgers Gardens. Following the internship experience, students may complete additional experiential learning projects that are extended into the fall semester. Some are hired to stay on with Rutgers Gardens as Student Horticulturists/Student Farmers, continuing their educational journey with expanded responsibilities as they work (for pay) alongside Rutgers Gardens professional staff. The most recent summer internship cohort consisted of sixteen students; this fall, fifteen students are currently paid as Student Horticulturists/Student Farmers at the time of publication.

Volunteers also play an important role in the care and maintenance of the gardens and program delivery year-round. About 20 to 30 volunteers regularly engage in activities on site at Rutgers Gardens. Additional volunteer support is provided by corporate and student groups throughout the year. In 2024, a total of 431 distinct volunteers participated in hands-on activities at Rutgers Gardens across the



horticultural display gardens, Student Farm, and natural areas. Citizen science is also active at Rutgers Gardens, including through the iNaturalist project, where over 600 people have observed more than 2100 species at the site.⁴

Financials

Rutgers Gardens operates within the context of the university's overall finance and administration system. SEBS supports general facility and operational expenses and key full-time staff positions that provide the basic structure of the Rutgers Gardens operating model, through both direct financial support as well as several indirect costs. Rutgers Gardens also raises funds to support additional staff, facility, and program needs. Revenue-generating activities include site/venue rentals, plant sales, class and program fees, Student Farm Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) memberships, and produce sales. Further support comes through Rutgers Gardens memberships, donations/gifts, endowments, and grants.

Rutgers Gardens has had success with fundraising and generating income through fee-for-service efforts over the years to supplement

wider operational resources and capital support. However, the COVID-19 pandemic stressed this capacity. The associated reduction of earned income, fewer staff positions, lower levels of student and volunteer engagement, and additional backlog of grounds and facilities work that accumulated during the pandemic's peak contributed to a reevaluation of Garden operations. It will be important that future fee-for-service efforts align with the new vision, with a focus on mission-driven activities.

As an entity within SEBS and the larger Rutgers-New Brunswick, Rutgers Gardens fundraising efforts are conducted within the framework of the Rutgers University Foundation (RUF); Rutgers Gardens is not an independent non-profit organization. In other words, all philanthropic gifts to Rutgers Gardens are made through the RUF. Current fund options for gifts include: the Friends of Rutgers Gardens fund, which supports horticultural efforts, student engagement, and more; the Student Farm fund; and the Helyar Woods and Natural Areas Support Fund. Rutgers Gardens memberships are also tax-deductible gifts. At the time of publication, RUF no longer has a gift assessment fee applied to donations, so 100% of a donor's gift amount is available to Rutgers Gardens. In addition to ad-hoc gifts made by donors throughout the year, Rutgers Gardens also maintains multiple small endowments, which are directed to support specific areas and/or activities of Rutgers Gardens.

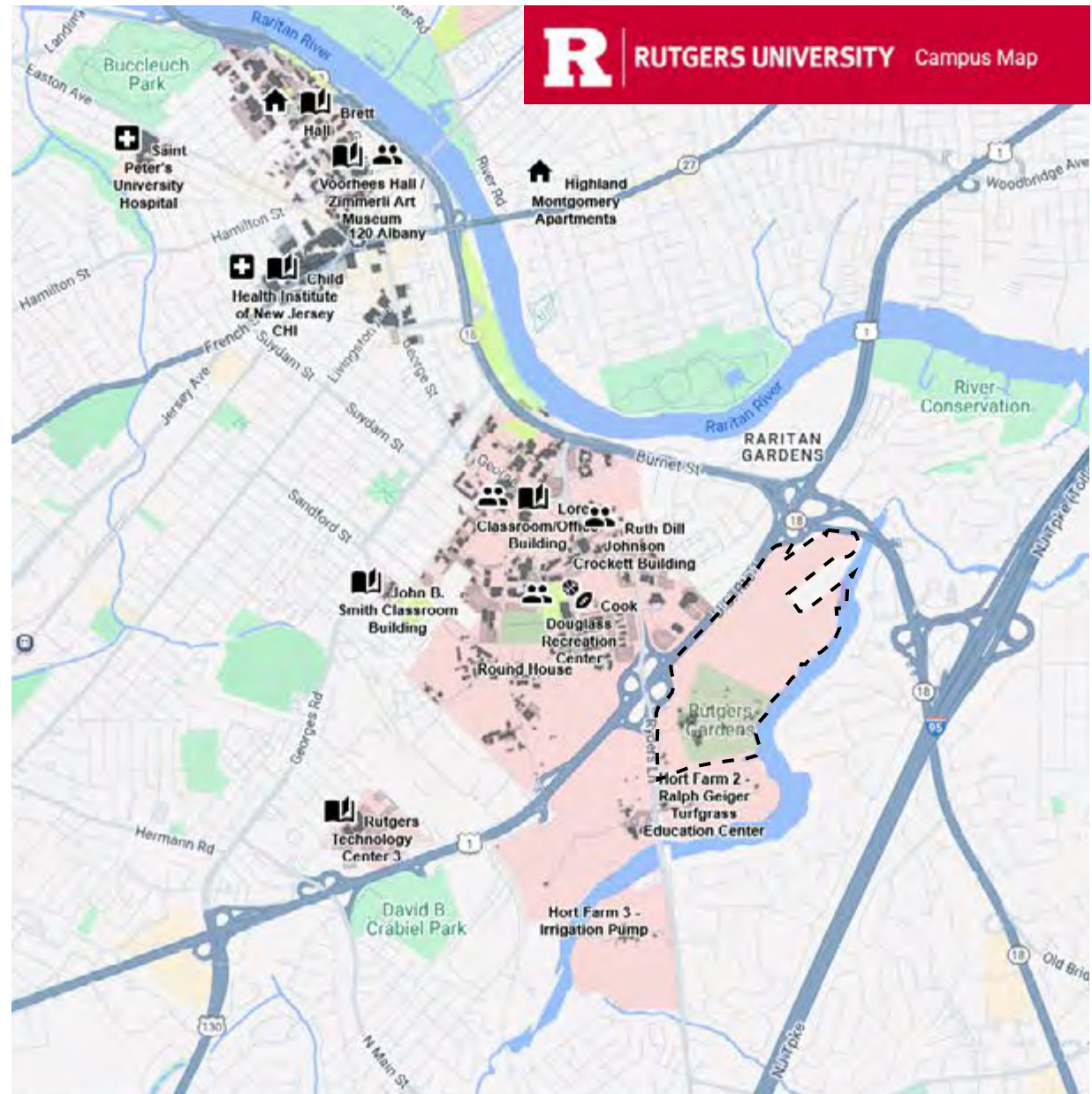
⁴ - More information can be found at the iNaturalist page for Rutgers Gardens at <https://www.inaturalist.org/projects/rutgers-gardens-and-hort-farm-i-ii-rutgers-univ-new-brunswick-north-brunswick-nj-usa>

Physical Site

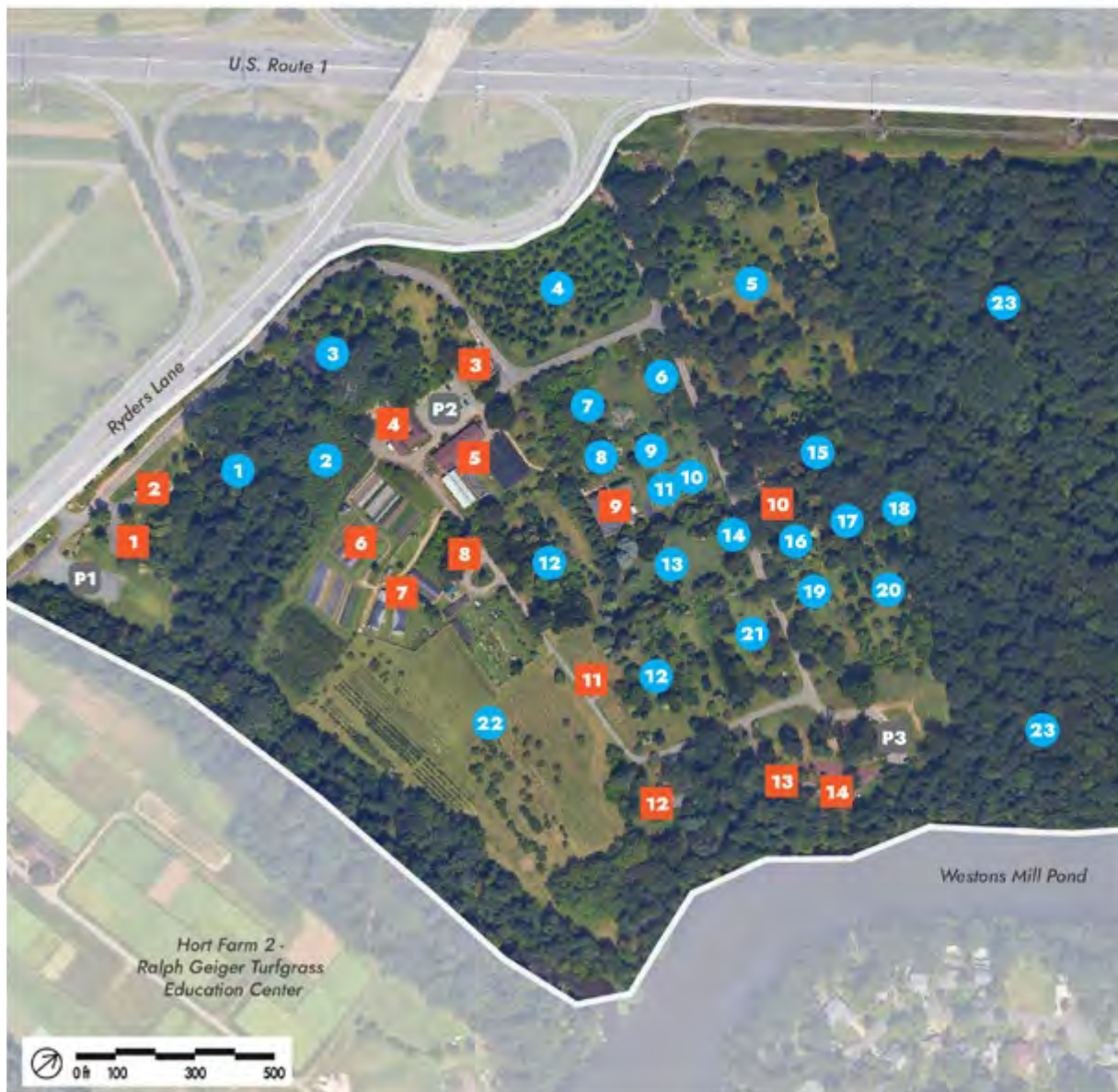
Rutgers Gardens is located on the edge of G.H. Cook campus. It is separated from the core area of campus by Ryders Lane and Route 1, which creates an extremely unsafe environment for pedestrians and cyclists attempting to reach the Gardens. Furthermore, no public transportation, either university, county, or otherwise, connects to Rutgers Gardens at present. Because of these conditions, a personal vehicle or rideshare is necessary to safely access Rutgers Gardens; even vehicles face challenges entering and exiting⁵. The access challenge, as well as limited signage at the entry inviting the public to visit, may contribute to a perception that the Gardens is an exclusive or unknown space, rather than a space open and welcoming to all.

5 - Ryders Lane is a county road, which necessitates wider coordination and potential challenges with changing access to Rutgers Gardens. Though a traffic study was completed as part of a former master planning process for Rutgers Gardens, the study was conducted in July when typical University traffic is not present and therefore should not be considered representative of today's year-round conditions.

Figure 4. (right) Rutgers Gardens Physical Context: Map from Rutgers University Campus Map Website. Rutgers Gardens is physically separated from the rest of Cook campus (light red background) by Route 1 and Ryders Lane. Several other green spaces are nearby, including parks, campus spaces, and conservation areas, showcasing potential future green network connections.







SITE PLAN KEY



Garden Areas

- | | |
|------------------------------------|--|
| 1. Hillside Garden | 14. Ella Quimby Water Conservation Terrace |
| 2. Bamboo Grove | 15. Rhododendron Garden |
| 3. Pond at Holly House | 16. Art Rudolph Sun and Shade Garden |
| 4. Holly Collection | 17. Rain Garden |
| 5. Shade Tree Collection | 18. Pollinator Garden |
| 6. Alice Harding Lilac Walk | 19. Edw J. and Ida M. Orken Memorial Garden |
| 7. Shrub Garden | 20. Winterberry Holly Collection |
| 8. The Floral Garden | 21. Ornamental Tree Collection |
| 9. Succulent Garden | 22. NJ Agriculture Extension Station Research Fields** |
| 10. Donald B. Lacey Display Garden | 23. Helyar Woods |
| 11. All-American Selections Garden | |
| 12. Native Trees Area | |
| 13. Roy H. DeBoer Evergreen Garden | |

Structures & Facilities

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1. Reynolds House (Main Office)* | 7. Horticultural and Student Farm Greenhouses* |
| 2. Farmers Market Pavilion | 8. Field House** |
| 3. Holly House* | 9. Student Farm (Upper Field)* |
| 4. Maintenance Buildings** | 10. Potting Shed* |
| 5. Ornamental Horticulture Field Lab and Greenhouse** | 11. Meteorology Station** |
| 6. Student Farm (Lower Fields)* | 12. Thompson House* |
| | 13. Alumni Pavilion* |
| | 14. Log Cabin* |

P Parking

1. Farmers market parking
2. Holly House parking
3. Log Cabin parking

*program access only

** no public access

Figure 6. Rutgers Gardens Site Plan - Core Area

The landscape of Rutgers Gardens has four broad typologies: the curated display garden areas, the Student Farm, university agricultural and horticultural research spaces, and the natural areas of Helyar Woods and its adjacent meadow and wetland ecosystems. Notable garden areas and plant collections include the Art Rudolph Sun and Shade Garden, Bamboo Grove, Donald B. Lacey Display Garden, Holly Collection, Edwin J. and Ida M. Otken Memorial Garden, Ornamental Tree Collection, Pollinator Garden, Rain Garden, Rhododendron Garden, Roy H. DeBoer Evergreen Garden, Shade Tree Collection, and Shrub Garden, the larger area of which includes the Alice Harding Lilac Walk. In the spring of 2024, a grant supported the installation of a new native trees collection, the design of which was prepared by a graduate student in the Department of Landscape Architecture. Structures at Rutgers Gardens include the Reynolds House Main Office Building, the farmers market pavilion, Holly House, the Welschman Dwelling (Field House), Thompson House, the Log Cabin and associated Alumni Pavilion, the Potting Shed (former gift shop), several greenhouses, and several research buildings. Many of the historical garden areas and plant collections were established at different points in time, and often as a function of specific research and demonstration needs, that pre-dated a vision of operating as a public garden; this has resulted in many garden areas and collections seemingly disjointed from each other.

The current layout of Rutgers Gardens separates public access to display gardens and natural areas from research areas and the Student Farm, both of which limit public access using deer fencing that also serves to exclude larger wildlife from the farm/research areas. Minimal on-site information is provided about past research and display gardens or their importance, though physical living remnants of past research projects remain. Three kiosks have garden maps and some general information, though little interpretive signage exists with information about individual garden areas and plants found throughout the Gardens. Aside from roadways and areas adjacent to buildings, there are no paved (or otherwise accessible) paths throughout. Visitor amenities and facilities are also limited. A composting restroom was built to provide public



restrooms to visitors but is currently closed to the general public due to recurring acts of vandalism when the facility had been open.

Ownership of the parcels that comprise Rutgers Gardens is mixed; Rutgers University owns the core display garden area, while portions of Helyar Woods are owned by the Trustees of Rutgers University, the City of New Brunswick, and PSE&G, as shown in Figure 7. (Land owned by the State is controlled by Rutgers for educational purposes.)

Portions of the site along the Route 1 corridor are also part of a utility easement, also as shown in the accompanying map in Figure 7. This easement greatly limits current and future uses of the previous overflow parking area in the northwest corner of the display gardens, as no structures are to be constructed within the easement and a buffer for parking and other activities should be maintained around the gas utility to minimize risk.

Key Takeaways

The role and landscape of Rutgers Gardens has been shaped over time by both research and public interests. This has resulted in a site with an interesting history and educational ties, but also in a site that can feel physically disjointed with access, navigational, and use challenges. As a part of SEBS, Rutgers Gardens has the potential to further capitalize on its ties to Rutgers University. Moving from present day into the future, a defined vision will help Rutgers Gardens address contemporary needs and be an important resource for education and engagement.

