

THE GARDEN CONSERVANCY
Strategic Plan 2020-2025





Cover: The rehabilitation of Blithewood Garden, Annandale-on-Hudson, NY, is a current preservation partnership with Bard College.
Above: Open Days volunteers greet garden visitors at a Garden Conservancy Open Day in Pasadena, CA.

CONTENTS

4		INTRODUCTION
6		BUILDING ON A REMARKABLE LEGACY
8		THE STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS
10		OUR MISSION AND VISION
12		GOALS FOR THE GARDEN CONSERVANCY OF 2025

The Garden Conservancy
Post Office Box 608, Garrison, NY 10524
845.424.6500 | info@gardenconservancy.org
www.gardenconservancy.org

Published in March 2020

INTRODUCTION

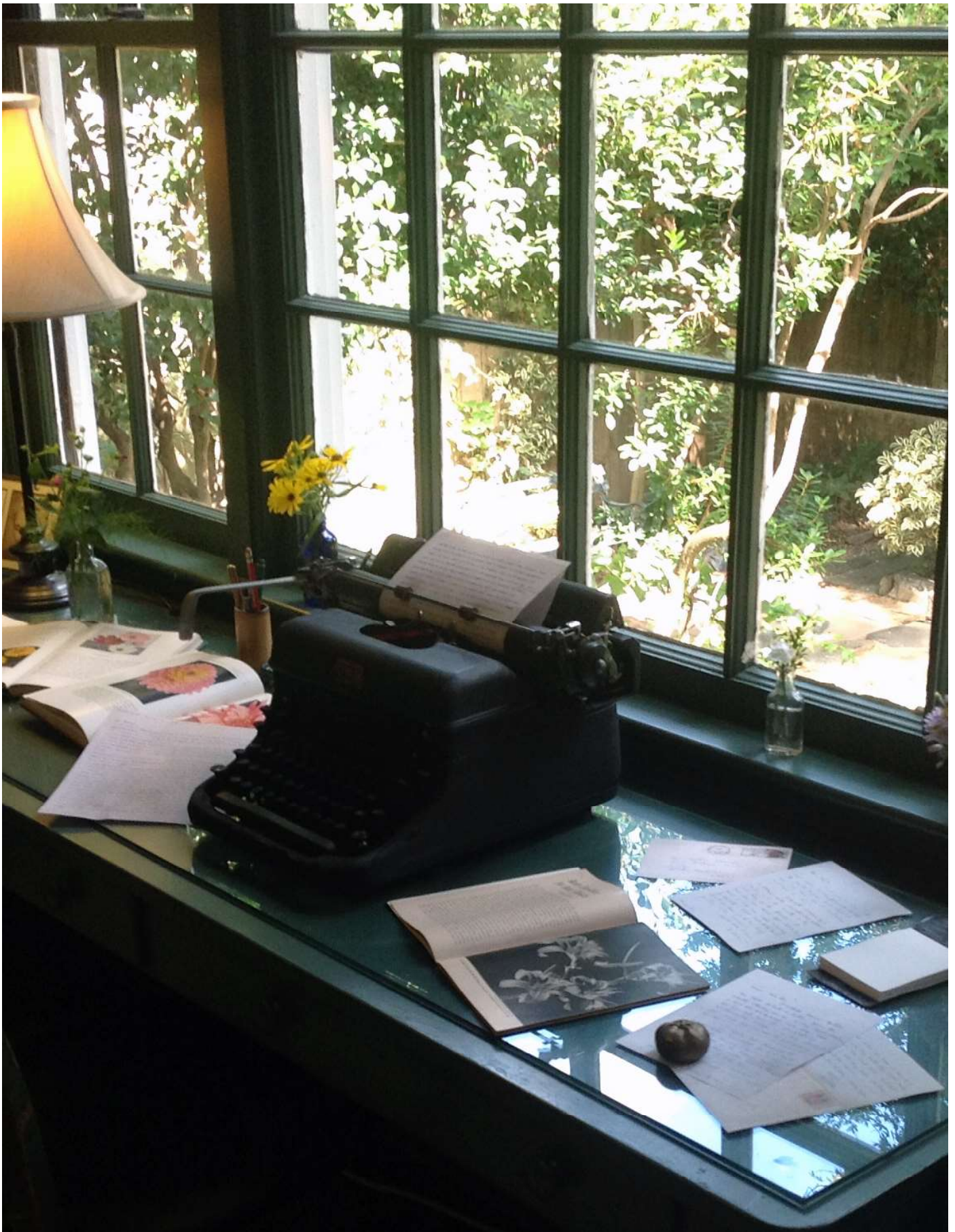
THE VITAL ROLE OF GARDENS

The Garden Conservancy champions the vital role gardens play in American history, culture, and quality of life.

The Conservancy partners with gardeners, community organizations, horticulturists and garden professionals, designers, and historians across America to preserve outstanding gardens. The organization works with both emerging public gardens as well as with longstanding icons, including many National Historic Landmarks and sites listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Since 1995, the Conservancy's signature Open Days program has allowed more than a million visitors to experience the bounteous peace and beauty of some 3,000 private gardens across the country. The organization's garden-study tours and public education programs offer further opportunities for people to explore and be inspired by unusual and exciting design ideas, horticultural skills, cultural insights, and environmental issues.

The Garden Conservancy champions the vital role gardens play in American history, culture, and quality of life.



The Garden Conservancy holds a conservation easement protecting the garden of noted twentieth-century Southern garden writer Elizabeth Lawrence, located in Charlotte, NC., for the education and inspiration of future generations.

BUILDING ON A REMARKABLE LEGACY

PUBLIC TREASURES

The Garden Conservancy was founded in 1989 by visionary plantsman Frank Cabot. Cabot saw a pressing need—and an opportunity—for some of America’s outstanding gardens to outlive the people who created them. He resolved to find ways to help private gardens become public treasures.

