



BOTANIC GARDEN
FORT WORTH

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August 6, 2018

Mr. Chair and Park Board Members:

It is my pleasure, on behalf of the Fort Worth Botanic Garden's Strategic Planning Task Force, to present recommendations for ensuring a bright future for one of our community's most significant cultural assets. The Botanic Garden is a major part of the history and public life of our city and we feel that safeguarding it for future generations is of the utmost importance. With that in mind, we present what we believe are realistic and pragmatic recommendations based on in depth investigations of the Garden, its operations, funding, and future outlook.

While the Botanic Garden remains a place of great beauty and respite for our citizens, we are deeply concerned by the findings of the strategic plan, facility assessment, and currently projected funding. The Garden has more than \$15 million in deferred maintenance and an estimated \$1.2 million annual shortfall in operational funding. These deficits are symptomatic of systemic underfunding and the unsustainability of the financial model. Failure to take decisive actions to implement new revenue sources and a more strategic approach to managing the Garden will jeopardize the very existence of the Garden for future generations.

The process to arrive at these recommendations has been robust and involved multiple meetings, input from staff and the public, and many hours of reviewing and discussing information from a wide variety of sources. All the concerns presented here have been carefully considered and shaped by input received throughout our deliberations. We believe these findings and recommendations represent urgently needed, proactive steps to safeguard the Garden's future while also preserving access for all.

I hope that the report attached is helpful in understanding the challenges the Garden is facing and in explaining our recommendations for addressing them. If not, please feel free to contact me with any questions or concerns you may have.

We appreciate your time and consideration of this important issue for the future of Fort Worth.

Respectfully submitted,

Sal Espino, Chair

Fort Worth Botanic Garden Strategic Planning Task Force

Enriching people's lives through environmental stewardship and education

FORT WORTH. *A facility of the City of Fort Worth*
Parks and Community Services Department



**City of Fort Worth
Fort Worth Botanic Garden Strategic Planning Task Force**

Recommendations to City Council

Presented by:

Sal Espino, Chair

John Avila, Co-Chair

Task Force Members

City Manager's Office and Park & Recreation Department

Task Force for review and approval – August 6, 2018

Park & Recreation Advisory Board Work Session – September 26, 2018

Park & Recreation Advisory Board Action Item – October 24, 2018

Fort Worth City Council Presentation – October 30, 2018

Fort Worth City Council M&C – November 13, 2018

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Received January 15, 2018

Tab 3: Facilities Assessment, Fort Worth Botanic Garden. Elements of Architecture, et al. Final Version
Received August 1, 2018

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Executive Summary

Botanic Garden Strategic Plan Task Force

Purpose: To formulate prudent financial management policy recommendations that will strategically ensure the sustainability of the Fort Worth Botanic Garden and effectively maximize the full potential of the Garden as a world class museum while maintaining accessibility to all citizens.

Summary of Process

These recommendations result from a public process by a 16 member task force of community leaders, city staff, and various stakeholders. Five open task force meetings and a public meeting were held between February and August of 2018. The public will have five opportunities to make public comments at public, park board, and city council meetings; and comments were also accepted by mail and on-line. Additionally, the meetings and recommendations were covered by TV, print, and on-line media.

Key concerns were to:

- establish the current condition and long term needs of the Garden,
- determine what additional funding is needed to assure sustainability and review possible new funding sources,
- consider the impact of potential fees on the public and develop mechanisms that would assure accessibility, and
- evaluate various governance options and recommend which would best serve the Garden.

All data presented throughout the strategic planning process is available at www.fwbg.org/strategic-plan and all task force presentations and supporting documentation were made available to the public in hard copy at each meeting and is available in the addenda to these recommendations.

General Findings and Recommendations

1. ***Finding:*** There is a clear financial need to better fund general operations and maintain the current Garden infrastructure. Without transformational change, the Garden is not financially sustainable.
2. ***Finding:*** The Garden will require significant additional financial support to realize the aspirations of the 2010 Master Plan.