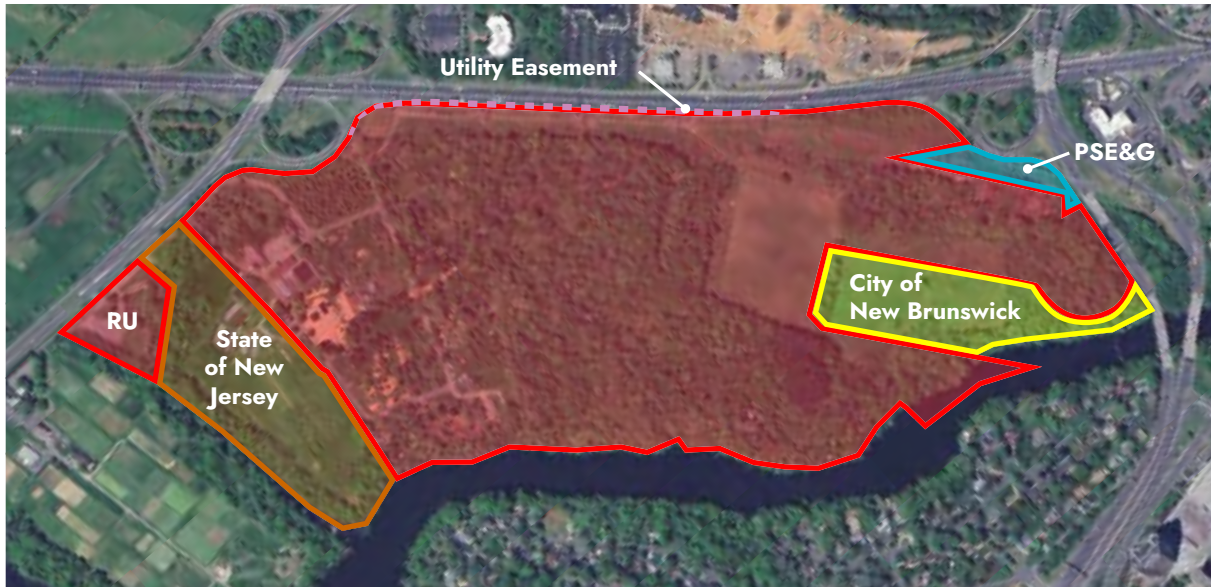


Figure 7. Current Ownership of Rutgers Gardens Parcels with Utility Easement



CHAPTER 2

RESEARCH AND EXISTING CONDITIONS ANALYSIS



A critical part of developing the Vision Plan included gathering input and information from a variety of sources and stakeholders to best inform the future direction for Rutgers Gardens. Having multiple types of information streams — from existing documents to online surveys, live interviews, and on-site assessments — provided a range of insights and analyses to draw from and prevents having just one source or data input drive the vision planning process.



RELEVANT DOCUMENT AND PROJECT REVIEW

A considerable document review was undertaken throughout the Vision Plan process. Reviewed documents and projects spanned a range of subjects that related to Rutgers Gardens and Rutgers University, such as previously developed plans and studies, historical research, theses, and formal agreements.

Reviewed materials included:

- » Rutgers-New Brunswick Academic Master Plan
- » Rutgers 2030 (Rutgers University Physical Master Plan)
- » Previous Rutgers Gardens Master Plans (2008 and 2014) and related studies
- » Holly House - Garden Club of New Jersey lease documents
- » College Farm Historic District Official Documents (2002)
- » Rutgers Gardens Forest Stewardship Plan (2014)
- » Graduate student theses
 - Hybrid Territory: The Shaping of Public Display at Rutgers Gardens by David Hanrahan (2013)
 - Revealing Edges: Connecting Rutgers Gardens to Cook Campus at a Pedestrian Scale by Jim Taranto (2013)



- » Other student and Rutgers departmental work
 - Mapping of Rutgers Gardens display garden planting by Daniel Ilkow (2022)
 - AIR Collaborative Access Rutgers Gardens and March2RU Gardens Projects (2021) and associated information⁶
 - Native American Acknowledgement Garden Design Concepts (2022)

The reviewed materials provided more in-depth context for the history of Rutgers Gardens and its current conditions. Importantly, they also provided context for larger Rutgers University planning efforts, which is key for understanding how the future vision for Rutgers Gardens can best align with larger-scale university efforts moving forward. A common thread among most documents was the desire for Rutgers Gardens to enhance its existing connections to become a more visible part of Rutgers University, with some documents having a greater emphasis on physical connections, while others had a stronger emphasis on academic, programmatic, and cultural connections. Several documents described information about the Gardens that is not currently presented physically on site, such as its history and past research. Previous master plan efforts presented strong design visions, though they generally offered limited steps for implementation and sustainability. Several other documents offered ideas for potential future elements at the Gardens, as well as strategies for ongoing management. Overall, the document review showcased the sense of opportunity for more to be shown and done at Rutgers Gardens.

⁶ - These full projects include surveys, student research on pedestrian/bicycle path placements connecting G.H. Cook campus and Bristol Meyer Squibb Headquarters to Rutgers Gardens, Environmental Engineering student capstone project of a pedestrian bridge over Ryders Lane (2022), NJ Transit bus research, and information on local stakeholders. Information provided in these documents should be taken into consideration during the development of a master site plan for Rutgers Gardens.

BENCHMARKING RESEARCH

A benchmarking study was conducted as part of information gathering for the Vision Plan. Rutgers University is New Jersey's land-grant university and a member of the Big Ten Conference (B1G); thus, other B1G and land-grant university gardens and arboreta were included. Additional selected institutions with notable university gardens or arboreta were also included. Gathered information consisted of basic metrics on the university and its garden or arboretum facility (such as number of students, size of facility, year established, etc.), mission statements, location, offerings, and overall operations.

The benchmarked facilities come in a wide range of sizes, with the smallest being an acre and the largest being over 5,000 acres. The average size is about 1,160 acres when including facilities that span the entire campus, with the average decreasing to 260 acres when not including full campus arboreta. Generally, all facilities are either within or accessible from campus and do not have an admission fee. (Visiting some may require a campus parking fee, however.) The Minnesota Landscape Arboretum has a few notable exceptions to the rest of the benchmarks. It is located about 30 miles southwest of the University of Minnesota Twin Cities campus and charges an admission fee. It is most comparable to a private botanical garden facility than the others benchmarked.

Of the benchmarks, roughly two-thirds had a published mission statement, while one-third did not. (A list of published mission statements is included in the Appendices.) All offer educational opportunities, and most, though not all, offer research opportunities. Several feature trial or demonstration gardens, though only a few specifically note children's gardens. A limited number have private site rentals available. Few have membership programs, but most have memorial or commemorative tree/bench/etc. programs. Those with membership programs offer reciprocal visits to other American Horticulture Society gardens, as does Rutgers Gardens' current membership. All accept donations. Most, but not all, advertise volunteer opportunities with several listing open volunteer events on their websites.

List of Benchmarked Institutions

- » *W. J. Beal Botanical Garden; MSU Campus Arboretum; Clarence E. Lewis Landscape Arboretum; and MSU Horticulture Gardens (Michigan State)*
- » *Chadwick Arboretum and Learning Gardens (Ohio State)*
- » *The Arboretum at Penn State*
- » *The Purdue Arboretum*
- » *University of Illinois Arboretum*
- » *University of Maryland Arboretum and Botanical Garden*
- » *Minnesota Landscape Arboretum*
- » *UNL Botanical Garden and Arboretum (University of Nebraska)*
- » *University of Wisconsin—Madison Arboretum*
- » *Jesse H. and Beulah Chanley Cox Arboretum (Indiana University)*
- » *Hilltop Garden & Nature Center (Indiana University)*
- » *Matthaei Botanical Gardens and Nichols Arboretum (University of Michigan)*
- » *UI Campus Arboretum (University of Iowa)*
- » *UMass Permaculture Garden and Durfee Conservatory (University of Massachusetts Amherst)*
- » *Cornell Botanic Gardens and F.R. Newman Arboretum*
- » *UC Davis Arboretum and Public Garden (University of California, Davis)*

Maintenance teams vary: some have facility-specific staff, while others are maintained by university landscape service/grounds or similar departments. Several also advertise student internship opportunities.

Other notable elements from benchmarked institutions include:

- » WJ Beal Botanical Garden and the University of Wisconsin-Madison Arboretum both issue research permits / have online applications for research projects for approval, with WJ Beal also having a teaching permit
- » Purdue Arboretum Explorer: a searchable database and interactive online map for all trees at the campus arboretum
- » UI Campus Arboretum has a tree inventory app that can be used throughout campus
- » University of Maryland Arboretum and Botanical Garden partners with the university's Spanish Language Department to offer select events and courses in a bilingual format, and with students studying select foreign languages for service events
- » University of Wisconsin-Madison Arboretum allows skiing and snowshoeing on select designated trails
- » UC Davis Arboretum and Public Garden use several innovative methods in managing and operating their spaces, including co-designing and the "Learning by Leading™" internship program, and maintain a regularly updated thorough and informative website. Their GATEways Project master planning framework has led to much success, with creating linkages between student learning and community engagement being a significant focus of the project. They serve as an inspirational model recommended for more in-depth study.

Taken together, the examples from benchmarked institutions demonstrate an expansive potential for Rutgers Gardens to amplify current efforts toward student success, university integration, and community engagement.



SURVEY FINDINGS

Background

As part of the visioning process, an online survey was conducted to gather information on current and potential future uses and programs of Rutgers Gardens. Survey responses were collected from February 19, 2024 to March 24, 2024, resulting in 688 valid responses. Digital distribution of the survey link with an invitation to participate included messaging via Rutgers Gardens newsletters and social media, SEBS alumni newsletters, and faculty/staff listservs within the university; sharing of the survey to others was encouraged. Participation was therefore biased toward those who had some affiliation with Rutgers University and/or Rutgers Gardens but was not exclusive to only those formally affiliated with Rutgers. Youth and non-users (of Rutgers Gardens) were not intentionally targeted during this survey process, but could be considered for inclusion in future surveys.

Survey data were analyzed by total responses and by respondents' affiliations with Rutgers University: faculty/staff (both current and retired); students; alumni; other affiliation; and no affiliation.⁷

⁷ - Respondents were allowed to select multiple affiliations; therefore, when counts are shown by affiliation, they exceed the total number of survey responses.

Summary of Survey Responses

Survey respondents were largely affiliated with Rutgers University and/or Rutgers Gardens, which was expected given the survey distribution methods. Demographics of survey respondents were similar to the demographics of New Jersey at large but did not reflect the specific demographics of New Brunswick and Rutgers-New Brunswick communities. Both the City of New Brunswick and Rutgers-New Brunswick are more diverse, with higher percentages of non-White demographics than existed among survey respondents.

Popular current uses of Rutgers Gardens reported in the survey responses revolve around general enjoyment of public green space, educational opportunities, and the farmers market. Transportation was frequently noted as a significant challenge, especially for students, to visiting Rutgers Gardens. Other common visitation challenges included knowledge limitations (e.g., hours, logistics, wayfinding, etc.) and amenity limitations (e.g., paths, parking, restrooms), as shown in the accompanying figures.

Across the various affiliations, there was consistency in topics recognized as important to the future mission of Rutgers Gardens and for desired future programming:

- » Uses deemed most important to the future mission included: community/public access to green space; educational programs and workshops for adults; farmers markets; and university student education and internships. Rutgers Gardens serving as an event venue for private rentals or permitted uses was ranked last by all affiliations.
- » Most desired future programming included: garden-based educational classes and programs; additional or expanded farmers market-style events; expanded opportunities for Rutgers University students to use Rutgers Gardens; and performance and/or visual art-related events for the public.

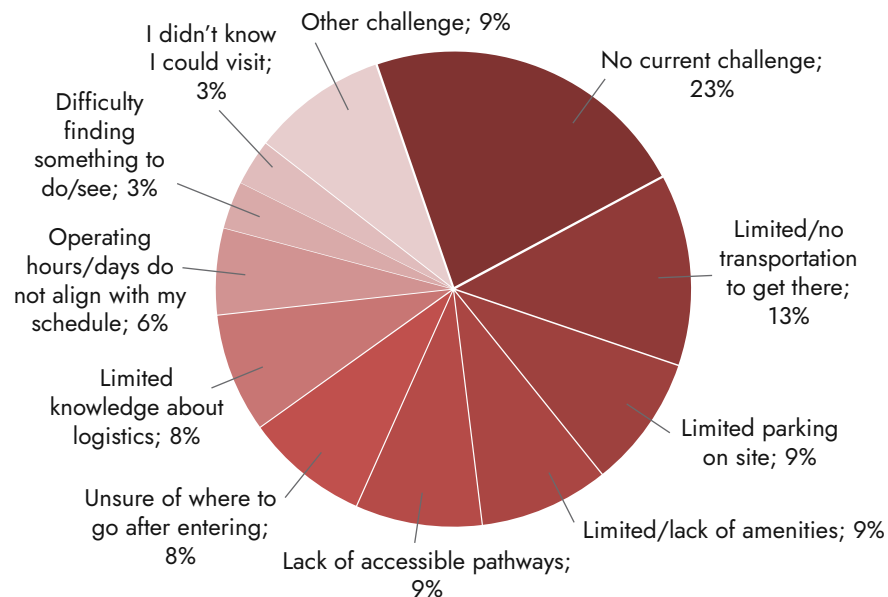
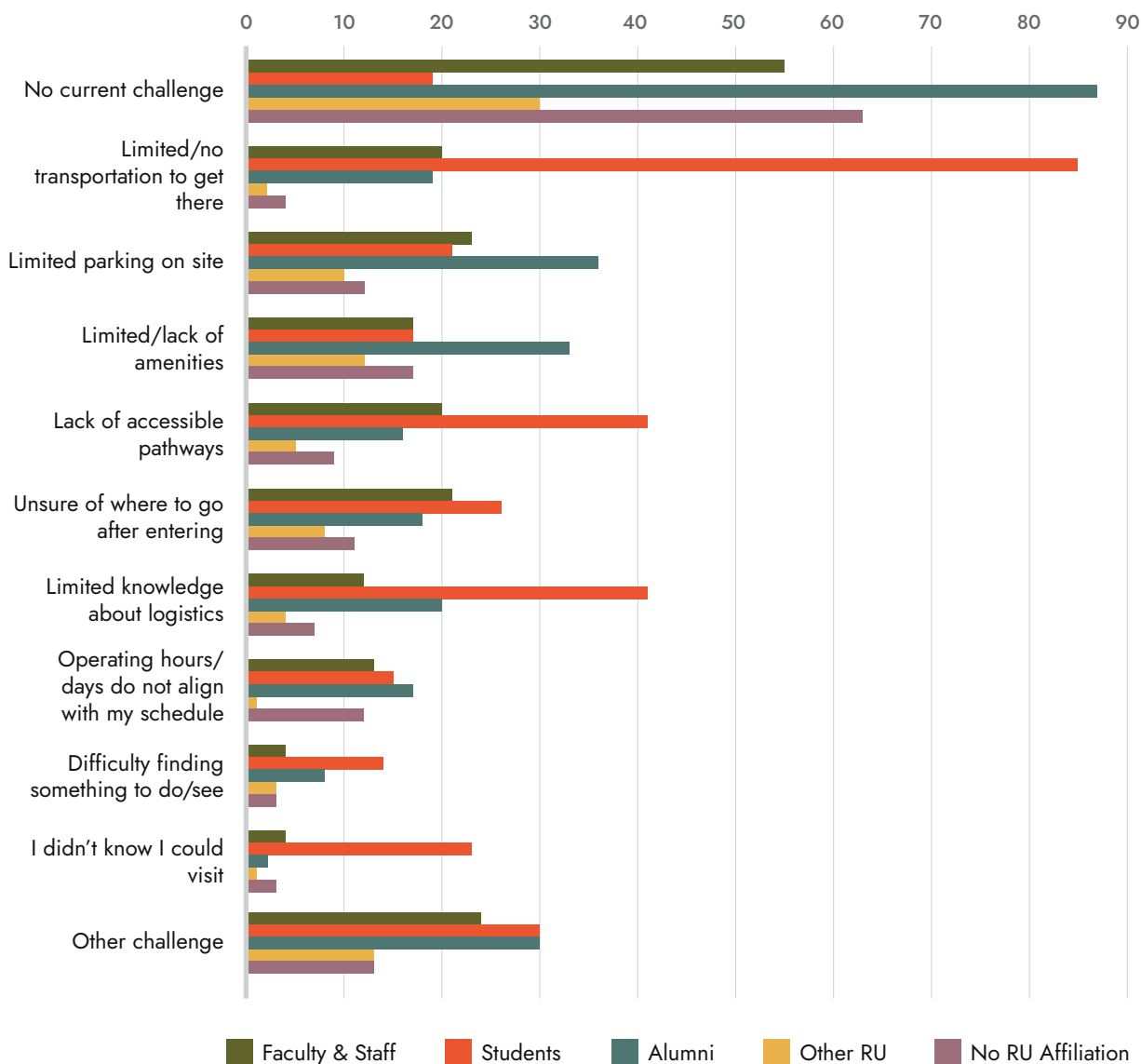


Figure 8. Survey-Identified Challenges with Visiting Rutgers Gardens – Overall Percentage



However, there was greater variation between the different affiliations for highest priorities for the future vision and most desired site improvements. Overall, the highest priorities for the future vision included: ecology/conservation; display and demonstration gardens; climate change resilience; and preservation of historic garden collections and conducting horticultural research (tie). While ecology/conservation and climate change resilience remained top choices for students, students placed a higher priority on diversity, equity, and inclusion and food security than other groups, and a lower priority on preservation and display and demonstration gardens. Students preferred a greater focus on improving access and the overall ecological health of Rutgers Gardens, with less desire for specific display garden expansions and new demonstration plantings. Faculty similarly wanted to see access and ecological improvements, but also strongly desired more signage and plant labels, as well as expansion of display gardens. Expansion of display gardens and more signage and labels were most desired by alumni and those without any Rutgers affiliation, and were also highly desired overall.