The Garden Conservancy's first project was a dry garden in Walnut Creek, California, created by Ruth Bancroft, a dedicated plant collector and gardener. Indeed, Ruth's garden was the spark that prompted Frank Cabot to found the Garden Conservancy. The Conservancy worked with Ruth to raise awareness of and support for her garden and to build an organization to shift the garden from private to nonprofit status. They developed a conservation easement, which Ruth granted to the Garden Conservancy. The easement was the first of its kind, the first to protect not only the land, but also the garden's design in perpetuity, ensuring that the garden would be preserved for the delight and edification of future generations. The Conservancy also worked with Ruth to build a local friends organization, a board of directors, and professional garden staff. Together, they created new public programs and facilities. Though this process was long, complicated, and often challenging, this initial project is now a smashing success, the first of many stellar achievements by the Garden Conservancy.

The Conservancy has helped more than 100 gardens across America survive, prosper, and share their bounty with a supportive public.

The Conservancy's signature garden-visiting program, Open Days, gives the public access to hundreds of private gardens across the country. Each year, thousands of visitors are inspired and educated by seeking out these magical, beautiful spaces. The Conservancy's lectures, tours, and symposia offer further opportunities for people to connect with innovative ideas about gardens, design, and horticulture.

Since its founding in 1989, the Conservancy has helped more than 100 private gardens across America survive, prosper, and share their bounty with a supportive public.



The Ruth Bancroft Garden, Walnut Creek, CA, was the first preservation project of the Garden Conservancy. With guidance from the Conservancy since the early 1990s, it is now a thriving public garden with professional staff, rich programs, and strong community support. Photo by Marion Brenner

THE STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS

DEVELOPING A ROADMAP

The world and the organization have both changed since Frank Cabot's time. To continue serving its communities, the Garden Conservancy needed a thorough process to identify its vision and clear, practical strategies to help meet its goals.