Recommendation: A broad based funding approach utilizing city funding, enhanced generated revenues, and bond funding should be used to address current deferred maintenance needs and assure adequate operational funding to prevent future maintenance and programmatic shortfalls.

3. **Finding:** *Operating revenue not only needs to increase, but to come from more broadly based sources including memberships, private and corporate giving, and greater generated revenues.*
4. **Finding:** *An admission fee is necessary to accomplish these goals, but should be closely tied to accessibility options that allow all citizens to benefit from the Garden and its programs. It not only provides needed financial support, but also drives a robust membership program important for a successful development program.*

Recommendation:

General Admission Fees (to replace current Japanese Garden and Conservatory admission fees).

- a. \$12adult / \$6 children 6-15 / \$10 Senior 65+ / Children 5 and under free.
- b. Membership Fees of \$50 individual, \$80 couple, \$100 family.

Accessibility Options:

- a. **Membership.** Family membership \$100 (cost of ~3.5 visits for family of 4) or \$8.33 a month. Reciprocal admission to 200+ gardens.
- b. **Lone Star Card Discounts** (SNAP/WIC Card).
 - a. Discounted Family Membership \$30 or \$2.50 per month. Includes Reciprocal Admission.
 - b. Museums4All. Family visits for \$1.00 admission per adult member, children under 18 free.
- c. **MusePass.** Free family passes in each Fort Worth public library. Encourages library visits.
- d. **Sponsored Field Trips.** Sponsored 3rd grade field trips for local Title I schools. Includes one free family pass per student.
- e. **Blue Star Program.** Free admission to families of active military members from Memorial Day to Labor Day.
- f. **Community Based Free Family Passes.** Free admission to a family distributed to locations that specialize in meeting the needs of underserved populations. Free passes would be distributed on request to non-profit organizations providing services to underserved children and families. This program has been highly successful at the Fort Worth Zoo. In the first year approximately 4,500 passes would be offered (based on 4.8% of visitors reported as low income in visitor intercept study and average family size of 2.86 per US Census).

- 5 **Finding:** *A more agile governance model is required that promotes development and management of private resources and allows business-based operations needed to fully realize the Garden's potential.*

Recommendation: *Governance of the Garden should be transitioned to non-profit management, with a staff-led process to select the best non-profit partner using criteria approved by City Council, followed by transitional goals and timelines established by contract and approved by City Council.*

More information on these recommendations and the process followed to develop them is contained in the following, full report.



Task Force Report of Findings and Recommendations

Background:

Purpose:

To formulate prudent financial management policy recommendations that will strategically ensure the sustainability of the Fort Worth Botanic Garden and effectively maximize the full potential of the Garden as a world class museum while maintaining accessibility to all citizens.

Process:

These recommendations result from a public process, led by a 16 member task force of community leaders and based on input from consultants, staff, task force members, and the public. Five task force meetings open to the public were held between February and August of 2018; the public will have five opportunities to make public comments at public, park board, and city council meetings; and numerous comments received on-line and by letter were considered while developing the recommendations.

Key objectives were to:

- establish the current condition and long term needs of the Garden,
- determine what additional funding is needed to assure sustainability and review possible new funding sources,
- consider the impact of potential fees on the public and develop mechanisms that would assure accessibility, and
- evaluate various governance options and recommend which would best serve the Garden.

All data presented throughout the strategic planning process is available on-line at <http://www.fwbg.org/strategic-plan> and all task force presentations and supporting documentation is available in the addenda to these recommendations. Key information is also summarized in this document.

Project Overview:

It was the goal of the task force and staff to create an open public process. The task force members (list attached, appendix 1) were selected by the City Manager's office with input from staff, council members, and community leaders. The task force proposal was reviewed by Council on January 30, 2018 and meetings began in February.