Figure 9. Survey-Identified Challenges with Visiting Rutgers Gardens – Count by Affiliation

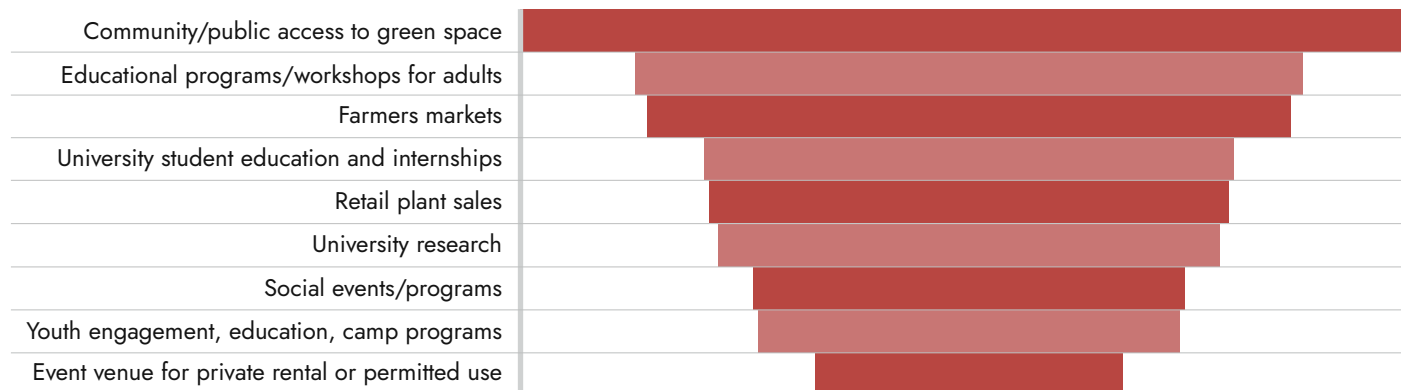


Figure 10. Overall Ranked Importance of Uses to Future Vision from Survey

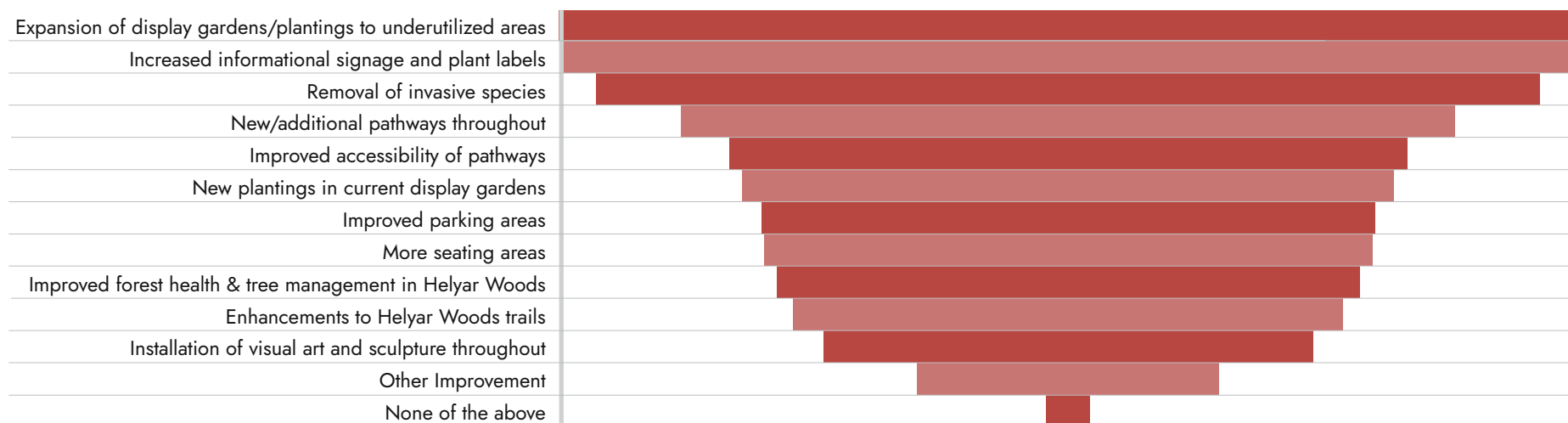


Figure 11. Overall Most Desired Future Site Improvements from Survey

Similar themes emerged from the survey's optional open-ended response for additional input, including: improving transportation and accessibility; providing education; expanding programming; recommending new amenities; incorporating sustainability, native plants, and biodiversity; addressing challenges with maintenance and invasive species management; and Rutgers Gardens being a place of respite and enjoyment.

Key Takeaways of Survey Results

Overall, survey respondents placed a high value on and expressed strong desire for current and future use of Rutgers Gardens for enjoyment and education, and ecology and display/demonstration garden-related topics. Strong interest was shown for expanding the farmers market in different ways, and for improving access and elements of the Gardens to address current challenges with visiting Rutgers Gardens. While more events and programs were broadly of interest, Rutgers Gardens as a private event venue was ranked of lowest importance to its future mission. More than a third of survey respondents provided an optional open-ended response, showcasing the passion many stakeholders have for Rutgers Gardens.



INTERVIEW FINDINGS

Interview Background

An intensive interview process was conducted as part of the data gathering process for the Vision Plan. Interviews were conducted between February and December of 2024 and included both individual and group interviews. In total, 71 people were interviewed over the course of 37 interview sessions. A wide range of stakeholders were represented, including:

- » Rutgers Gardens staff
- » Rutgers Gardens student interns
- » Rutgers Gardens members
- » Rutgers Gardens volunteers
- » Rutgers Gardens donors
- » Rutgers Gardens Advisory Board
- » Rutgers University current and retired faculty
- » Rutgers University staff (including NJAES, Master Gardeners, and OCPE staff⁸)
- » Rutgers University alumni
- » Horticulture industry representatives

Summary of Interview Responses

Across all interviews, enthusiasm and passion for the future of Rutgers Gardens was readily apparent. A plethora of opportunities were envisioned, including improved and enhanced displays, entry, and amenities throughout the Gardens. There was a consistent desire for Rutgers Gardens to have greater recognition as a university and public asset. However, several challenges were noted as potential roadblocks to future success.

OPPORTUNITIES:

Rutgers Gardens is recognized as a well-loved green space within the surrounding urban area. There was wide interest in expanding both internal and external (to Rutgers) connections and partnerships. Both physical and programmatic ties to RU-NB were mentioned in many interviews. Interviewed faculty often commented on ways they would like to expand their use of Rutgers Gardens for classes and/or research, or noted ideas for how other departments could integrate their curriculum with Rutgers Gardens. Similarly, staff are dedicated and passionate, and would like to be able to do more to help Rutgers Gardens thrive, including further supporting students and the public in engagement and experiential learning at the Gardens.

Research was described as an important component to the historic use of Rutgers Gardens; both opportunities for future research integrated with Rutgers Gardens operations and highlighting past and existing research on site were recommended. Opportunities for research to tie into student education and community demonstrations and showcases were specifically mentioned.

Some stakeholders interviewed also expressed a strong interest in how Rutgers Gardens can better serve not just the Rutgers community, but the local public community as well. Much discussion centered around the

8 - NJAES — New Jersey Agriculture Experiment Station; OCPE — Office of Continuing Professional Education

importance of, and ways to provide, more engagement opportunities for all types of users, with a range of ideas for future programs, partnerships, and physical enhancements to Rutgers Gardens mentioned.

CHALLENGES:

Lack of safe non-car access was mentioned as a major challenge in nearly all interviews. Specifically, faculty mentioned difficulty pursuing educational opportunities at Rutgers Gardens for their students because students without cars cannot be expected to regularly attend classes or programs at Rutgers Gardens. Student interns acknowledged the need for a car to safely access the Gardens prevents a wider range of students from interning or volunteering. A few faculty also noted their own limited time and/or resource capacities, or not having considered the option, as limiting factors to using Rutgers Gardens. Rutgers staff similarly have interest in doing more programming and education at Rutgers Gardens but also noted capacity and resource limitations.

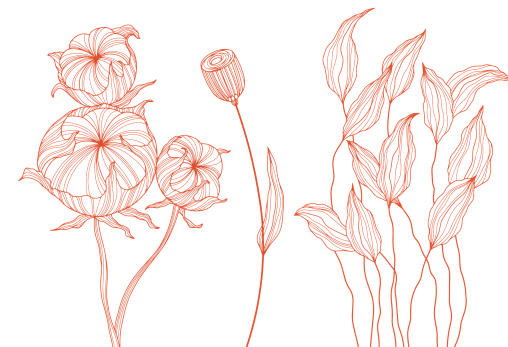
Capacity limitations with respect to site maintenance and programming were identified. Specifically, dedicating sufficient time to provide the detailed attention needed for plant and landscape care while also balancing program and event needs is challenging. Additionally, aging equipment and limited personnel were recognized as hindrances to effective site management. Staff also expressed general concerns that the current needs of site maintenance and programming efforts exceed the capacity of existing staff positions.

The importance of communication was also emphasized. This was most noted for internal staff, volunteers, members, and donors. Simple, strategic, and positive communication of various fundraising options and their expected impact will help cultivate relationships with potential donors. Volunteers and members wished to feel more engaged and experience a stronger sense of community, with more frequent and transparent communication desired. Limited programs and gathering

spaces were noted as restricting factors to creating engagement, as well as limiting the opportunities to further connect the non-Rutgers community to Rutgers Gardens and by extension RU-NB. Interviews with some volunteers and members revealed several misconceptions around the Gardens' history and relationship to Rutgers University, demonstrating opportunity for clarification.

Key Takeaways

Interviews offered an important opportunity for stakeholders to provide detailed, in-depth feedback specific to their connection with Rutgers Gardens. Interview participants confirmed the dedication to, and care for, Rutgers Gardens amongst diverse stakeholder groups. The challenges and opportunities presented provide clarity around certain site, operational, and programming realities while also helping to guide considerations for short and long term strategies for Rutgers Gardens moving forward.



ON-SITE ASSESSMENT

ETM conducted multiple site visits with staff and working group member representatives as part of the data gathering and analysis. Visits were conducted at different times of the year and included a variety of locations on site. Notable observations are listed below and summarized on the accompanying map at the end of this section.

Entry & Access

- » Though prime road frontage exists, the current entry has low appeal, unclear navigation, and minimal wayfinding or interpretive information. Ample opportunity exists to consider a welcoming, enhanced “gateway” to Rutgers Gardens (and, as such, Rutgers University) in future planning.
- » The manual entry gate is operational but requires high-intensity management to open and close the Gardens according to operating hours and to accommodate exceptions to the public hours.
- » Security when the site is closed is challenged by lack of fencing around the Gardens, as well as needing to leave the gate partially open at certain times outside of typical operating hours for researchers and classes at the Holly House. Additionally, the placement of the current gate is within the main Gardens site and does not gate all garden areas.
- » There are other, non-monitored ways to enter Rutgers Gardens from directions other than the main entry, which is an issue for both security and access.
- » There are limited paved or otherwise clear, defined, and accessible paths aside from roadways throughout the Gardens, creating both accessibility challenges and the potential for vehicular and pedestrian conflicts, with additional negative impacts on navigation.

Parking

- » There is limited paved or otherwise permanent, stable parking on site; non-paved overflow areas are not well-defined, subject to variable weather conditions (e.g., wet, muddy, slippery), contain hazards (e.g., branches could drop on vehicles), and in some areas result in negative impacts on the site itself (e.g., damaged grass, long-term negative impacts on tree roots).
- » Parking capacity is further challenged by distances that must be maintained around utility rights of way, making on-site parking capacity for large events very limited.
- » One of two paved lots, the Holly House lot is often at capacity for classes and events held there by other university departments, causing general Rutgers Gardens visitors (including students) to seek parking elsewhere.
- » As parking is located on the edges of the Gardens, accessible parking is located a distance away from many key garden areas.
- » There is no formal bus parking, and though buses can traverse the Log Cabin Road loop, larger buses face challenges with vegetation near the roadways. Buses can turn around or park in the gravel lot near the main office to access Rutgers Gardens though the distance of this lot from the main garden areas presents a challenge for visitors with limited mobility, unless the buses first allow passengers to disembark within the Gardens.

Garden Areas

- » There is an overall sense of green space and abundant plant material throughout much of the grounds.
- » Grounds of the display gardens are generally clear of litter and trash, though visitor trash receptacles and materials blowing in

from offsite via Ryders Lane and Route 1 require frequent clean-up.

- » While certain display garden areas are well maintained, others appear overgrown, undermaintained, and challenged by invasive species and diseases.
- » Garden spaces lack clear physical or thematic connectivity.
- » Several areas present opportunities for high-impact enhancements to be generated from low-intensity efforts. Examples of such areas include the Log Cabin gardens, shade tree area, and Log Cabin Road “loop” where minimal inputs to boost appearance and function can yield significant, visible improvements with relatively few resources compared to other areas and projects.
- » Many areas have mature plants that are aging out or affected by diseases. This represents a potential loss of some iconic, historically significant, and/or well-loved elements, but also an opportunity to re-think the future design and use of these areas.
- » Trespassing after hours and theft of garden materials are amplified when the bamboo shoots are sprouting in the spring; vandalism occurs periodically after hours.
- » With the current garden layout, back-of-house areas such as the maintenance shop and mulch yard are part of general circulation, leading to confusion and detracting from the visitor experience. Additionally, lack of fencing around back-of-house areas poses security and theft concerns.
- » The Student Farm is located on the edge of the Gardens, which limits its immediate visibility to visitors, but also helps enforce access restrictions associated with food production and safety.
- » Helyar Woods and the surrounding natural areas are challenged by deer browse, invasive species pressure, and environmental stressors.

Signage & Amenities

- » There is minimal signage and few plant labels within garden areas.
- » There is limited to no signage describing current and past research and food production practices; signage only indicates visitors may not enter research areas.
- » There are limited accessible pathways and resting spaces throughout the Gardens.
- » There are currently no permanent publicly accessible restrooms at the Gardens, following closure of the seasonal composting restrooms due to vandalism.
- » The gift shop building is located away from main parking areas, which is not ideal. It currently remains closed following a pause initiated during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Facilities

- » Few facilities are open to the public during daily use, and it can be unclear which facilities these are and where they are located. Several areas of the Gardens that are not open to the public can seem uninviting. Their relationship to, and impact on, the overall visitor experience should be considered.
- » Existing facilities are older and in various condition, with many needing repairs and/or updates. One example already underway is Thompson House, which is undergoing renovations during conversion from a residence to an office and meeting space.
- » Some greenhouses are heated, so can be used throughout the year for programming alongside plant production.



- » There are limited public utility connections throughout the Gardens, particularly in the core display areas, which can provide challenges for watering, programming, and providing amenities (i.e., restrooms).
- » The Log Cabin Alumni Pavilion is the only covered outdoor gathering space within the primary display garden areas, and there is limited indoor classroom space available.
- » Because of its location early in the entry sequence, the farmers market pavilion can be perceived as a separate space instead of connected to the rest of Rutgers Gardens. This pavilion is robust and a point of interest with the living roof, but is currently only used once per week on market days. Site conditions such as high winds, uneven shading, and limited rain protection (depending on the direction) present challenges with farmers market and other programming applications.
- » Because of its location at the immediate entry to Rutgers Gardens, the main office will receive occasional visitors asking for information about the gardens, even though it is not designed as a public welcome center. As renovations to Thompson House are completed, some offices will relocate there, providing an opportunity to re-think the current main office to have a public-facing component.



Figure 12. Current Conditions Assessment Map

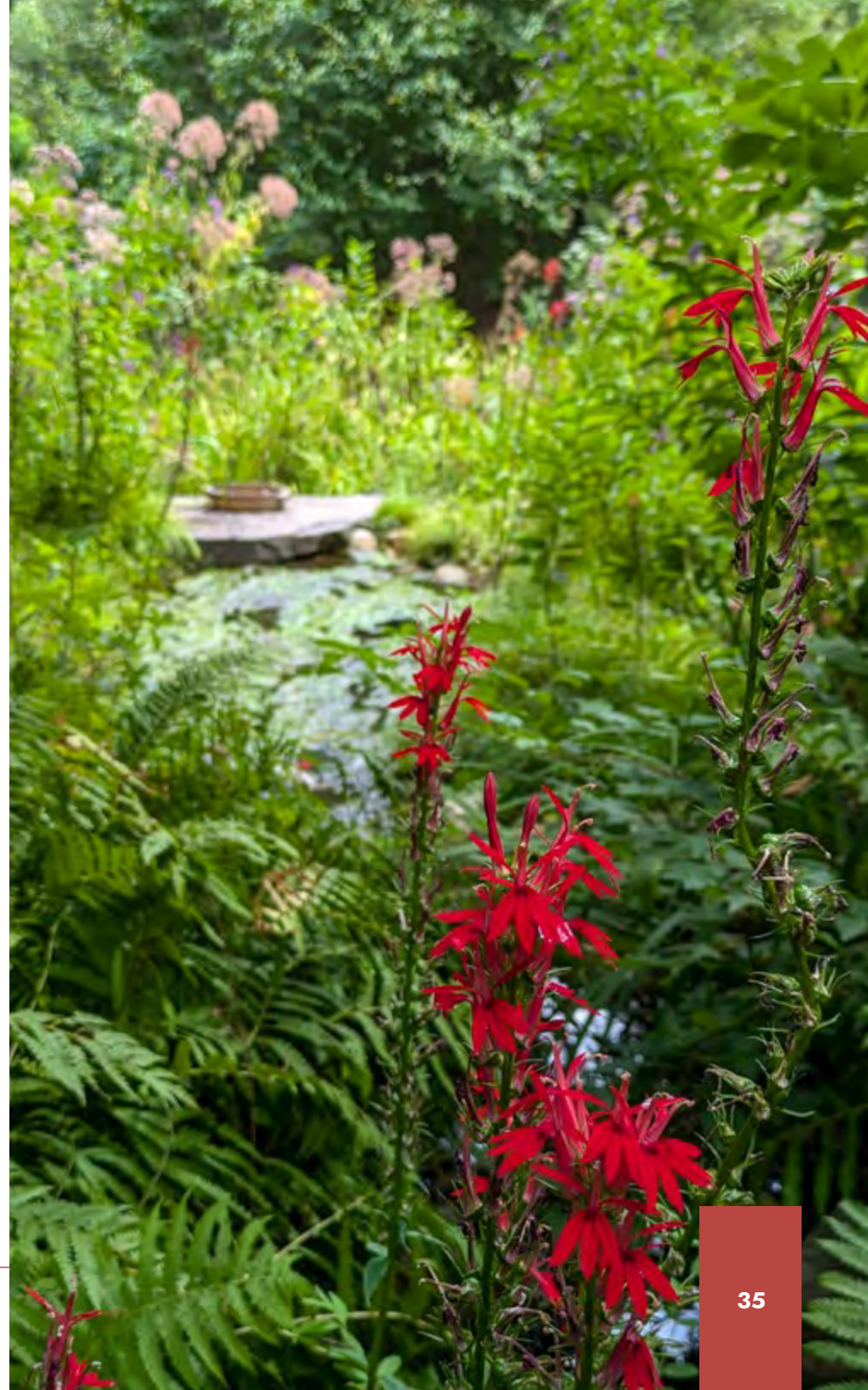
CHAPTER 3

SUMMARY OF CURRENT CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES



A Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) analysis is an organizational assessment tool that enhances the planning process through evaluation of multiple operational elements. Strengths and weaknesses typically examine the factors internal to the organization, such as human and physical resources, financial capabilities, and current activities. Opportunities and threats typically focus on external factors, including future trends, the economy, funding sources, and demographics. It can be used to reveal possibilities and limitations to change, identify barriers and opportunities, and to explore new solutions to challenges.