Garden Conservancy leadership worked with Lord Cultural Resources to create a new strategic plan for the organization—a plan that builds on the Conservancy's proud past and prepares it for an even better future. Planning began by taking stock of the Garden Conservancy's strengths, weaknesses, challenges, and potential. The process addressed misconceptions that threaten to hold back both the organization and the remarkable strengths that could carry the organization to new heights.

The touchstone for these discussions was inclusivity: garnering input from internal and external partners and thought leaders through in-depth, individual interviews, as well as surveys and group workshops. Many ideas were considered, resulting in buy-in for the plan from many corners. All of these consultations are distilled into a final plan that fully represents both the organization and the communities it serves. Garden Conservancy members, staff, volunteers, garden owners, and members of the public should all see their values and needs reflected in this plan.



Garden host Maureen Ruetters engages garden visitors in a hands-on workshop at a Garden Conservancy Open Day at the Gardens at Clock Barn in Carlisle, MA. Photo by Faizal Westcott

"We [nonprofit organizations] all need to market ourselves better. Make people aware [we] exist."
— *Public organization*

"The Garden Conservancy is perceived as somewhat elitist, an older demographic, focused on preservation and maintenance of historic gardens. And that is a relatively narrow niche."
— *Preservation organization*

"The future of public gardens is positive for young people who will respond to health and wellness benefits and do whatever they can to protect public spaces."
— *Education organization*

"[A major change in the garden world] is a greater demand in urban and suburban areas for mixed-use land resources."
— *Horticultural organization*

"Would like the Garden Conservancy to achieve, over the next decade, a clear and more focused mission that is easily articulated."

"Opportunity: Expand concept to preservation of wonderful SMALL gardens."

"National in scope, but not enough regional depth in many areas."

"Collaborate with other similar groups to take advantage of intersecting areas of interest."
— *Garden Conservancy Society of Fellows members*

"Would like Open Days expanded to more areas of the country."

"Increase educational programming beyond primarily speakers and Fellows tours. Add day trips, hands-on learning experiences, and a variety of programs to bring our community together."

"[Need] a clearer message about what we do and why we do it."
— *Board members*

"Expand your reach to gardens in urban areas and among lower income groups."

"Young people are critical, to ensure the Conservancy can grow and remain relevant."

"I'd like to hear more from you!"
— *Members*

"*'Saving'* is a really big word and a challenging undertaking."
— *Staff*

OUR MISSION

To preserve, share, and celebrate
America's gardens and diverse gardening traditions
for the education and inspiration of the public

OUR VISION

The Garden Conservancy
will be the champion and steward
of the vital role gardens play in
America's history, culture, and quality of life.

A *mission* statement is the “why” of an institution, its purpose and reason for being. It serves to inspire support. While the Garden Conservancy’s former institutional statement was strong and well-liked, during the strategic planning process, it became apparent that the statement should be expanded to more clearly express the organization’s activities.

A *vision* statement was added to reflect the organization’s aspirational goal that drives everything we do, guiding the development of our short-term and long-term strategies and programs.



Friendly volunteers greet Open Days guests at a Garden Conservancy Open Days in Los Angeles, CA (top), and Austin, TX (bottom, photo by Brian Jones).



GOALS FOR THE GARDEN CONSERVANCY OF 2025

**FIVE AMBITIOUS STRATEGIC GOALS
WERE DEVELOPED TO GUIDE THE ORGANIZATION
FOR THE NEXT FIVE YEARS.**

The O'Byrne Garden, Eugene, OR, has been a popular participant in Garden Conservancy Open Days. Photo by Marion Brenner

GOAL 1

DEVELOP OPEN DAYS AS THE MAJOR GATEWAY PROGRAM OF THE GARDEN CONSERVANCY

Open Days, the country's only national garden-visiting program, has been an outstanding success, connecting hundreds of thousands of people with gardens across the country.

It is the Garden Conservancy's signature program, the gateway to public awareness of the role and contributions of the Garden Conservancy.

Open Days has the potential to be a nimble connection to the Garden Conservancy's big ideas, including increasing and diversifying its audiences.