Information presented included:

February 16	Consultants presented the 2015 Strategic Plan, visitor intercept study and facility assessment; discussion on garden mission statement and task force charge.
March 19	Initial benchmarking information, revenue projections, and accessibility options presented and discussed.
April 19	Additional benchmarking information, revised revenue projections, and further discussions on accessibility.
May 14	Public meeting with staff presentations on information presented to date, 23 citizen speakers, and 40 written responses.
June 19	Revised revenue projections based on lower fee and visitation assumptions as suggested by the task force, staff presentations on recommended accessibility options, initial presentation and discussion of governance options, and presentation of initial vision for the future.
August 6	Review of draft recommendations to Park Board and Council, additional discussion of governance options and final revisions to admission fee structure.

All notices of meetings were published in advance, meetings were open to the public, the issues and findings were widely covered by print and broadcast media, and public input was accepted during the public meeting, Park Board meetings, and Council sessions.

The recommendations contained in this document were developed in draft form by staff based on discussions in the various meetings, reviewed by task force members and revised according to their comments, and presented in public forums according to City policy.

General Findings and Recommendations

- 1. Finding:** *There is a clear financial need to better fund operations and maintain the current Garden infrastructure. Without transformational change, the Garden is not financially sustainable.*
- 2. Finding:** *The Garden will require significant additional financial support to realize the aspirations of the 2010 Master Plan.*

Recommendation: *A broad based funding approach utilizing city funding, enhanced generated revenues, and bond funding should be used to address current deferred maintenance needs and assure adequate operational funding to prevent future maintenance and programmatic shortfalls.*

3. **Finding:** *Operating revenue not only needs to increase, but to come from more broadly based sources including memberships, private and corporate giving, and greater generated revenues.*
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5. **Finding:** *A more agile governance model is required that promotes development and management of private resources and allows business-based operations needed to fully realize the Garden's potential.*

Recommendation: *Governance of the Garden should be transitioned to non-profit management, with a staff-led process to select the best non-profit partner using criteria approved by City Council, followed by transitional goals and timelines established by contract and approved by City Council.*

Statement of Institutional Viability

The Fort Worth Botanic Garden has served our city's citizens and visitors for over 80 years. The Garden has grown into a major cultural asset for the state and the entire region, with significant portions recognized in the National Register of Historic Places. The Garden's facilities have been made possible through the support and collaboration of the City of Fort Worth, the Fort Worth Botanical Society, the Fort Worth Garden Club, and many donors and advocates.

However, operating costs have grown faster than revenues for decades resulting in significant deterioration of this community asset. Taxpayer support, combined with generated revenues from events, the limited admission fees currently collected at the Japanese Garden and Conservatory, and donations can no longer address growing needs for maintenance and improvement. The Garden has no endowment, does not have its own membership program, has no professional fundraising staff, no longer has an actively cultivated donor base, and is not in a position to successfully solicit, receive, or manage private funds.

Background: The **2016 Strategic Plan** found that the Garden's annual operations were underfunded by at least \$1.2 million, with some of the key needs including:

Major functions are not staffed or minimally staffed:

- Development and Membership
- Finance/Business Operations
- Curation
- Events

Other functions are understaffed:

- Visitor services
- Education/Public Programs
- Horticulture
- Maintenance and Operations

The strategic plan also found that in comparison to other highly successful large botanical gardens, there is a major imbalance in the Garden's funding formula. Taxpayer support, while critical to success, makes up too large a portion of the Garden's operating budget relative to funding streams from other sources. In particular, the study noted that general admissions drive memberships and memberships drive philanthropy. The Garden's lack of a general admission fee is negatively impacting those programs. In fact, the Garden is missing or underperforming in most key segments typical of a healthy, broad based funding strategy for cultural institutions.