This SWOT Analysis for Rutgers Gardens serves both as a summary of the research and analysis done for the Vision Plan as well as a guide toward identifying future challenges and opportunities that should be addressed in the Vision Plan.



STRENGTHS



- » A safe green space open to the public, free of charge
- » Located centrally in New Jersey, close to major highways
- » Variety of landscapes, from display gardens to woodlands, with a biodiverse series of collections
- » Student Farm connects to agricultural history and contributes to hunger relief efforts through produce donations
- » Strong foundation of plant collections and programming
- » Passionate user groups
- » Dedicated staff with strong skill sets
- » Expanded SEBS support for student success and community engagement efforts
- » Student internships and opportunities for experiential learning
- » Rutgers students and faculty are interested in engaging, with many already doing so
- » Well-attended seasonal farmers market
- » 4-H Camp at Rutgers Gardens and associated youth engagement
- » Support for many different educational uses
- » Reflects important history of university plant research and state horticultural industry

WEAKNESSES

- » Physical site is separated from the rest of Rutgers University and G.H. Cook campus by major roadways
- » Getting to and from Rutgers Gardens is a challenge
 - Difficult to safely access without a car — there are currently no bus routes, or bike or pedestrian paths to the Gardens
 - Even with a car, turning into and out of Rutgers Gardens on Ryders Lane can be challenging depending on traffic and the time of day
- » The entry has low appeal, unclear navigation, and minimal information
- » Garden spaces within Rutgers Gardens feel disjointed, with minimal signage, few plant labels, and limited pathways to connect garden areas
- » Historical growth of Rutgers Gardens, including siting of research, was not done based on an over-arching vision
- » Cooks Market Pavilion, the main offices, and the Hillside Garden may be perceived as separate spaces from the rest of Rutgers Gardens due to physically disjointed location
- » Uses are limited by amount and condition of facilities and amenities
 - Facilities are older and many need repairs and/or updates; accessibility is limited
 - Few public-facing facilities are usable year-round
 - No functional and safe permanent public bathrooms
 - Limited indoor classroom space
 - Limited parking
- » Limited accessibility within Rutgers Gardens: lack of accessible paths and few resting spaces
 - Limited clear, paved (or otherwise accessible) paths within Rutgers Gardens create accessibility challenges, encourage potential conflicts between vehicles and pedestrians walking on roadways, and can cause confusion on where to go while visiting
- » Security challenges — the garden is not fully enclosed, so there are limited physical barriers to prevent entry when closed/after hours
- » Deer pressure negatively impacts plant viability and health outside of fenced areas
- » Operations are challenged by limited resources compared to needs, deferred maintenance, and conflicting goals (e.g., grounds work versus annual plant sale preparations) at the start of the growing season:
 - Backlog of deferred maintenance, especially in natural areas
 - Current staff are stretched thin as the level of personnel resources available (staff, student interns, volunteers, etc.) fall short relative to the size of the facilities and program goals
 - Both grounds work and preparation for the annual plant sale start at the beginning of the growing season, which can lead to grounds staff starting off the season behind on grounds work when they support plant sale preparation
- » Limited awareness and knowledge of Rutgers Gardens by the RU-NB community
- » Lack of connection and communication between various stakeholder groups, including volunteers and members
- » A strong desire for past legacies may limit future opportunities and Rutgers Gardens' ability to be forward-thinking

OPPORTUNITIES

- » Enhanced and expanded plant collections, including demonstration gardens, RU plant breeding programs, native plants, etc.
- » Targeted garden areas that showcase best management practices and ways to increase horticultural and agricultural resilience
- » Additional space allocations in buildings previously underutilized (e.g., Thompson House) to allow for expanded uses of current front office and overall entry sequence
- » Updated facilities and new amenities to improve accessibility and visitor experience
- » Options for providing non-car access to Rutgers Gardens, including but not limited to buses, physical connections (crosswalk, footbridge, etc.), local on-demand transportation services, and new public transportation connections
- » Rutgers Gardens serving as a welcoming gateway to RU-NB, offering an opportunity to introduce the public to the various environmental and educational learning and program opportunities
- » Self-guided and instructor-led, interactive education opportunities for visitors and learners throughout the Gardens
- » On site and online information includes additional information about Rutgers Gardens history, past and current research, and Student Farm production to enhance educational efforts
- » Structured ways for visitors to engage with the Student Farm and research areas not generally open to the public
- » Participation in student orientations, involvement fairs, etc. offered via the university for greater student awareness of Rutgers Gardens
- » Targeted open houses for different groups (RU faculty, industry, volunteers, etc.)
- » Expanded university and community collaboration and partnerships for a wide range of opportunities such as:
 - Broadened scope of classes, programs, research, and outreach
 - Enhanced educational offerings, such as lecture series, tours, etc.
 - Additional integrated arts (physical and programmatic)
 - Targeted space and activities for children in collaboration with partners (4-H, etc.)
 - Connection to campus stewardship efforts throughout RU, and particularly on G.H. Cook campus
- » Expanded connections with other state gardens and arboreta, such as through the Garden State Gardens Coalition and other collaborations
- » Expanded connections with local green and landscape industries through industry membership and partnerships (e.g., NJNLA, NJLCA)
- » Revamped volunteer program to better benefit volunteers and the Gardens
- » Restructured membership program and offerings that align with Rutgers University Foundation goals and resources
- » Improved grounds and garden maintenance efficiencies through new contracted services, targeted volunteer days, and partnerships
- » Support through local corporations
- » And many more!

THREATS

- » Impacts from increasing heat, drought, precipitation levels, and storm intensity
- » Impacts from pests and diseases and associated costs (treatment, removal, replacements)
- » Invasive species (plants and others)
- » Impacts to visitor experience and maintenance needs due to removals of aging plants and collections
- » Consistent turnover in student population via temporary internships and students' graduation
- » Changes with broader Rutgers policies and leadership may realign university priorities
- » Lack of, or limited follow-through on, long-term management plans
- » Public perceptions may misalign with actual vision, goals, and operations
- » Negative impacts and perceptions of overuse of the site relative to current or future capacity
- » Vandalism and theft damage existing and discouraging new art installations, benches, bridges, and other infrastructure, as well as plant collections
- » Perceptions of poor safety and limited security detract from the visitor experience and encourage more undesirable uses
- » Limited security resulting in vandalism, theft, etc. in part due to inconsistent or limited RUPD patrols, etc. especially during closed hours
- » Stakeholders limiting collaborations and partnerships
- » Larger economic trends impacting availability and amounts of different funding sources



CONCLUSIONS

There is a strong desire for Rutgers Garden to be successful, to be increasingly recognized as an integral part of the Rutgers experience, and to be a greater asset to the public. However, Rutgers Gardens is still perceived as a “hidden gem” by many and may be seen as an “exclusive” space by others due to the limited accessibility at present. It faces key challenges around access, site maintenance and improvements, and achieving a broad awareness of the Gardens and its offerings. Rutgers Gardens will also have to continue to navigate broader outside influences, including both recognized and unanticipated trends across environmental, economic, and other areas.

Rutgers Gardens’ current site conditions and programming, while limited in some ways, provide a strong base on which to build. There is a plethora of opportunities to expand partnerships, integrate more closely with RU-NB and the RU-NB Academic Master Plan, draw inspiration from other university botanical gardens and arboreta, and to be more engaging, educational, and an asset to all.

There exists a need to align the vision plan and associated goals with Rutgers Gardens’ capacity for success; growing and expanding the vision requires concurrent growth of resources to achieve broader goals. As we discuss in “Part II: What’s Next?,” this resource growth is feasible through creative approaches that leverage new and existing collaborations, partnerships, and funding opportunities that align with wider efforts across RU-NB.



A group of people, mostly women, are standing in a forest with vibrant autumn foliage. They are looking towards a body of water in the distance. The scene is framed by a white border. A black rectangular box with white text is overlaid in the center of the image.

PART 2:
What's Next?
Our Future Vision

CHAPTER 4

DEFINING VISION, MISSION, AND VALUES



Rutgers Gardens is generally well-loved by those who use and visit the space. The Gardens provides several educational opportunities, yet to achieve its full potential, needs a guiding vision and a comprehensive plan to maximize resource efficiencies, improve access, and increase overall engagement.

Though far-reaching impacts are desirable, Rutgers Gardens cannot be everything to everyone. With finite resources and grounding within a public land grant university, transforming Rutgers Gardens into a destination botanical garden (e.g., Longwood Gardens) is not feasible, realistic, or appropriate. Nor is returning Rutgers Gardens to function solely as a research farm, given its ingrained public connection and teaching applications. A vision to engage different groups across multiple uses should be holistic and unified; importantly, the Gardens should meet current and future university and community needs.

To address current challenges and better capitalize on its full potential, it is key for Rutgers Gardens to define a new vision that charts a course forward toward a sustainable future.



THE VISION

Rutgers Gardens is envisioned to be a well-loved space for learning and enjoyment throughout all seasons of the year.

Rutgers Gardens serves a variety of stakeholders through many applications, balancing University goals with free public access, and supporting education, ecology, and research through the display gardens, farms with ecology, and natural areas. Opportunities to visit and learn are available and adapted to different seasons. Students participate in experiential and service learning across a variety of disciplines. A range of programming is provided through collaboration with partners, local community, and the University. Visitors of diverse backgrounds and ages have a positive and educational experience visiting the Gardens such that they want to return. Skilled staff are supported by an engaged network of volunteers, members, and an advisory council. The Gardens are recognized as a valuable green space and seen as a resource for both the local and regional communities, showcasing examples of conservation and stewardship. Rutgers Gardens is well recognized for its integration within Rutgers University, serving as an asset for the entire RU-NB community, including by expanded efforts in the core of G.H. Cook campus to reach those who do not yet — or cannot regularly — visit Rutgers Gardens' primary location. Through these stronger ties, the Gardens better leverages university resources with public and private support to facilitate and sustain an improved experience for the university and wider public communities. Rutgers Gardens serves as a key point of engagement between Rutgers University and the general public, including by helping to introduce community members to Rutgers and by facilitating students as a key component of community engagement initiatives.

REVISING THE MISSION STATEMENT

The most recent Rutgers Gardens mission was to “cultivate inquisitive minds, great plants, and inspired gardening through educational exploration and enjoyment.” The website also included the tagline “where the future of horticulture is grounded in our past.” The previous mission was “to promote and provide accurate information about the art of horticulture with an emphasis upon the relationship between plants, human health and nutrition in the designed, as well as in the natural landscape.”

Neither the mission statement nor tagline were dramatically “charged”, and they did not adequately capture the role Rutgers Gardens has in supporting student education and community engagement as described in the Rutgers-New Brunswick Academic Master Plan. Additionally, the statements can be limiting because of defined topical categories, when Rutgers Gardens has opportunities to offer education and engagement across a broader spectrum.

Revising the current mission statement will facilitate framing new goals and an overall vision for Rutgers Gardens that better reflect supporting students (and others) at Rutgers University, emphasizing the connection to the University, and being a resource to all as a public garden.

This Vision Plan defines the revised mission of Rutgers Gardens as:

“growing from its research roots to thrive as a university botanical garden for all, providing nature-based experiences to educate, engage, and delight.”

Together with the vision statement, the mission can serve to guide future growth and planning for Rutgers Gardens.

KEY VALUES

To support the new vision and mission, it is also important to define key values for Rutgers Gardens. These key values have been defined for three different aspects of Rutgers Garden's operations: educational and visitor experience; internal practice and partnership; and overall organization.

To incorporate into our educational and visitor experience:

- Ecology & Biodiversity
- Horticulture & Agriculture
- Health & Wellness
- Arts & Sciences

And to embody in practice and partnership:

- Stewardship
- Accessibility
- Enjoyment
- Collaboration

So that Rutgers Gardens can be:

- Visible
- Activated
- Meaningful
- Connected



MISSION: Growing from our research roots to thrive as a university botanical garden for all, providing nature-based experiences to educate, engage, and delight

Embracing:
Ecology & Biodiversity
Horticulture & Agriculture
Health & Wellness
Arts & Sciences

To become:
Visible
Activated
Meaningful
Connected

Through:
Stewardship • Accessibility
Enjoyment • Collaboration

CHAPTER 5

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR A NEW VISION



Establishing a new vision is important, as is developing a path to implement that vision. This section presents a variety of recommendations aimed to advance Rutgers Gardens from its current condition toward its future vision. Recommendations focus around four broad themes that reinforce the Vision Plan values and aim to address key challenges and opportunities at Rutgers Gardens. These themes are:



Enhancing Educational Experience & Engagement



Improving Access & Navigation



Increasing Awareness & Communications



Strengthening Capacity & Operations

Within each theme are several Vision Plan goals, along with actions recommended for the short, medium, and long terms to drive actions moving forward over the next one to five years. Short-term recommendations generally focus on achievable outcomes that can be attained with existing resources, that strengthen and highlight Rutgers Gardens' connections to RU-NB, and that foster new and existing partnerships. Mid- and long-term recommendations focus on more intensive projects and expanding outreach offerings that may require additional or specifically designated resources and support.

Note that recommendations are not necessarily listed in priority order.



SUMMARY OF THEMES, GOALS, AND ACTIONS



Enhancing Educational Experience & Engagement

- » Revitalize garden areas for improved education and engagement
- » Expand educational potential through partnerships and programs
- » Facilitate engagement through program offerings, including programs by others
- » Integrate research that aligns with garden experience
- » Improve visitor amenities to enhance experience



Increasing Awareness & Communications

- » Increase student and faculty awareness of utilizing the Gardens
- » Regularly communicate with stakeholders
- » Expand types and methods of marketing
- » Improve branding and image
- » Increase promotional signage and presence
- » Improve engagement of website and social media
- » Showcase historical contributions and importance



Improving Access & Navigation

- » Improve non-automobile access to Rutgers Gardens
- » Ensure safe and accessible parking and vehicular access
- » Improve circulation and increase navigability around Rutgers Gardens
- » Enhance accessibility within the Gardens
- » Create a clearer and more welcoming entry



Strengthening Capacity & Operations

- » Expand staff and resource capacity
- » Continue enhancing membership and volunteer programs
- » Improve analysis and delivery of services
- » Add to operational partnerships
- » Clarify Advisory Board role and structure
- » Expand revenue and fundraising opportunities
- » Capitalize on Vision Plan momentum



RECOMMENDED PRIORITY INITIATIVES

Of the recommended goals and actions listed in the following section, the following are the highest priority items:

Short term:

- » Assess each organizational program area to determine feasibility of scope and labor needs in support of initial vision/mission alignment with current practices.
- » Revitalize highly used and visible garden areas through invasive species removal, installing new plants, and adding new and improving existing plant labels
- » Improve non-automobile access through piloting a student-focused bus to Rutgers Gardens from RU-NB campuses
- » Develop a circulation plan to guide design and implementation of future circulation systems and access patterns
- » Improve navigability and education opportunities through updated and improved maps
- » Install larger entry signs with more information to indicate open hours and welcome the public while also branding the space as university-affiliated
- » Create a research application and approval process to help ensure future research can align with Rutgers Garden vision
- » Increase student and faculty awareness and engagement through promotion of the Rutgers Gardens Campus Stewardship initiative in garden spaces throughout Cook campus
- » Complete website updates to reflect current and new operations, programs, and vision
- » Engage University collaborators who can provide teaching, research, and professional guidance and expertise in support of Rutgers Gardens staff
- » Improve maintenance capacity at Rutgers Gardens through strategic changes to how and by whom work is performed
- » Increase data collection and tracking of planting, sales, and various ongoing operations
- » Restructure and rename the Advisory Board to better reflect its charge and increase the group's involvement with fundraising, programming, and outreach in support the Gardens
- » Adjust the model of the Spring Plant Sale to reduce the staff and logistical challenges associated with the event

Medium term:

- » Connect to larger University initiatives for funding and support
- » Identify and work with internal University partners to provide expanded programming, with a particular focus on SEBS/NJAES
- » Improve internal accessibility through a primary accessible pedestrian path
- » Develop a plan to address safer and lower-maintenance opening and closing procedures
- » Update the Log Cabin and Log Cabin Alumni Pavilion to better serve events and programs
- » Work to increase use of Rutgers Gardens for education and training by various Rutgers departments beyond SEBS
- » Discuss corporate funding opportunities with RUF and Office of Research colleagues
- » Expand and enhance the Gardens student internship program through creation of a forest stewardship intern track

- » Develop a physical master plan for Rutgers Gardens based on the Vision Plan to guide future site development

Long term:

- » Provide signage and online information in languages beyond English
- » Conduct a community-focused assessment to identify potential partners and collaborators
- » Develop and offer programming designed to engage groups that currently do not highly utilize Rutgers Gardens
- » Explore creation of different donation level tiers that are recognized on the Garden's website
- » Develop updated maintenance and management plans for the various garden areas, including the Student Farm and Helyar Woods





DETAILED GOALS AND ACTION ITEMS

The tables throughout the rest of this chapter reflect the key goals and action items recommended in the Vision Plan. By categorizing each item as short, medium, or long term, and assigning a priority level and estimated funding needs, the tables will help guide operationalization of the Vision Plan by Rutgers Gardens and SEBS. Key potential partnerships beyond SEBS are also identified to support the next steps in implementation of the Vision Plan.