The Garden Conservancy has only just begun to realize the potential of this program to heighten awareness of our organization, and to promote the idea that gardens and gardening are for everyone.

OBJECTIVES:

- Feature more and different types of gardens
- Perform an audit of Open Days gardens
- Have staff conduct a business plan for the Open Days program
- Establish a board committee for Open Days
- Properly resource Open Days, including appropriate staffing



Landscape designer Francois Goffinet being interviewed for the Garden Conservancy's documentation of the John P. Humes Japanese Stroll Garden in Mill Neck, NY. The new Documentation Program is funded by the Suzanne and Frederic Rheinstein Fund for Garden Documentation.

GOAL 2

CLEARLY DEFINE THE BRAND OF THE GARDEN CONSERVANCY

The Garden Conservancy is beloved by those involved with the organization. They know who the Garden Conservancy is, what is valued, and why this organization matters so much.

The next step is to develop the Garden Conservancy brand and tell stories in ways that allow broader audiences to share that understanding.

OBJECTIVES:

- Articulate and communicate what the Garden Conservancy does and its relevance today and in the future
- Connect Open Days programs to the greater preservation and education mission of the Garden Conservancy
- Re-examine the organization's graphic identity
- Build the Garden Conservancy brand



The Garden Conservancy led a ten-year project to rehabilitate and re-imagine the Gardens at Alcatraz in San Francisco, CA, in partnership with the National Park Service and the Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy. Photo by Marion Brenner

GOAL 3

RAISE AWARENESS OF THE GARDEN CONSERVANCY'S WORK

While Open Days provides a powerful public presence, some of the Garden Conservancy's most important work happens behind the scenes. As the organization develops its voice, it can raise awareness of this important but less visible work. The Garden Conservancy will also work to ensure that people know the ways in which the Conservancy preserves America's gardens for future generations.

OBJECTIVES:

- Improve the messaging around “how” the organization preserves gardens and “why” we share gardens
- Use social media more effectively
- Communicate that Open Days admissions support the mission of the Garden Conservancy
- Create a Garden Conservancy awards program
- Increase visibility of the Garden Conservancy's role as a garden preservation advocate



Garden host Fred Bland and Open Days visitors explore his garden in Branford, CT, during a Garden Conservancy Open Day.
Photo by Denise Shay

GOAL 4

DIVERSIFY THE BOARD AND STAFF

Diversity and representation begin with an organization's internal structure. The Garden Conservancy board of directors and staff are populated with passionate, dedicated people. The next step is to build a board and staff that reflect the diversity of audiences the Garden Conservancy hopes to reach and the diverse gardening traditions it celebrates.

OBJECTIVES:

- Form a board governance committee
- Chart out the areas of expertise, experience, and focus of board members
- Use Emeritus board for advice
- Ensure board and staff reflect the communities that the Garden Conservancy hopes to reach
- Consider committee participation by non-board members in order to cultivate future membership on the board



In the kitchen garden at Scribner's Catskill Lodge in Hunter, NY, horticulturist Andrew Koehn presents a Garden Conservancy Digging Deeper program discussing how he provides organic herbs and vegetables for the inn's locavore restaurant.

GOAL 5

FIND NEW FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

The Garden Conservancy is in good financial health. However, like most small nonprofit organizations, it relies heavily on revenues generated through a small community of high-level donors. Working to diversify revenue sources to help maintain stability from year to year is imperative.

While raising public awareness, the Garden Conservancy will also seek out new funding sources to ensure the organization has the fiscal foundation to grow its capacity and to cultivate visitors' appreciation and understanding of America's gardens.