Figure 1
FY2018 Fort Worth Botanic Garden Budget

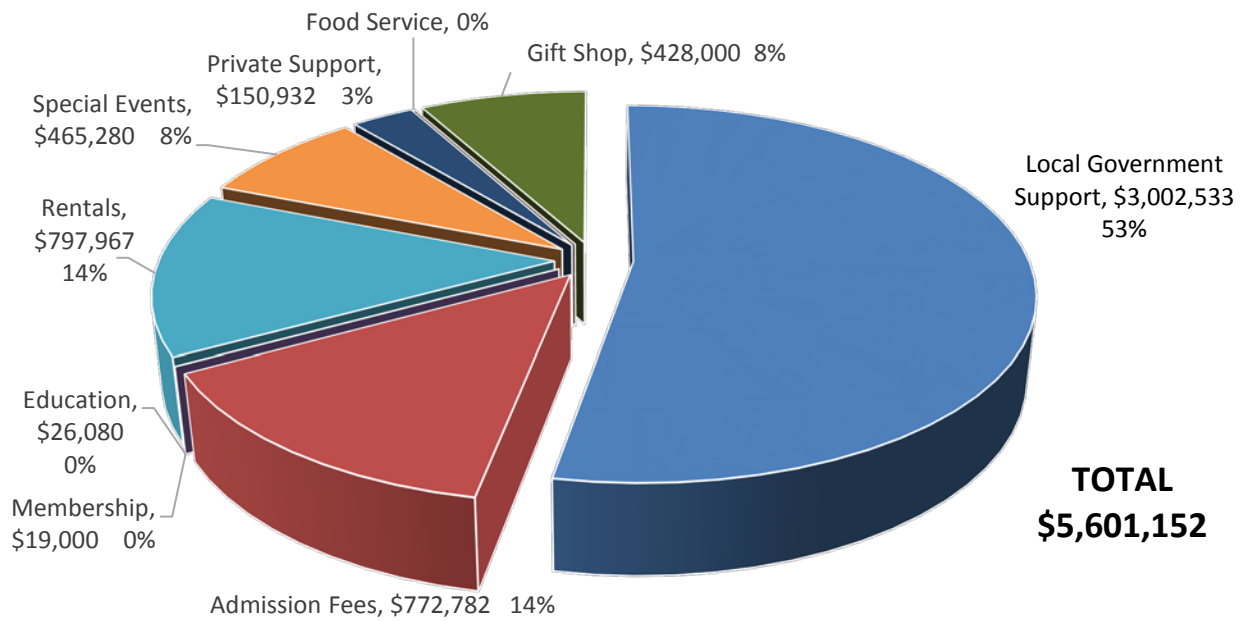
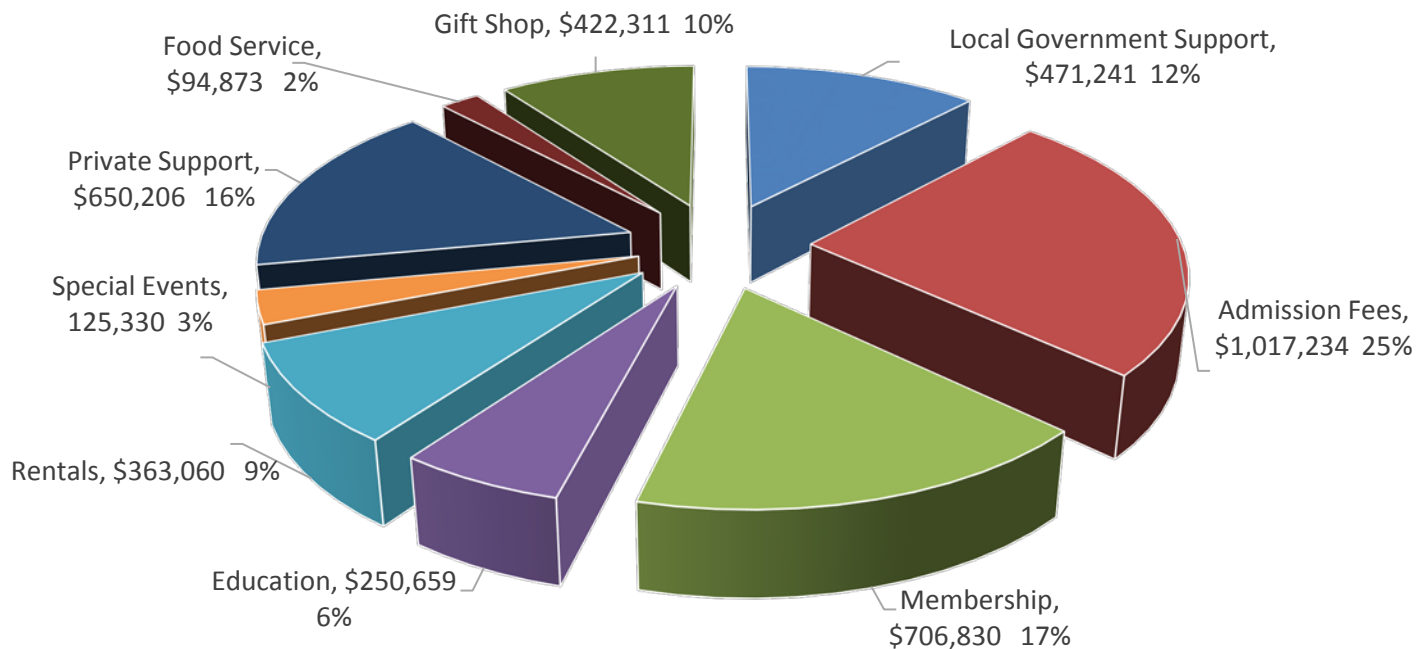