Table acronyms:

DOT, DOTs – Department of Transportation, Departments of Transportation

EJB – Edward J. Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy

FCHS – Family and Community Health Sciences

IP&O – Rutgers University Institutional Planning & Operations; departments notable for the Vision Plan include Parking Services; Transportation Services; Planning, Development, and Design; University Facilities; and University Public Safety

MGSA – Mason Gross School of the Arts

NJAES – New Jersey Agricultural Experiment Station

NJLCA – New Jersey Landscape Contractors Association

NJNLA – New Jersey Nursery and Landscape Association

OCPE – Office of Continuing Professional Education

RADR – Rutgers Access and Disability Resources

RCE – Rutgers Cooperative Extension

RCFM – Rutgers Community Farmers Market

RComm, UCM – Rutgers University Communications and Marketing

RUF – Rutgers University Foundation

RU-NB – Rutgers–New Brunswick; the New Brunswick campus of Rutgers University

SAS – School of Arts and Sciences

SEBS – School of Environmental and Biological Sciences



VISION THEME 1: ENHANCING EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE & ENGAGEMENT



Overall Goals:

1. Revitalize garden areas for improved education and engagement
2. Expand educational potential through partnerships and programs
3. Facilitate engagement through program offerings, including programs by others
4. Integrate research that aligns with garden experience
5. Improve visitor amenities to enhance experience



1.1 REVITALIZE GARDEN AREAS FOR IMPROVED EDUCATION & ENGAGEMENT

*Embodied Values:
Activated, Meaningful*

Goal: Enhance garden displays and visitor areas to increase potential for experiential learning, wellness, and enjoyment.

Action Item	Term	Priority Level	Relative Funding Need	Potential Partnerships
Remove invasive species, vines, and other undesired plants from garden areas that are highly used and highly visible	Short	High	\$\$	IP&O, external partners
Install new plants in select areas to improve ecological, aesthetic, and/or educational value, focusing on areas where new plantings can have the most impact and on highly visited areas	Short	High	\$\$	NJAES, IP&O, external partners (e.g., NJNLA, NJLCA)
Add new labels, or improve existing labels where appropriate, to plants in highly used and highly visible display garden areas	Short	High	\$ - \$\$	NJAES, external partners
Broaden Student Farm vegetable production to include plantings of cover crops, pollinator and beneficial insect-attracting plants, etc. to increase sustainability and educational potential	Short	High	\$	NJAES, external partners
Expand removal of invasive species, vines, etc. from other areas of Rutgers Gardens, working with partners, volunteers, and/or contractors	Medium	Medium	\$\$	NJAES, IP&O, external partners
Add labels to remaining display garden areas and key locations in Helyar Woods (such as for notable trees and at trail heads)	Medium	Medium	\$\$	Campus Green Space Network
Expand planting efforts to other garden areas and displays in conjunction with ongoing planning efforts (e.g., site master plan, forest management plan, etc.)	Long	Medium	\$\$	NJAES, IP&O, external partners
Create or update existing garden areas to serve as demonstration / showcase gardens that reflect ecological stewardship, sustainability, and conservation, as well as the arts, youth engagement, and cultural traditions	Long	Medium	\$\$\$	NJAES, IP&O, external partners

1.2 EXPAND EDUCATIONAL POTENTIAL

*Embodied Values:
Activated, Meaningful*

Goal: Capitalize on current and future partnerships and targeted physical improvements to greatly expand the educational potential of Rutgers Gardens across a variety of fields, with a particular focus on experiential and service learning for university students.

Action Item	Term	Priority Level	Relative Funding Need	Potential Partnerships
Expand experiential and service learning opportunities for SEBS and other university students at Rutgers Gardens	Short	High	\$	RU-NB
Strengthen the Student Farm's connection throughout Rutgers Gardens via collaborative volunteer opportunities, signage and promotion, farm-to-table events, tours, collaborative programming, etc.	Short	High	\$ - \$\$	NJAES, RCE
Expand student engagement with campus-based living laboratories, including urban agriculture and community garden sites connected to Rutgers Gardens	Short	High	\$	IP&O
Connect with SEBS departments for use of the Gardens in delivering their programming, including through partnerships on projects and operations	Short	High	\$	Various departments
Work with SEBS faculty to develop programs that utilize Rutgers Gardens as a conduit to support University undergraduate and graduate classes	Short	High	\$	Various departments
Increase education and training opportunities for community members and industry professionals offered in partnership with Rutgers Cooperative Extension, including the Office of Continuing Professional Education, Master Gardeners, and Environmental Stewards	Short	Medium	\$	NJAES, RCE
Add informational signage at Student Farm and research areas providing basic information on what is being done in those areas, rules for access, and historical connections to past research where relevant	Short	High	\$	External partners and supporters
Improve Rutgers Gardens infrastructure to offer expanded community educational programs, including some in a hybrid (in-person and online) model	Medium	Medium	\$\$	IP&O
Increase use of Rutgers Gardens for education and training by various Rutgers departments beyond SEBS	Medium	High	\$\$	Other RU-NB schools & colleges

1.2 EXPAND EDUCATIONAL POTENTIAL CONT.

Goal: Capitalize on current and future partnerships and targeted physical improvements to greatly expand the educational potential of Rutgers Gardens across a variety of fields, with a particular focus on experiential and service learning for university students.

Action Item	Term	Priority Level	Relative Funding Need	Potential Partnerships
Host select departmental lectures at Rutgers Gardens that can be opened to the public	Medium	Medium	\$	SAS, MGSA, etc.
Work with SEBS academic departments to explore creation of new major, minor, microcredentials, digital badges, and/or certificate programs that fully utilize Rutgers Gardens in part of their curricula, such as programs related to public gardens, groundskeeping, and land stewardship	Long	Medium	\$	Various departments
Engage with industry partners to explore how Rutgers Gardens can better support education for the agriculture and nursery industries	Long	Medium	\$	External partners



1.3 FACILITATE ENGAGEMENT THROUGH PROGRAM OFFERINGS

Goal: Having Rutgers Gardens facilitate the use of garden space by others for programming, while providing some core programs in-house, can expand the variety of programs offered and who they serve.

Action Item	Term	Priority Level	Relative Funding Need	Potential Partnerships
Develop events tied to seasons and specific plant collections, such as “holly-days”, seasonal farm produce features, etc.	Short	Medium	\$	NJAES
Develop health and wellness programs in collaboration with RU-NB initiatives such as ScarletWell	Short	Medium	\$\$	Rutgers University
Engage the New Jersey agricultural community with the Student Farm, including through the Transition to Organic Partnership Program and Rutgers Beginner Farmer Training Program.	Short	Medium	\$\$	NJAES, external partners
Identify and work with internal University partners to provide expanded programming, with a particular focus on SEBS/NJAES, including RCE’s departments of Agriculture and Natural Resources, FCHS, 4-H Youth Development, and Continuing Professional Education.	Medium	High	\$	NJAES, and more
Develop educational programs that can also serve as social and/or fundraising events, such as a lecture+dinner event, lecture+plant sale, etc.	Medium	Medium	\$\$	NJAES, external partners, etc.
Develop and offer programming designed to engage groups that currently do not highly utilize Rutgers Gardens (e.g., introduction to ecology programs, organized Helyar Woods hikes, programming offered in Spanish, etc.)	Long	High	\$\$	External partners (e.g., NJ Audubon, Native Plant Society)
Conduct a community-focused assessment to identify potential external partners and collaborators, including those who might offer programs at or in partnership with Rutgers Gardens (e.g., New Brunswick stART program)	Long	High	\$\$	Middlesex County and/or New Brunswick-based community organizations
Expand integration of art of various mediums (sculpture, performance, etc.), such as in partnership with Mason Gross School of Arts or local organizations	Long	Low	\$\$ - \$\$\$	MGSA, external partners

1.4 INTEGRATE RESEARCH THAT ALIGNS WITH GARDEN EXPERIENCE

Goal: Rutgers Gardens has an opportunity to embrace past, current, and potential future horticulture, agriculture, and ecology research in alignment with the desired visitor experience, as well as to embrace community-engaged, educational, and social science research opportunities.

Action Item	Term	Priority Level	Relative Funding Need	Potential Partnerships
Create a research application and approval process to help ensure future research can align with the vision and use of Rutgers Gardens and that proposed studies do not conflict with one another, define a time and location of research, and include plans for post-research use (where applicable)	Short	High	\$	RU-NB
Represent and highlight some of the NJAES breeding programs (dogwoods, hazelnuts, Ilex, food crops, etc.) through plantings, signage, and events at Rutgers Gardens	Short	Medium	\$	NJAES
Communicate, publish, and present current research underway by Rutgers Gardens staff (i.e., ginger crop trials, stakeholder preference surveys, etc.) and SEBS faculty pilot studies (i.e., study of tick populations in the Bamboo Forest, evaluation of bee nesting habitats)	Short	Medium	\$	Various departments
Incentivize student-based research at or featuring Rutgers Gardens, including from non-traditional fields such as the arts and humanities, through Experiential Learning opportunities	Short	Medium	\$	Many
Collaborate with NJAES, including RCE, to strengthen connections between Rutgers Gardens and the community, including by showcasing ongoing and potential research from outlying NJAES field stations at Rutgers Gardens	Medium	Medium	\$	NJAES
Collaborate with SEBS and other RU-NB faculty to co-develop research programs that advance the university's mission of scholarly research while also advancing Rutgers Gardens as a renowned university botanical garden	Long	Medium	\$ - \$\$	RU-NB

1.5 IMPROVE VISITOR AMENITIES

Goal: Enhance the overall visitor experience through improved and new amenities throughout the Gardens.

Action Item	Term	Priority Level	Relative Funding Need	Potential Partnerships
Improve restroom facilities to ensure they are clean, functional, and accessible year-round	Short	Medium	\$\$	IP&O
Explore re-opening, and potentially relocating, Gardens gift shop with select items (gifts, food, beverages, Student Farm produce) for sale during peak hours and consider potential synergies with the farmers market	Medium	Low	\$ - \$\$	RUF, RComm
Update the Log Cabin and Log Cabin Alumni Pavilion to better serve events and programs, including by making the facility accessible to ADA standards and installing year-round climate control	Medium	High	\$\$	IP&O, Rutgers & Cook Alumni Associations
Add amenities to support broader community use, such as elements for children and youth in collaboration with 4-H	Medium	Medium	\$\$ - \$\$\$	IP&O, external partners
Plan and construct additional gathering spaces to support expanded programming, such as a covered outdoor gathering/classroom space, gathering space for greenhouse functions, covered space for Student Farm functions, etc.	Long	Medium	\$\$\$\$	IP&O, Landscape Architecture Dept.
Plan and construct a covered outdoor gathering space for teaching and programs in an area other than the Log Cabin Alumni Pavilion to better facilitate concurrent offerings	Long	Low	\$\$\$\$	IP&O, Landscape Architecture Dept.
Repurpose current main office space into visitor/welcome center, potentially with gift shop/farm store	Long	Medium	\$\$\$	RComm



VISION THEME 2: IMPROVING ACCESS & NAVIGATION



Overall Goals:

1. Improve non-automobile access to Rutgers Gardens
2. Ensure safe and accessible parking and vehicular access
3. Improve circulation and increase navigability around Rutgers Gardens
4. Enhance accessibility within the Gardens
5. Create a clearer and more welcoming entry



2.1 IMPROVE NON-AUTOMOBILE ACCESS TO RUTGERS GARDENS

*Embodied Values:
Activated; Connected*

Goal: Explore a variety of ways to improve non-car access to address the challenges those without personal vehicles currently face with visiting Rutgers Gardens.

Action Item	Term	Priority Level	Relative Funding Need	Potential Partnerships
Pilot a student-focused bus to Rutgers Gardens from RU-NB campus(es) prioritizing student access on farmers market days, and expand as needed based on results of the pilot program	Short	High	\$	IP&O
Explore the feasibility of a HAWK (high intensity activated crosswalk) beacon and/or a traffic light crossing for Ryders Lane in collaboration with the Brandt Center	Medium	Medium	\$	IP&O, EJB, Middlesex County DOTs
Based on feedback from the pilot bus program, expand the program and/or feasibility of a limited-service Rutgers bus connection to Rutgers Gardens	Medium	Medium	\$ - \$\$	IP&O
Establish a formal pedestrian and bike connection from G.H. Cook campus to Brandt Behavioral Health Center to help facilitate future connections across Ryders Lane to Rutgers Gardens, the Office of Continuing Professional Education, and The Rutgers Turfgrass Science Center at Hort Farm 2.	Medium	Medium	\$\$ - \$\$\$	IP&O, local & county DOTs
Conduct traffic and planning studies in conjunction with the Brandt Behavioral Health Center for feasibility of improvements to improve access to Rutgers Gardens, such as a signalized intersection with striped crossing or a pedestrian bridge	Medium	Medium	\$	IP&O, EJB, local & county DOTs
Investigate potential for connections to non-university public transportation options, potentially in connection with Middlesex County Destination 2040 Strategic Plan	Long	Medium	\$	EJB, NJ TRANSIT, Middlesex County RIDE

2.2 ENSURE SAFE & ACCESSIBLE PARKING & VEHICULAR ACCESS

*Embodied Values:
Activated; Connected*

Goal: Improve how visitors with vehicles access and navigate around the site.

Action Item	Term	Priority Level	Relative Funding Need	Potential Partnerships
Implement strategies to calm vehicular traffic within the gardens, such as speed bumps and/or creating a one-way traffic flow along Log Cabin Road, to increase safety and improve the experience for those using Log Cabin Road.	Short	Medium	\$\$	IP&O
Identify areas for improved permanent parking on site, including clearly by defining parking limitations due to underground utilities in former overflow parking area	Short	Medium	\$	IP&O
Stabilize unpaved parking locations, transitioning from grass to gravel, pavers, or other permeable but stable material. – Spaces to stabilize for permanent parking include grass areas near the Log Cabin, Weather Station, and Thompson House.	Short	High	\$\$	IP&O
Add more designated ADA parking, with some parking closer to garden areas popular among visitors.	Short	High	\$\$	IP&O
Identify permanent or semi-permanent designated space for bus parking and turn-around within Rutgers Gardens	Short	Medium	\$	IP&O
Expand overflow parking in shade tree area, at the front parking area with a transportation into the Gardens, and/or in offsite areas with a shuttling service for large events	Long	Low	\$\$ - \$\$\$	IP&O
Explore options for additional parking and improved walkways into Rutgers Gardens as a part of the entry sequence redesign	Long	Low	\$	IP&O, local municipalities and DOTs
Improve accessibility between the farmers market pavilion, front office building, and front parking areas for those with limited mobility as part of the entry sequence redesign	Long	Medium	\$\$	IP&O

2.3 IMPROVE CIRCULATION & INCREASE NAVIGABILITY AROUND RUTGERS GARDENS

*Embodied Values:
Activated; Connected*

Goal: Make enhancements to mapping, wayfinding, and circulation systems to improve how students and visitors navigate to and within Rutgers Gardens.

Action Item	Term	Priority Level	Relative Funding Need	Potential Partnerships
Provide updated and improved maps, inclusive of key areas and suggested pathways/routes through the Gardens, to students and visitors	Short	High	\$	IP&O, UCM
Develop a circulation plan to guide design and implementation of future circulation systems, including both pedestrian and vehicular traffic throughout Rutgers Gardens	Short	High	\$\$	IP&O, design firm
Add more permanent informational signage and signage with QR codes – Signage can be implemented in such a way that it also guides visitors from one area to the next	Medium	High	\$ - \$\$	IP&O
Utilize selective mowing to create temporary guidance through otherwise undefined garden areas, possibly replacing turfgrass with meadow plantings or “bee lawns” in select areas.	Medium	Medium	\$	TBD
Create defined paths throughout Rutgers Gardens to help facilitate circulation to and through gardens; consider permeable materials for permanent path installations to minimize environmental impacts while also increasing accessibility.	Medium	High	\$\$	IP&O
Regularly inspect signage and QR code links and ensure they are up to date and accurate.	Long	Low	\$	n/a
Create updated maps with increased detail on plant identification, bloom time, etc. for Rutgers Gardens display areas, Helyar Woods, and Student Farm, potentially in partnership with University-wide map updates to all campus green spaces and based on the Rutgers Gardens plant database.	Long	Medium	\$	IP&O

2.4 ENHANCE ACCESSIBILITY WITHIN THE GARDENS

*Embodied Values:
Activated; Connected*

Goal: Provide new amenities and enhanced surfaces within the Gardens to better serve students and visitors of all abilities.