OBJECTIVES:

- Pursue sponsors for Open Days
- Launch a capital campaign
- Examine video content for marketing visibility
- Launch a planned giving society with lifetime and estate gifts
- Build membership
- Increase foundation and corporate support



The John Fairey Garden (formerly known as the Peckerwood Garden) in Hempstead, TX, has been a Garden Conservancy preservation project since 1998.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

EXTERNAL INTERVIEWS

<p>Anna Caroline Ball <i>President and CEO</i> <i>Ball Horticultural</i></p> <p>Mimi Bradley <i>Director of Operations & Special Programs</i> <i>Institute of Classical Architecture & Art (ICAA)</i></p> <p>Cindy Brockway <i>Program Director for Cultural Resources</i> <i>The Trustees of Reservations</i></p> <p>Sir Peter Crane <i>President</i> <i>Oak Spring Garden Foundation</i></p>	<p>Barbara Faust <i>Director</i> <i>Smithsonian Gardens</i></p> <p>Dr. Joshua Ginsberg <i>President</i> <i>Cary Institute of Ecosystem Studies</i></p> <p>Robert Gordon <i>Head of Operations</i> <i>Garden Museum, London</i></p> <p>Sheffield Hale <i>President & CEO</i> <i>Atlanta History Center</i></p> <p>Dr. Charlie Hall <i>Department of Horticultural Sciences</i> <i>Texas A&M University</i></p> <p>Stephanie Meeks <i>President & CEO</i> <i>National Trust for Historic Preservation</i></p>	<p>Jennie McCahey <i>Program Director</i> <i>Royal Oak Foundation</i></p> <p>Brian McPeck <i>President</i> <i>The Nature Conservancy</i></p> <p>Dede Petri <i>President</i> <i>The Garden Club of America</i></p> <p>Dr. Theodore Prudon <i>President</i> <i>DocomomoUS</i></p> <p>Dr. Casey Sclar <i>Executive Director</i> <i>American Public Gardens Association</i></p>
--	---	---