Figure 2

Average National Revenue Mix Peer Gardens (Budgets \$4.2 million+)



Findings: Institutional Viability

The combination of chronic operational underfunding and lack of a broad and diversified base of support leaves the Garden poorly positioned to be sustainable into the near, much less the distant, future. Without transformational change at the Garden, the task force finds that future delivery of even basic services of a botanical garden will become increasingly challenging and ultimately not possible.

Financial Plan Recommendations

Revenue Assumptions

Accomplishing this more diversified and resilient base of support will require:

1. Continued city support at the current level for year one and growing with the Consumer Price Index in foreseeable subsequent years,
2. Strong growth in philanthropic support,
3. Bond funding for deferred maintenance, and
4. Significant growth in generated revenue. No options appear to be feasible for generating adequate revenue other than a general admission fee

Table 1: Fee Recommendations*

Admission Fees	
Adult	\$12
Senior 65+ (20% Discount)	\$10
Children 6-15 (50% Discount)	\$6
Children 5 and under	Free

Annual Membership Levels	Includes	Fee	Cost/Month
Family	2 named adults and all children <18 in household	\$100	\$8.33
Lone Star Family	Same as Family	\$30	\$2.50
Individual	One named adult	\$50	\$4.17
Dual	Two named adults	\$80	\$6.67
Contributing	Family plus 1 additional adult per visit	\$200	\$16.67
Supporting	Family plus 2 additional adults per visit	\$500	
Sponsor	Family plus 2 adults per visit/2 event tickets	\$1000	
<i>Note: All memberships entitle holder to reciprocal privileges at 230 other gardens</i>			

Table 2: Revenue Projections*

Revenue Source	FY 2019	FY 2020	FY 2021	FY 2022	FY 2023	FY 2024
Admissions	\$982,138	\$2,343,755	\$2,414,068	\$2,486,490	\$2,561,084	\$2,637,917
Generated Revenue	\$1,563,840	\$1,569,065	\$1,446,987	\$1,635,544	\$1,504,933	\$1,705,182
Membership/Donation	\$256,000	\$342,000	\$403,225	\$470,071	\$518,453	\$576,638
City Subsidy	\$3,045,821	\$3,137,196	\$3,231,311	\$3,328,251	\$3,428,098	\$3,428,098
Gross Revenue	\$5,847,799	\$7,392,016	\$7,495,591	\$7,920,355	\$8,012,569	\$8,347,835

Note: Projected revenue from fees and memberships will be evaluated annually and adjusted as needed.