Action Item	Term	Priority Level	Relative Funding Need	Potential Partnerships
Add ramps and handrails to buildings and facilities where not already installed	Short	Medium	\$\$	IP&O, RADR
Add benches or other seating elements to more garden areas and along paths	Medium	High	\$	IP&O, RUF, external contractors
Add a primary accessible pedestrian path to connect key areas of Rutgers Gardens	Medium	High	\$\$	IP&O, Landscape Architecture Dept., EJB
Explore adding railing or other aids on select garden paths and woodland trails to improve accessibility	Medium	Low	\$	IP&O, RADR
Develop a fully pedestrian accessible circulation system throughout that links multiple areas of Rutgers Gardens, including a loop path through Helyar Woods	Long	Medium	\$\$	IP&O, Landscape Architecture Dept., EJB, external partners
Improve accessibility of existing facilities, including Log Cabin and Alumni Pavilion access	Long	Medium	\$ - \$\$\$	IP&O, RADR
Ensure all future facilities are accessible, including restrooms, classrooms, welcome center/gift shop, etc.	Long	Medium	\$\$	IP&O, RU-NB
Add adaptive tools and spaces (lower planting/potting benches, benches on wheels, seats with backs) to greenhouses to accommodate participants of diverse abilities	Long	Medium	\$	IP&O, RADR, external partners

2.5 CREATE A CLEARER AND MORE WELCOMING ENTRY

*Embodied Values:
Visible; Activated*

Goal: Establishing a clearly defined entrance with more visitor information can help with improving awareness and security of the site, while being more welcoming can help attract new and returning visitors.

Action Item	Term	Priority Level	Relative Funding Need	Potential Partnerships
Install larger entry signs, ideally noting the days and times at which the site is open to visitors; signage should visually signify that the Gardens are part of RU-NB and that everyone is welcome (university and community)	Short	High	\$	IP&O
Create additional and/or updated signage for wayfinding upon entry	Short	Medium	\$	IP&O, RComm
As some staff offices relocate to Thompson House, repurpose an area of the current main office building at the entry into a publicly accessible welcome and information center, along with new signage and increased curb appeal improvements (i.e., paint, chairs on porch, sign about events) to denote this transition.	Medium	Medium	\$\$\$	IP&O
Design a welcoming entry sequence inclusive of wayfinding for pedestrians and cyclists	Medium	Medium	\$\$	IP&O, EJB
Design entry so that the “garden experience” is immediately apparent upon arrival.	Medium	Low	\$\$ - \$\$\$	IP&O
Develop a plan for more secure and lower-maintenance opening and closing procedures, inclusive of the possibility of an automatic gate located closer to the Gardens entrance	Medium	High	\$\$	IP&O
Re-establish and move Gardens gift shop to entry; expand gift shop to serve as a farm store that could be open when Gardens and/or farmers market are closed to further the Student Farm contributions to improved food security	Long	Low	\$\$\$	IP&O, RUF, RCFM
Relocate the farmers market to another location within the Gardens and repurpose the current pavilion into a new space (welcome center, gift shop, education center, conservatory, etc.) that creates a stronger welcome and entry sequence for Rutgers Gardens and receives more than once-weekly seasonal use	Long	Low	\$\$\$	IP&O, NJAES



VISION THEME 3: INCREASING AWARENESS & COMMUNICATIONS



Overall Goals:

1. Increase student and faculty awareness of utilizing the Gardens
2. Regularly communicate with stakeholders
3. Expand types and methods of marketing
4. Improve branding and image
5. Increase promotional signage and presence
6. Improve engagement of website and social media
7. Showcase historical contributions and importance



3.1 INCREASE STUDENT & FACULTY AWARENESS & ENGAGEMENT

*Embodied Values:
Visible, Meaningful, Connected*

Goal: Offer expanded opportunities for the Rutgers University community to learn about Rutgers Gardens and how they might engage and collaborate with the Gardens for educational, research, programming, and wellness opportunities.

Action Item	Term	Priority Level	Relative Funding Need	Potential Partnerships
Promote Rutgers Gardens through the spaces on and adjacent to G.H. Cook campus connected to Rutgers Gardens under the Campus Stewardship initiative (e.g., Floriculture Greenhouses, Healthy Harvest at Jones Avenue) and connect to larger University-wide green space efforts	Short	High	\$	RU-NB, RComm
Host an open house for Rutgers faculty for information about and ways they can use Rutgers Gardens for classes and research	Short	High	\$	RU-NB, RUF
Explore partnerships with student clubs for volunteering, events, etc.	Short	Medium	\$	Various
Include Rutgers Gardens and its programs to the Grow at SEBS student app	Short	Medium	\$	n/a
Add a Rutgers Gardens presence to student orientation and involvement fairs	Medium	Medium	\$	Rutgers Student Affairs
Partner with Residence Life to increase exposure of Rutgers Gardens to on campus residents across all New Brunswick campuses and for ways to incorporate the Gardens into Open House activities	Medium	Medium	\$	Residence Life
Partner with Dining Services and Family & Community Health Sciences to enable students to use meal swipes at the Student Farm and/or campus farmers markets	Medium	High	\$	Rutgers Dining Services, FCHS
Lead efforts to create a Rutgers institutions pass, stamp card or similar, along with facilities like the Zimmerli Art Museum, Geology Museum, etc.	Long	Low	\$	Rutgers Student Affairs

3.2 REGULARLY COMMUNICATE WITH STAKEHOLDERS

Goal: Ensure consistent communication with stakeholders about ongoing operations, programs, and plans at Rutgers Gardens to help foster an engaged and collaborative culture.

Action Item	Term	Priority Level	Relative Funding Need	Potential Partnerships
Establish regular communication via newsletters from Rutgers Gardens to stakeholders, members, and volunteers, potentially developing specific content for member and volunteer communications	Short	Medium	\$	RUF, external partners
Include Student Farm stakeholders (i.e., CSA members, volunteers, donors, and market shoppers) in wider Rutgers Gardens communications as appropriate	Short	Medium	\$	RUF, external partners
Plan and send thank-you notes to donors who contribute to Rutgers Gardens throughout the year (e.g., donors who contribute \$100 or more receive a thank you card quarterly)	Short	High	\$	RUF
Provide more opportunities for members and volunteers to learn about and provide input on future plans, such as through annual or bi-annual member debriefings/ events and volunteer update meetings/gatherings	Medium	Medium	\$	RUF

3.3 EXPAND TYPES & METHODS OF MARKETING

*Embodied Values:
Visible, Meaningful*

Goal: By expanding marketing efforts to different groups and in different languages, Rutgers Gardens can increase its exposure and engagement to a wider audience and help everyone feel welcome.

Action Item	Term	Priority Level	Relative Funding Need	Potential Partnerships
Develop a dedicated email newsletter to volunteers, focusing on key updates and opportunities to engage	Short	Medium	\$	NJAES, RCE
Engage more alumni at Rutgers Gardens through events, newsletters, etc., in collaboration with the SEBS Alumni Engagement team, Cook Community Alumni Association, and Rutgers University Alumni Association	Short	Medium	\$	SEBS Alumni Engagement, Cook Community Alumni Association, Rutgers University Alumni Association
Explore opportunities for wider engagement of the Student Farm at farmers markets, campus events, dining halls, and more	Medium	Medium	\$	RU-NB
Consider co-development of shelf-stable, value-added Student Farm products with SEBS/NJAES departments to increase marketing and sales, as well as food security among students and community residents	Medium	Medium	\$\$ - \$\$\$	NJAES
Engage students, volunteers, and staff in outreach at local community events and programs, especially in collaboration with RCE and NJAES research stations, and at public libraries, schools, etc.	Medium	Low	\$\$	RComm, external partners
Develop a program of outreach to former interns, including events that invite them back to reconnect and engage with the Gardens and current staff and students.	Medium	Medium	\$	RUF, alumni associations
Provide signage and online information in languages beyond English (for example, via onsite signage with QR codes that link to website pages featuring information in additional languages)	Long	High	\$ - \$\$	RComm, University language departments
Work with partners to expand outreach to underserved communities throughout the greater New Brunswick area	Long	Medium	\$\$	External partners

3.4 IMPROVE BRANDING & IMAGE

Goal: Strategize various ways that Rutgers Gardens can improve how it is seen and recognized by different stakeholder groups to increase positive perceptions and overall awareness, including by elevating Rutgers Gardens to become a recognized and respected botanical garden within a Big Ten university.

Action Item	Term	Priority Level	Relative Funding Need	Potential Partnerships
Increase Rutgers Gardens presence across SEBS and RU-NB events and programs to increase recognition of the Gardens and campus stewardship efforts; examples include Rutgers Day, ScarletWell initiatives, etc.	Short	High	\$	RComm, Student Affairs
Participate in local, regional, and national conferences, representing Rutgers Gardens and SEBS, including by offering educational sessions and/or delivering presentations the demonstrate Rutgers Gardens' research, programs, and collaborations	Short	Medium	\$	NJAES, RCE, external organizations
Publish peer-reviewed, Extension, and community articles that feature Rutgers Gardens research and/or showcase horticultural, agricultural, and ecological best practices in use at Rutgers Gardens	Short	Medium	\$	RComm
Participate in the university's "R" Garden signage initiative at Rutgers Day	Short	Low	\$	Rutgers Day
Explore opportunities for Rutgers Gardens to promote and bring awareness to Rutgers University's role as a leader in horticulture, agriculture, and land stewardship to the public, including through local, regional, and national recognition	Medium	Medium	\$	NJAES, external partners
Explore the possibility of expanding the traditional "Rutgers Gardens" name to encompass new campus stewardship initiatives while communicating that the public is welcome and encouraged to visit and learn	Long	Medium	\$	RU-NB, IP&O
Use "R" Gardens to frame a marketing and fundraising campaign, playing off "R" standing for "Rutgers" and sounding like "our" to show both university and general public connections	Long	Low	\$ - \$\$	RUF

3.5 INCREASE PROMOTIONAL SIGNAGE & PRESENCE

Goal: Look for opportunities for additional physical and virtual promotion to increase general awareness and use of, and support for, Rutgers Gardens.

Action Item	Term	Priority Level	Relative Funding Need	Potential Partnerships
Work with SEBS and Rutgers-New Brunswick media teams to increase the virtual presence and promotion of Rutgers Gardens through various channels	Short	Medium	\$ - \$\$	RComm
Add new physical signage at the entrance to Rutgers Gardens/along Ryders Lane to indicate open hours and welcome the public while also branding the space as university-affiliated	Short	High	\$\$	IP&O, Middlesex County DOT
In alignment with Rutgers University IP&O, add more physical signage throughout RU-NB that highlights Rutgers Gardens as a campus destination	Medium	Medium	\$\$	IP&O
Install visual art, plantings, or other displays along the section of Rutgers Gardens that borders Route 1 to pique interest and promote the Gardens	Long	Low	\$\$	MGSA, PSE&G, NJ DOT
Work collaboratively with road agencies to add signage advertising Rutgers Gardens on Route 1 and Ryders Lane, as well as potentially on Route 18	Long	Low	\$\$	Local DOTs

3.6 IMPROVE ENGAGEMENT OF WEBSITE & SOCIAL MEDIA

Goal: Through meaningful content creation and regular updates, Rutgers Gardens can provide a more engaging online presence, showcasing what the Gardens offer and how they can help other groups.

Action Item	Term	Priority Level	Relative Funding Need	Potential Partnerships
Complete web site revisions and updates to reflect current operations and programs, and to highlight new mission, vision, and values upon adoption of the vision plan	Short	High	\$ - \$\$\$	n/a
Better connect to RU and SEBS existing media channels to further share Rutgers Gardens content, including the SEBS Newsroom and Community Chronicle alumni newsletter	Short	Medium	\$	RComm
Engage student interns to create and share select content, such as via “student takeovers” of social media accounts	Medium	Medium	\$	n/a
Build out more content on the Garden’s website, such as videos, seasonal blooms, seasonal items for sale at the farmers market, an events calendar, etc.	Medium	Medium	\$	RComm
Prioritize content that can be multi-purpose, such as content that can be used both for social media posts and newsletters, or for the website that can be linked to QR codes on site for self-guided tours	Long	Medium	\$ - \$\$\$	NJAES, RCE

3.7 SHOWCASE HISTORICAL CONTRIBUTIONS & IMPORTANCE OF RUTGERS GARDENS

*Embodied Values:
Meaningful, Connected*

Goal: Expand ways for students and visitors to learn about different aspects of the history of Rutgers Gardens, as well as New Jersey horticulture and agriculture, to reinforce the historical contributions and importance of Rutgers Gardens.

Action Item	Term	Priority Level	Relative Funding Need	Potential Partnerships
Increase the information available about the history of Rutgers Gardens, significant plant development, etc. through signage and QR codes at the site, which could link to website content	Short	Medium	\$	NJAES, RU-NB
Engage stakeholders from the Indigenous communities of New Jersey, as well as faculty colleagues who study and support Indigenous culture, to strengthen Rutgers Gardens connection to traditional land uses and histories	Medium	Medium	\$ - \$\$	External partners; RU American Studies department
Collaborate with local historical and cultural groups to increase engagement, fundraising, and promotion for various garden areas as appropriate, such as the NJ Women's Heritage Trail for the Alice Harding Lilac Walk, pending restoration timeline and success	Medium	Low	\$	Various external partners
Develop lectures and educational programs that convey past and current research at Rutgers Gardens and its significance	Medium	Medium	\$\$	Research partners
Coordinate student theses, professional projects, and/or class projects to expand material on the history of Rutgers Gardens	Long	Medium	\$ - \$\$	RU-NB schools and departments



VISION THEME 4: STRENGTHENING CAPACITY & OPERATIONS



Overall Goals:

1. Expand staff and resource capacity
2. Continue enhancing membership and volunteer programs
3. Improve analysis and delivery of services
4. Add to operational partnerships
5. Clarify Advisory Board role and structure
6. Expand revenue and fundraising opportunities
7. Capitalize on Vision Plan momentum



4.1 EXPAND STAFF & RESOURCE CAPACITY

Goal: Explore a variety of resources and partnerships to expand current capacity of staffing and resources to better operate the site and implement the Vision Plan.

Action Item	Term	Priority Level	Relative Funding Need	Potential Partnerships
Look for opportunities to invite University-wide faculty and staff to assist with and integrate in their expertise into operational tasks, such as media, forestry, vegetable production, food safety, etc.	Short	High	\$	IP&O, Student Affairs, MGSA
Identify and engage University collaborators who can provide teaching, research, and professional guidance and expertise in support of Rutgers Gardens staff	Short	High	\$ - \$\$	OCPE, IP&O, and others
Improve maintenance capacity at Rutgers Gardens by: – engaging contract services for mowing, large-scale invasive species removal, and other tasks where the scope or mechanization needed exceeds the scope, skill, or capacity of Rutgers Gardens staff – revising and expanding volunteer opportunities to maximize engagement, learning, and productivity – growing the student internship program to engage additional learners in active landscape management, farm, and forest activities – addition of Student Horticulturist/Student Farmer positions (one or more returning interns that have working knowledge of Rutgers Gardens operations, maintenance, and programming) – hiring additional seasonal, part-time, and/or full-time staff to improve the capacity for current operations and expand to develop new projects/programs	Short	High	\$\$	Various
Expand and enhance the Gardens student internship program through creation of a forest stewardship intern track connected with Helyar Woods and potentially Hutcheson Memorial Forest, the Rutgers EcoPreserve, and/or the University Inn and Conference Center's Arbor Trail as Rutgers Gardens expands beyond current site context	Medium	High	\$\$	RU-NB Campus Green Space Network

4.1 EXPAND STAFF & RESOURCE CAPACITY CONT.

Goal: Explore a variety of resources and partnerships to expand current capacity of staffing and resources to better operate the site and implement the Vision Plan.

Action Item	Term	Priority Level	Relative Funding Need	Potential Partnerships
Revisit formal agreements with partners for opportunities for updates to reflect current and evolving needs as the vision plan and future projects are implemented	Medium	Medium	\$	Various
Invest in updated equipment to increase maintenance capacity, prioritizing purchase of equipment that can serve multiple functions, such as a small utility vehicle with multiple attachments that can be used for brush removal, snow clearing, etc.	Long	Medium	\$\$ - \$\$\$	IP&O
Redesign and potentially relocate the existing maintenance yard and other back-of-house spaces to provide more security, address stormwater management needs, and better serve staff while enhancing the visitor experience	Long	Medium	\$\$\$ - \$\$\$\$	IP&O



4.2 CONTINUE ENHANCING MEMBERSHIP & VOLUNTEER PROGRAMS

Goal: Explore and add to ways to enhance the member and volunteer programs to be a more rewarding experience that better serves all.

Action Item	Term	Priority Level	Relative Funding Need	Potential Partnerships
Improve the membership registration and processing experience for members and Gardens staff	Short	Medium	\$	RUF
Update volunteer program to be more structured, with a training/orientation day, an annually signed volunteer agreement, volunteer appreciation day, and ability to work up to team leadership roles (one-time volunteers would have liability waiver and orientation to that day's project only)	Short	Medium	\$	RCE
Host focused volunteer days targeted at specific groups (i.e., Master Gardeners, industry professionals, corporate entities, students) and/or specific tasks (i.e., invasive species removal) for which training is included as an incentive to participate	Short	Medium	\$	RCE, corporate and community partners
Engage students in learning and volunteer opportunities that also provide avenues for community engagement and experiential learning	Short	Medium	\$	RU-NB schools
Offer curated "behind-the-scenes" tours of garden areas that are typically closed to the public, such as the Student Farm and research areas, to members, volunteers, and/or university stakeholders	Short	Medium	\$\$	RUF
Explore the establishment of a docent program	Medium	Medium	\$	RCE (e.g., Master Gardeners)
Consider adding a student tier (perhaps connected to internship alumni) and young adult / emerging professional tier to the membership program	Medium	Low	\$	RUF
Explore further changes to membership program including different tiers, perks, prorated memberships, and potentials for collaboration/overlap with other groups under Campus Stewardship, staying within any larger University limitations	Long	Low	\$	RUF
Explore creation of different donation level tiers and ways to recognize donor contributions to Rutgers Gardens	Long	High	\$	RUF

4.3 IMPROVE SERVICE PROCESSES, ANALYSIS & DELIVERY

Goal: Through potential efficiencies, partnerships, and learning through data collection and analysis, Rutgers Gardens can enhance its capacity to operate and maintain the site.