THE GARDEN CONSERVANCY BOARD OF DIRECTORS*

Courtney S. Daniels
Chairman

Robert M. Balentine
Vice-Chairman

Susan Payson Burke
Secretary

Howard G. Seitz
Treasurer

Benjamin F. Lenhardt, Jr.
Chairman Emeritus

Mary Randolph Ballinger

Shelley Belling

Allison K. Bourke

F. Colin Cabot

Barbara Whitney Carr

J. Barclay Collins II

Page Dickey

Elizabeth Everdell

Lionel Goldfrank III

Susan Zises Green

Suzanne Kayne

Susan Lowry

Joseph Marek

Carolyn Mehran

Paul Redman

Suzanne Rheinstein

Katie Ridder

Ann Copeland Rose

Jorge A. Sánchez

Patricia A. Steffan

Dana Scott Westring

THE GARDEN CONSERVANCY STAFF*

James Brayton Hall
President and Chief Executive Officer

Donna Mortensen
Chief Operating Officer

Bridget Connors, *Director of Membership & Annual Giving*

Pamela Governale, *Director of Preservation*

Patrick MacRae, *Director of Public Programs & Education*

Sarah Parker, *Director of Development*

George Shakespear, *Director of Communications*

Pruda Vingoe, *Executive Assistant to the President*

Kyle Beach, *Events Coordinator*

Arie Bram, *Database Manager*

Claire Briguglio, *Development Associate*

Kate Kerin, *Special Programs & New Region Coordinator, Open Days*

Rani Long, *Open Days Program Associate*

Lorraine Mahon, *Fellows Tours Coordinator*

Lori Moss, *Associate Director of Communications*

Cara Schaffer, *Administrative Coordinator*

Molly Scott, *Administrative Assistant*

Lauren Thompson, *Program Coordinator, Open Days*

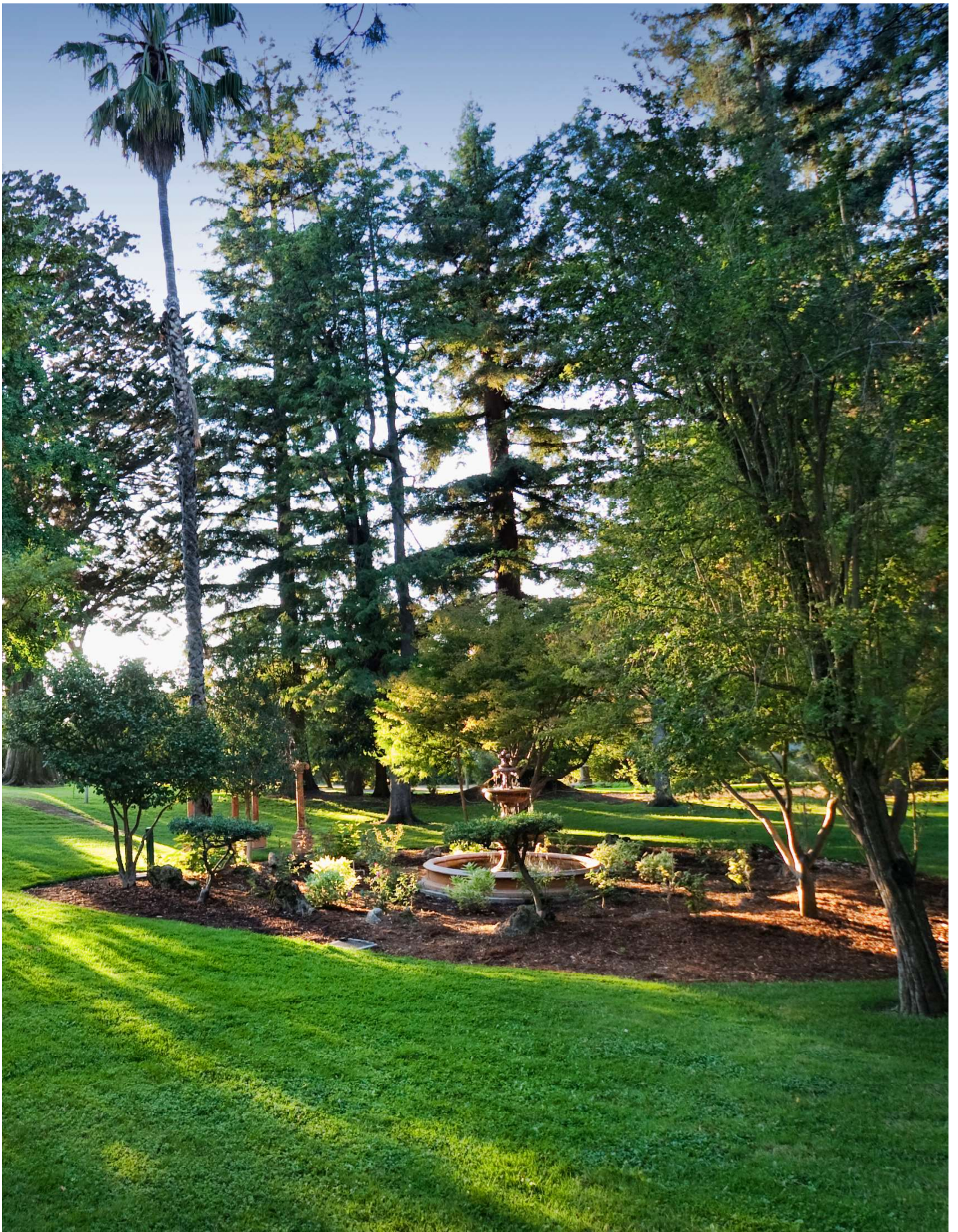
Anne Welles, *Associate Director of Preservation*

Stephanie Werskey, *Communications Manager*

Elaine Zanck, *Business Manager*

With a clear vision and a smart strategic plan, we are excited about where the Garden Conservancy goes from here. As we move forward with our plans, we thank you for being a part of that journey.

*Board and staff members who participated in the planning process for the Strategic Plan 2020-2025.



In 2019, the Garden Conservancy began a new preservation partnership with the Gardens at Palmdale, Fremont, CA. The gardens will be managed for use by the public and are now protected in perpetuity by a conservation easement held by the Garden Conservancy. Photo by Eric Figge, courtesy of Robson Homes