Action Item	Term	Priority Level	Relative Funding Need	Potential Partnerships
Assess each organizational/program area within Rutgers Gardens to determine the feasibility of scope and associated labor needs in support of current and future mission alignment	Short	High	\$	n/a
Reduce the time Gardens staff and interns spend mowing turf, such as through identifying areas that can be transformed into “low-mow” areas and/or restructuring how turf mowing is completed (i.e., contract out mowing or partner with IP&O Grounds Department or Turfgrass Center) allowing more time to perform detailed garden maintenance and implement improvements	Short	High	\$ - \$\$	Turfgrass Center, external partners
Where appropriate, trim back planting undergrowth to better control invasive species and provide better access for maintenance equipment	Short	Medium	\$	n/a
Establish the Rutgers Gardens plant database for use to catalog and promote plant collections and specimens, and to create maps for internal and visitor use	Short	High	\$\$	RUF, external partners
Increase data collection and tracking on various operational elements, such as maintenance performed, crop planting and harvest records, what classes are using the Gardens, what research is conducted, what and how many plants are sold, etc. to establish a database to inform ongoing operations	Short	High	\$\$	NJAES, RCE
Routinely review staff capacities, professional development opportunities, and supporting services to help ensure staff wellness and retention	Short	High	\$ - \$\$	Office of Workplace Culture, external partners
Reduce redundancies between the Floriculture Greenhouse and greenhouses at Rutgers Gardens and provide more focused operations and programming at both (i.e., student-focused at Floriculture Greenhouses, community-focused at Rutgers Gardens)	Medium	Medium	\$	RU-NB schools, external partners

4.3 IMPROVE SERVICE PROCESSES, ANALYSIS & DELIVERY

Goal: Through potential efficiencies, partnerships, and learning through data collection and analysis, Rutgers Gardens can enhance its capacity to operate and maintain the site.

Action Item	Term	Priority Level	Relative Funding Need	Potential Partnerships
Identify turf areas that could be transitioned to meadows to further reduce maintenance needs associated with turf.	Medium	Medium	\$	External partners, e.g. Meadow Lab
Develop updated maintenance and management plans for the various display garden areas, Student Farm, and Helyar Woods to help address invasive species, restore plant collections, enhance productivity, and plan for future care in the context of sustainable land stewardship	Medium	High	\$\$	IP&O, external partners
Create or purchase a database to better track and engage with volunteers, members, donors, and others at Rutgers Gardens	Long	Medium	\$\$	RUF
Work with IP&O to better understand and integrate sustainability initiatives being implemented by the wider University into Rutgers Garden's operations	Long	Medium	\$ - \$\$	IP&O



4.4 ADD TO OPERATIONAL PARTNERSHIPS

Goal: Explore strengthening and expanding various partnerships to assist in providing care and maintenance for Rutgers Gardens.

Action Item	Term	Priority Level	Relative Funding Need	Potential Partnerships
Establish ways Rutgers Gardens can be integrated with maintenance of atypical grounds spaces on Cook Campus, such as teaching gardens and food production areas (i.e., community gardens and urban farms)	Short	Medium	\$	IP&O
Strengthen the working relationship with IP&O Grounds – Identify ways Rutgers Gardens can be used to help train Grounds staff and student interns working with IP&O – Request collaboration and support from IP&O Grounds leadership with Rutgers Gardens initiatives as appropriate	Short	Medium	\$	IP&O
Explore how Rutgers Gardens can connect with other green spaces (EcoPreserve, Hutcheson Memorial Forest, University Inn Arbor Trail, etc.) on campus	Short	Medium	\$	IP&O, RU-NB schools and departments
Utilize Rutgers Gardens to develop, propagate, and/or grow specialty plants for Grounds to install on Rutgers campuses	Medium	Low	\$\$\$	IP&O
Explore how Rutgers Gardens can connect with other institutions at Rutgers University, such as the Chrysler Herbarium, Zimmerli Art Museum, Geology Museum, etc.	Long	Medium	\$	Various
Better engage industry organizations and grow green industry connections	Long	Medium	\$	External partners

4.5 CLARIFY ADVISORY BOARD ROLE & STRUCTURE

Goal: Clarify the role of the board as an advisory and supportive (not governing) entity to assist the Director of Rutgers Gardens, and expand the potential for the board to support various elements of Rutgers Gardens operations and programs.

Action Item	Term	Priority Level	Relative Funding Need	Potential Partnerships
Revise or eliminate bylaws to better align with advisory and support roles of the board	Short	Medium	\$	n/a
Redefine the role of the board as providing support for Rutgers Gardens through fundraising, program operation, and advisement	Short	Medium	\$	RUF
Change the name of the Advisory Board to better reflect its inability to be involved with Garden finances and make binding decisions for Rutgers Gardens and to be more welcoming to larger community involvement (i.e., "Community Council", "Advisory and Stewardship Council", "Friends of Rutgers Gardens," etc.)	Short	High	\$	n/a
Increase board involvement with outreach, fundraising, and networking in support of Rutgers Gardens, including by developing signature initiatives for board members to implement. Examples include: – Farm-to-table dinner/cocktail hour fundraising events, expanding on successful 2023 pilot event conducted with RUF/SEBS development team – Art and cultural installations, lectures, and programs that can serve as engagement and fundraising opportunities, perhaps expanding on recent MGSA collaborations – Adoption of a specific garden area to spearhead restoration, enhancements, and/or promotion, e.g., Alice Harding Lilac Walk	Short	High	\$	Various
Facilitate ways for staff and board members to collaborate, such as through networking during the annual Board Retreat and/or at other on-site events throughout the year and working together on specific projects, sub-committees, etc.	Short	Medium	\$	RUF, external organizations

4.5 CLARIFY ADVISORY BOARD ROLE & STRUCTURE CONT.

Goal: Clarify the role of the board as an advisory and supportive (not governing) entity to assist the Director of Rutgers Gardens, and expand the potential for the board to support various elements of Rutgers Gardens operations and programs.

Action Item	Term	Priority Level	Relative Funding Need	Potential Partnerships
As board role is defined, consider adding Volunteer Liaison, Member Liaison, and Student Liaison positions to the board that can serve as formal communication points and representatives of these groups	Medium	Medium	\$	RUF
Establish a regular schedule (e.g., every 3 years starting with one year after completion of the Vision Plan) to hold a workshop to examine the function of the board, and incorporate recommended changes as needed	Medium	Medium	\$	External partners/ facilitators
Establish focused, ad-hoc or permanent sub-committees related to specific topics or projects, which meet separately from, but are facilitated by, the main group, with board and staff members serving in leadership and coordination roles that gather input from stakeholders, bring in additional specialized expertise, raise funds, and incorporate more diverse voices.	Medium	Medium	\$	NJAES/RCE, external partners
Track board membership and involvement (such as terms, project and sub-group involvement, etc.) to see how the board evolves and to easily coordinate any terms lengths or similar considerations in the bylaws	Long	Low	\$	RUF

4.6 EXPAND REVENUE & FUNDRAISING OPPORTUNITIES

Goal: Explore a range of sources to increase funding opportunities and financial sustainability to support current and future projects and operations at Rutgers Gardens.

Action Item	Term	Priority Level	Relative Funding Need	Potential Partnerships
Implement revised farmers market management model in partnership with FCHS to enhance market services and integrate with other SEBS/NJAES farmers markets	Short	Medium	\$	FCHS
Adjust the model of the Spring Plant Sale to reduce the staff and logistical challenges associated with the event (i.e., different format for the sale, offering alternative sales at different locations and times, offering pop-up sales, changing plants sold, having dedicated sale staff, etc.) in conjunction with data collection	Short	High	\$	External partners
As part of student experiential learning, engage students in the propagation and greenhouse production of Rutgers Gardens plants that can later be sold or installed at the Gardens and/or on campus	Short	Medium	\$\$	IP&O
Add options for donors to “adopt” or “sponsor” existing trees at the Gardens in a refreshed memorial tree program	Short	Medium	\$	RUF
Identify ways to acknowledge and thank donors for their support	Short	Medium	\$	RUF

4.6 EXPAND REVENUE & FUNDRAISING OPPORTUNITIES CONT.

Goal: Explore a range of sources to increase funding opportunities and financial sustainability to support current and future projects and operations at Rutgers Gardens.

Action Item	Term	Priority Level	Relative Funding Need	Potential Partnerships
Create farm-to-table style fundraising events that highlight the Rutgers Gardens Student Farm	Medium	Medium	\$ - \$\$	RUF
Expand hours and operations of on-site farmers market(s) to attract more visitors in collaboration with RCE partners	Medium	Medium	\$\$	RCE
Revisit memorial bench pricing to better account for future associated maintenance costs in preparation of proposed re-launch	Medium	Medium	\$	RUF
Study the potential for value added production opportunities and a winter CSA model at the Student Farm	Medium	Medium	\$	NJAES, RCE
Discuss corporate funding opportunities with RUF and Office of Research colleagues	Medium	High	\$	RUF
Expand tracking of plants and other goods sold at Rutgers Gardens to more accurately analyze buying trends	Long	Medium	\$ - \$\$	n/a
Explore sponsorship opportunities and term naming of select features at Rutgers Gardens in conjunction with the RUF	Long	Medium	\$	RUF

4.7 CAPITALIZE ON VISION PLAN MOMENTUM

Goal: Build on momentum and discussions from the Vision Plan process to ensure follow-up efforts and synergistic projects create a more connected Rutgers Gardens that is widely integrated with SEBS and RU-NB.

Action Item	Term	Priority Level	Relative Funding Need	Potential Partnerships
Review all action items and identify potential grant opportunities	Short	High	\$	NJAES, RU-NB schools
Collaborate with RUF to identify donors to support specific action items	Short	High	\$	RUF
Conduct a more in-depth case study of benchmarked institutions, focusing on UC Davis as an example	Short	Low	\$\$	External organizations
Conduct yearly internal planning with all staff to set priorities, review vision plan progress, reflect on current challenges, and consider goals and priorities for following years	Short	High	\$	External facilitators
Connect to larger University initiatives for funding and support; at the time of publication, current examples include the Chancellor's Strategic Initiative Fund and the ScarletWell grant program.	Medium	High	\$	Various
Develop a physical master plan for Rutgers Gardens based on the Vision Plan to guide future site development.	Medium	High	\$\$	IP&O, external partners
Develop a site security strategy/plan as part of a future planning process. For example, consider site security and deer protection, including by evaluating the potential for fencing all or a portion of Rutgers Gardens by expanding on existing deer fencing already in place for the research farms	Long	Medium	\$	IP&O
Identify partnerships with university faculty to seek grant support for programs, projects, and research to be conducted at and in conjunction with Rutgers Gardens	Long	High	\$	Various



CHAPTER 6

RESOURCE & IMPLEMENTATION NEEDS



A key element of the Vision Plan is expanding the services and resources with which partners can assist in order to mitigate the need for increased direct resources (including financial resources) for Rutgers Gardens to provide these services in-house. For example, Garden staff are envisioned to facilitate the use of spaces and facilities at Rutgers Gardens by others (e.g., university and community partners) for educational programs offered on site so that staff are not responsible for developing and running all programs that occur. (A current successful example of this is the Gardens partnering with RCE 4-H for the youth day camp, 4-H Camp at Rutgers Gardens.) However, it is assumed that most of the day-to-day care, management, operations, and communication for the Gardens will be done using in-house resources, and this capacity will ideally expand over time in alignment with the anticipated positive growth of Rutgers Gardens.



BUDGET & STAFFING IMPLICATIONS

To begin implementing some of the short-term recommendations and vision, it is important to acknowledge gaps between current resources and the full scope of resources needed to achieve the desired actions and goals. One such gap exists in the desired level of maintenance of the Gardens, for which there are important safety and aesthetic standards as well as ecological best practices. Living systems such as the gardens, farms, and natural areas of Rutgers Gardens require a certain level of maintenance and care to thrive and fulfil the educational and engagement goals of each space; from this foundation of basic care, more specific projects can be undertaken and improvement needs met. Achieving and maintaining the desired standard of care for these living laboratories may be done through a variety of ways, including the hire of additional in-house staff, interns, and student workers; engaging community and university volunteers; contracting landscape and professional services; and increasing industry connections. Meeting the gap should also acknowledge that different types of resources may be best suited for certain work (e.g., mowing contracted out to a landscape vendor, but detailed horticulture work done in-house by Gardens staff and student interns) and that some resources may not be able to perform certain tasks (e.g., volunteers not operating heavy equipment). Based on the short-term recommendations, additional garden and grounds maintenance staff and one or more additional horticulture intern(s) are recommended as a high priority to address deferred maintenance and provided needed care for elements added in the short-term. As the Student Farm and Urban Agriculture programs expand at Rutgers Gardens and throughout Cook campus, so too should staff and student participation expand accordingly.

Communications and marketing will be another key service that is expected to be met primarily through internal staff as current roles evolve in the short-term, with media amplification done in collaboration with the SEBS Office of Public Outreach and Communication; additional staff, student engagement, and university partnerships should be considered as needed to align with organizational growth as Rutgers Gardens evolves. Similarly, dedicated administrative coordination to support primary Rutgers Gardens and overarching Campus Stewardship efforts remains

important to retain and perhaps expand. Current staff capacities should be appropriately increased as needed to support growing needs.

Additional staff specifically needed in the long term will vary based on how the Gardens grows and its uses expand over time. Based on the recommendations and vision in this plan, potential new positions may include:

- » additional garden and grounds maintenance staff, with the amount and type (i.e., full time, part time, seasonal, etc.) adaptable based on services concurrently provided through contractors, students, volunteers, etc.;
- » greenhouse support staff in conjunction with the Rutgers Gardens expansion to include the campus Floriculture Greenhouse (number and type based on future greenhouse uses and related partnerships compared to current staff capacity)
- » dedicated Helyar Woods and/or campus natural area staff (ideally at least two staff, plus forest ecology interns) to support care and maintenance of as well as education and engagement in the SEBS natural areas;
- » additional staff to support facilitating programming, membership, and volunteer services (exact number of needed staff will be based on volume of programming, size of member and volunteer programs compared to capacity of existing staff, and may include a mix of part time staff and full time staff)

Since more strategic spending may result from vision plan recommendations, the overall operating budget is expected to increase. More operating funds will be needed to support the recommended new staff hires and to support the care of any improvements that come out of the vision plan process. Capital funding will also be required for new equipment purchases, to conduct recommended planning projects/studies, and to improve existing and/or create new garden areas and expand amenities.

AVENUES FOR FUNDING

As a public university and community asset, not all programming at Rutgers Gardens is expected to generate revenue or a direct financial return on investment; many activities instead yield important educational and engagement outcomes. As such, it is important that Rutgers Gardens not operate strictly for financial gain but instead make use of a variety of funding sources to support its ongoing operations. It is the hope that through this Vision Plan, Rutgers Gardens will be increasingly recognized as a university asset and as such will continue receiving funding and support in alignment with the mission and vision of both the University and the Gardens. With University support for core services and operations, additional funding can be sought to fully carry out the Vision Plan. These sources may include:

- » Grants — opportunities for a variety of grants specific to different types of projects, including those tied with ecology, conservation, and stewardship; mainly project-specific funds, but some grant makers may also help to support operating funding or capital projects
- » Gifts — wide range of opportunities for donors to contribute, ranging from “big impact, ‘small’ dollar” investments through major gifts to create endowed gardens, projects, or positions at Rutgers Gardens. Memorial or tribute gifts at a particular level (e.g., one-time \$5k donation, as these are popular requests) can help improve specific small-scale infrastructure or garden areas; designated gifts mainly support capital projects, with some opportunity for specific operational funds (i.e., donation for intern program support, to care for a specific garden area, etc.); larger gift opportunities include the creation of endowments that can support Gardens operations in perpetuity; smaller gifts accrue in specific or generalized gift accounts that support operations, supplies, student wages, etc. as needed
- » Internally generated revenue — use various revenue streams within campus stewardship to support wider efforts; including operational funding. Fund-generating activities include venue rentals, plant sales, program fees, and more.
- » University support — both direct financial support and indirect support through services provided by the University, as well as potential for in-kind services through internal partnerships; mainly operational funding and support for capital projects that align with the mission and vision of SEBS, Rutgers — New Brunswick, and the University.



CHAPTER 7

LIVING OUR VISION



Implementing the Vision Plan is meant to be an active, engaging process. Successful adoption will require efforts by many groups and partners who collaborate with Rutgers Gardens. Showcasing and celebrating early progress made toward achieving the recommended goals and actions will build momentum to continue to carry out additional components of the Vision Plan. Future plans, studies, and engagement opportunities should be used to further refine the Plan throughout implementation. With support for our mission and values, Rutgers Gardens will live our vision as a well-loved space for learning and enjoyment throughout all seasons of the year.



FUTURE PLANS & PROJECTS

Several recommendations call for future studies, planning efforts, or larger scale projects toward supporting the implementation of the Vision Plan. These include:

Studies & Plans

- » Yearly internal planning sessions with all staff to set priorities, review vision plan progress, reflect on current challenges, and consider goals and priorities for following years
- » Physical master plan for Rutgers Gardens, based on the Vision Plan recommendations
- » More in-depth case studies of benchmarked institutions
- » Feasibility study of a HAWK (high intensity activated crosswalk) beacon and/or a traffic light crossing for Ryders Lane
- » Traffic and planning studies in conjunction with the Brandt Behavioral Health Center for feasibility of improvements to access Rutgers Gardens, such as a signalized intersection with striped crossing or a pedestrian bridge
- » Feasibility study for moving and redesigning the entry gate to be closer to the entrance into the Gardens
- » Feasibility of value-added production opportunities and/or a winter CSA model at the Student Farm
- » A community-focused assessment to identify potential partners and collaborators
- » Updated maintenance and management plans for the various garden areas, including the Student Farm and Helyar Woods
- » Site security plan

Potential Capital Projects

- » Accessible pedestrian network throughout Rutgers Gardens
- » Stabilizing overflow parking areas
- » Redesigned entry with potential renovations of current main office building and farmers market pavilion
- » Updates to the Log Cabin and Log Cabin Alumni Pavilion, including those that address accessibility concerns
- » Design and construction of a second covered outdoor gathering space
- » Improved infrastructure and amenities for visitors
- » Updated equipment for staff
- » Redesigned and/or relocated maintenance yard and other back-of-house facilities

Different levels of funding, collaboration with other University departments, and/or hiring of external consultants will be needed for each project. All should be coordinated with the larger goals presented in the Vision Plan.

MEASURING PROGRESS

Tracking and evaluating progress toward achieving the goals and recommendations set forth will be key to the overall success of the Vision Plan. It is an important management need and will require time and effort. Progress and success should be measured by multiple metrics. These may include identifying completed recommendations, collecting and tracking evaluations and surveys by different user groups over time, and analyzing trends of data collected in association with programs, class use, research, etc. Comprehensive, in-depth surveys of all stakeholders are not recommended yearly; rather, smaller targeted evaluations can be conducted more frequently, with detailed surveys (e.g., community needs assessments) conducted every three to five years. Targeted annual data collection could include surveys to faculty at the beginning of each semester about how they are or would like to use Rutgers Gardens for classes and research; surveys to students to gather information on overall awareness, accessibility, and use; Student Farm CSA and market customer feedback surveys on produce preferences; and member and volunteer surveys to track engagement and opinions. A small group, whether the Advisory Board in a revised role and/or a University-based committee, could help further implementation of the Vision Plan and track progress over time. Conducted in the context of social sciences research best practices, measuring progress can inform Rutgers Gardens operations and programming and serve as a basis from which to develop publishable peer-reviewed literature and presentations appropriate for national academic and industry conferences, further elevating Rutgers Gardens to an esteemed Big 10 University botanical garden.

CELEBRATING THE NEW VISION

As Rutgers Gardens embraces a revised mission and sets course toward a new vision, it will be important to engage and involve key stakeholders so that the university and public communities are welcomed and encouraged to participate in, and support, this forward momentum. A series of events or programs that highlight and celebrate central aspects of the Vision Plan will help invite participation and engagement. Events and programs should both engage the broad audience that supports Rutgers Gardens and welcome new stakeholders alike.

Several opportunities can capitalize on implementation of initial short-term recommendations. One example is a farm-to-table reception for members and donors to highlight produce of the Rutgers Gardens Student Farm and to honor the student interns who are embracing the experiential learning opportunities of Rutgers Gardens. Another example is an inaugural donor and member ride on a bus that would connect Cook campus to Rutgers Gardens and other SEBS facilities to celebrate this important milestone toward increased access and the enhanced student engagement and learning it would provide. “Garden debut days” could highlight the work from those involved in designing, planting, and funding new or revitalized garden areas. Restoration of the popular “green chairs” in the Otken Memorial Garden, perhaps repainted in Rutgers scarlet red to reflect our connection to the University, could similarly showcase and celebrate progress toward the new vision for Rutgers Gardens. A student-led research open house for members, donors, and the community to visit would offer a chance to learn from our students about their work and how it advances the vision of Rutgers Gardens. Showcasing the successes of our students as they grow via Rutgers Gardens experiential learning opportunities will reinforce our commitment to the bright future envisioned.



VISION: A well-loved space for learning and enjoyment
throughout all seasons of the year

MISSION: Growing from our research roots to thrive as a
university botanical garden for all, providing nature-based
experiences to educate, engage, and delight

Embracing:

Ecology & Biodiversity
Horticulture & Agriculture
Health & Wellness
Arts & Sciences

Through:

Stewardship • Accessibility
Enjoyment • Collaboration

To become:

Visible
Activated
Meaningful
Connected



**Enhancing
Educational
Experience &
Engagement**



**Improving
Access &
Navigation**



**Increasing
Awareness &
Communications**



**Strengthening
Capacity &
Operations**

A photograph of a winter forest scene. The image shows numerous tall, slender evergreen trees, likely spruce or fir, densely packed together. Their branches are heavily laden with a thick layer of white snow. The ground is also covered in a deep, smooth blanket of snow. The lighting is soft and diffused, typical of an overcast winter day. In the center of the image, there is a dark, semi-transparent rectangular box. Inside this box, the word "APPENDICES" is written in a bold, white, sans-serif font, centered both horizontally and vertically.

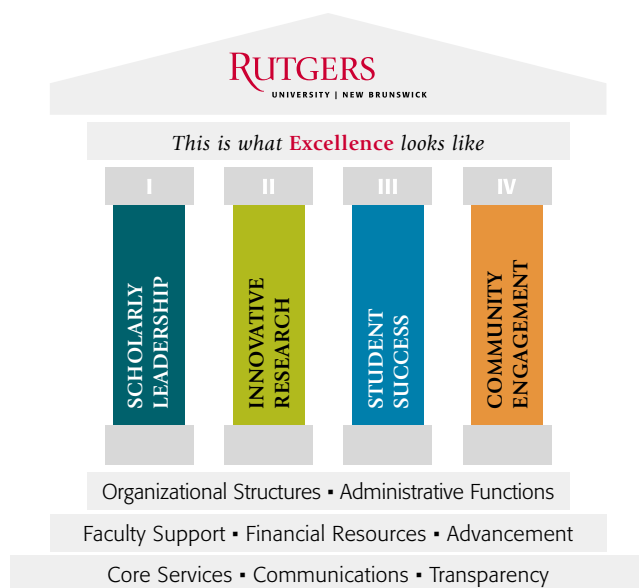
APPENDICES

RUTGERS UNIVERSITY ACADEMIC MASTER PLAN HIGHLIGHTS

Led by an extensive research process and conversations with the Rutgers community, the Academic Master Plan identifies a foundation of four pillars:

- » Scholarly Leadership
- » Innovative Research
- » Student Success
- » Community Engagement

These pillars support the plan's larger vision and Rutgers's overall pursuit of excellence.



We are committed to the relentless pursuit of Excellence.

We foster collaboration, partnerships, community engagement, and the solving of grand challenges to deliver social, economic, and cultural prosperity.

We value our rich history and remain steadfast in our commitment to becoming a beloved community.

We celebrate the personal and societal transformation that comes from innovative scholarship and globally recognized research, and we value the faculty and staff who commit their life's work to these endeavors.

We care for the well-being of our students and pledge our resources to nurture them on their paths to success.

We believe that students grow best into tomorrow's leaders when they have opportunities for high-impact learning, that learning can take place anywhere, and that its effect on communities can be profound.

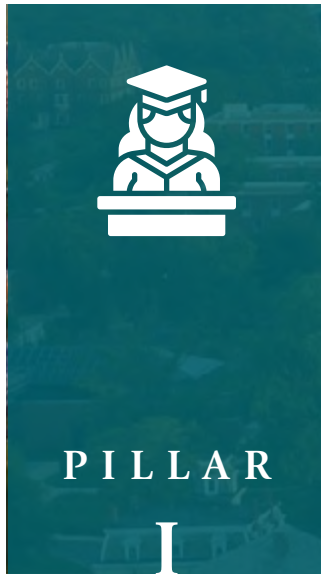
We take to heart the esteemed privilege of transforming lives and helping to make the world a better place.



This is what Excellence looks like

RUTGERS UNIVERSITY-NEW BRUNSWICK

10



SCHOLARLY LEADERSHIP

Goal:

Elevate the scholarly leadership of intellectual communities that support the diverse populations within Rutgers, New Jersey, the nation, and the world.



INNOVATIVE RESEARCH

Goal:

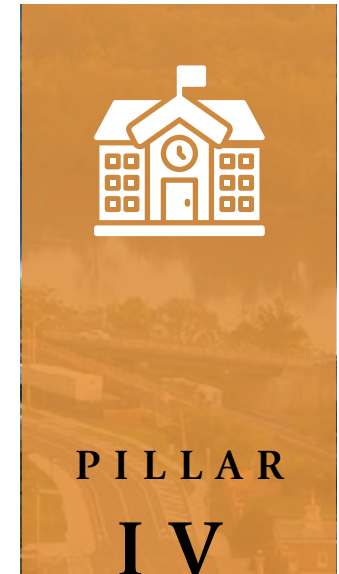
Strengthen Rutgers–New Brunswick’s capacity to solve grand challenges in our community, state, country, and the world to reflect our commitment to the public good.



STUDENT SUCCESS

Goal:

Transform the student experience.



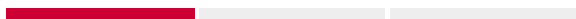
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Goal:

Build on Rutgers–New Brunswick’s strong foundation of community engagement.

Structure for the discovery, development, and implementation of Academic Master Plan projects:

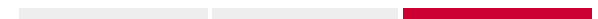
SCHOOL AND DIVISIONAL INITIATIVES



THE CHANCELLOR-PROVOST CHALLENGE



ADMINISTRATIVE-LEVEL INITIATIVES





PILLAR I

SCHOLARLY LEADERSHIP

Goal: Elevate the scholarly leadership of intellectual communities that support the diverse populations within Rutgers, New Jersey, the nation, and the world.

Objective I: Amplify our excellence in the disciplines of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) by identifying shared areas of interest that enhance our strengths and enable collaboration.

Objective II: Lead the nation and world in engaging our community's diversity in our teaching, research, and outreach.

Objective III: Expand our excellence through access to knowledge, opportunities, and infrastructure.



PILLAR II

INNOVATIVE RESEARCH

Goal: Strengthen Rutgers—New Brunswick's capacity to solve grand challenges in our community, state, country, and the world to reflect our commitment to the public good.

Objective I: Increase the impact of Rutgers—New Brunswick research excellence, including enhancing interdisciplinary and community-engaged scholarship.

Objective II: Enhance equitable representation of all communities in the research process.

Objective III: Enhance opportunities for student research.



PILLAR III

STUDENT SUCCESS

Goal: Transform the student experience.

Objective I: Create a welcoming, equitable, and supportive learning environment for all students.

Objective II: Prioritize on-time graduation with minimal debt for all students.

Objective III: Expand high-impact learning opportunities to best prepare students for future success.



PILLAR IV

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Goal: Build on Rutgers—New Brunswick's strong foundation of community engagement.

Objective I: Integrate community engagement into the curricular and co-curricular student experience.

Objective II: Incentivize and reward faculty committed to civic engagement and scholarship.

Objective III: Develop infrastructure for civic engagement initiatives to better partner across the institution and serve the state.

EXAMPLES OF MISSION STATEMENTS FROM BENCHMARKING

The following are examples of mission statements from benchmarking research. Note that not all institutions from benchmarking research had a published mission statement.

"Learning Experience in the Making"

- Clarence E. Lewis Landscape Arboretum, Michigan State University

"Chadwick Arboretum & Learning Gardens honors our Land-Grant tradition by providing extensive and diverse plant collections for education, research, and enjoyment."

- Chadwick Arboretum & Learning Gardens, Ohio State University

"to engage the academic strengths of the University in promoting scholarship and education about plants and their history and importance on earth."

- The Arboretum at Penn State, Pennsylvania State University

"to collect and display woody landscape plants in a way that enhances the educational, research, and outreach mission of Purdue University, promotes environmental sustainability, and increases the beauty of the Purdue University campus."

- Purdue Arboretum, Purdue University

"to discover, interpret and disseminate knowledge in the plant sciences and applied arts by providing an aesthetically enriched setting for education, research, conservation and enjoyment."

- University of Illinois Arboretum

"The University of Maryland campus is an Arboretum and Botanical Garden that strives to be an instrument of horticultural distinction, landscape design and interpretation, and place-making reflecting the university's education, research and service missions."

- Arboretum and Botanical Garden campus of University of Maryland

"To welcome, inform and inspire all through outstanding displays, protected natural areas, horticultural research and education."

- Minnesota Landscape Arboretum at University of Minnesota

"Conserve and restore Arboretum lands, advance restoration ecology, and foster the land ethic."

- University of Wisconsin—Madison Arboretum

"Hilltop Garden and Nature Center serves as an educational and recreational resource for youth gardening, Indiana University students and staff, and the surrounding community to learn about gardening and to connect with nature."

- Hilltop Garden and Nature Center, Indiana University

"To create innovative and nationally renowned permaculture gardens that provide student education and leadership training, community engagement opportunities, and fresh, local, organic produce to the UMass campus and local community."

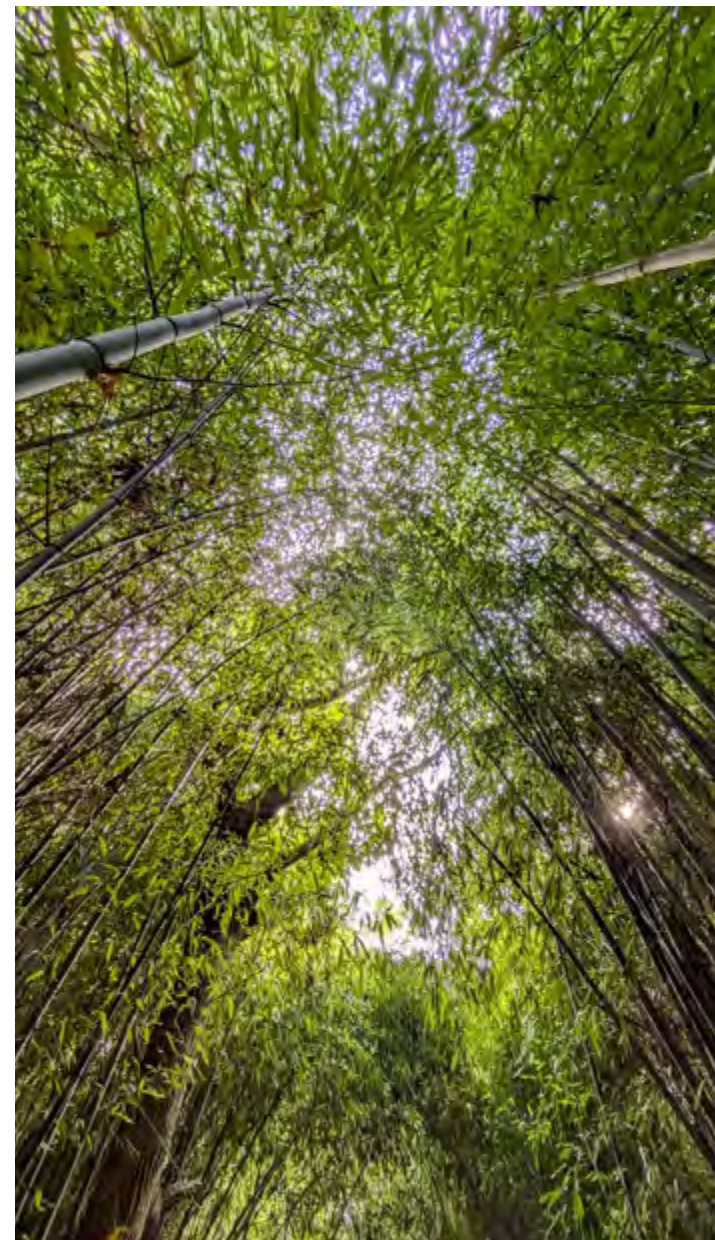
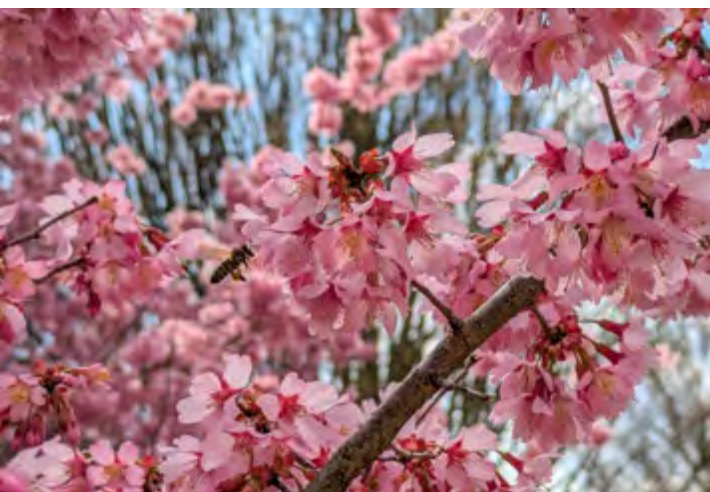
- UMass Permaculture Gardens, University of Massachusetts Amherst

"Our purpose is to inspire human potential to help people and environments thrive."

- UC Davis Arboretum and Public Garden, University of California, Davis

"Matthaei Botanical Gardens and Nichols Arboretum is a transformative force for social and ecological resilience through the waters and lands we steward."

- Matthaei Botanical Gardens and Nichols Arboretum, University of Michigan





*Improving the educational garden,
farm, and forest experience for all
through redefined vision, mission,
values, and goals*



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PUBLIC SPACE DESIGN