Table 3: Expense and Operating Balance Projections:

Expense	FY 2019	FY 2020	FY 2021	FY 2022	FY 2023	FY 2024
Gross Revenue	\$5,847,799	\$7,392,016	\$7,495,591	\$7,920,355	\$8,012,569	\$8,347,835
Base Labor Costs	\$3,413,589	\$3,515,997	\$3,621,477	\$3,730,121	\$3,842,024	\$3,957,285
Direct Expenses	\$1,987,401	\$2,047,023	\$2,108,434	\$2,171,687	\$2,236,837	\$2,303,942
Total Expenses	\$5,400,990	\$5,563,020	\$5,729,910	\$5,901,808	\$6,078,862	\$6,261,228
Net Base Revenue	\$446,809	\$1,828,996	\$1,765,681	\$2,018,548	\$1,933,707	\$2,086,608
Debt Service	\$0	\$756,281	\$915,000	\$868,313	\$847,563	\$826,813
Start-Up Costs	\$460,000	\$640,000	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Proposed Positions	\$48,030	\$322,249	\$512,320	\$617,870	\$745,885	\$768,262
Balance to Programming	-\$61,222	\$110,466	\$338,361	\$532,365	\$340,259	\$491,533

Note: Initial shortfalls would be covered by fund balances.

Assumptions:

1. First year visitation 267,550, conservatively estimates a 20% drop from Intercept Study 2017 estimate of 334,440. Attendance projection is also reduced to reflect an estimated 34,000 free children and 10,000 free admissions for members, for final Year 1 visitation projection of 223,939.
2. Average of 3% growth annually in attendance/event revenues and city support.
3. These projections include about \$61,000 proposed Year 1 revenue impact of a ½ price weekend day per month. Impact calculated to increase at 3% annually. Revenue would increase by those amounts annually if ½ days are not instituted or by some portion of them if they are not offered every month.

Financial Plan

Staff presented a number of options for a fiscally sound approach to financing the Garden. Of those options, the following outline seems the most feasible:

1. Use a combination of new general admission fees (**Table 1**) and current generated revenues, philanthropic support, and membership funds (**Table 2**) to bring annual operating revenue in line with actual needs. This is critical to prevent continued accumulation of deferred maintenance needs.
2. Use a portion of new admissions revenues to finance a public debt issue of \$10 million (**Table 4**) to address top priority deferred maintenance issues.
3. Frontload the startup of a new funding formula with supplemental city funds to improve guest experience, provide new programming, and fund marketing. An enhanced programming and marketing plan will leverage city funding through new generated revenue. Balance of Year 1 and 2 admission fee funds (**Table 3**) would go to finance additional startup costs.
4. Dedicate funding from future Bond Programs (\$5 million in 2022 and \$2 million in 2026) to fund infrastructure and site preparation that would address remaining deferred maintenance. These funds would be directed toward work that also advances plans for new facilities providing expanded public services.

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\$10 Million 20 Yr. Deferred Maintenance Bond

Table 4: Statement of Projected Debt Service



Preliminary

\$10,000,000

City of Fort Worth, Texas

Botanic Gardens Project

Equal Principal

Debt Service Schedule

Date	Principal	Coupon	Interest	Total P+I
09/30/2020	-	-	-	-
09/30/2021	500,000.00	4.150%	508,375.00	1,008,375.00
09/30/2022	500,000.00	4.150%	383,875.00	883,875.00
09/30/2023	500,000.00	4.150%	363,125.00	863,125.00
09/30/2024	500,000.00	4.150%	342,375.00	842,375.00
09/30/2025	500,000.00	4.150%	321,625.00	821,625.00
09/30/2026	500,000.00	4.150%	300,875.00	800,875.00
09/30/2027	500,000.00	4.150%	280,125.00	780,125.00
09/30/2028	500,000.00	4.150%	259,375.00	759,375.00
09/30/2029	500,000.00	4.150%	238,625.00	738,625.00
09/30/2030	500,000.00	4.150%	217,875.00	717,875.00
09/30/2031	500,000.00	4.150%	197,125.00	697,125.00
09/30/2032	500,000.00	4.150%	176,375.00	676,375.00
09/30/2033	500,000.00	4.150%	155,625.00	655,625.00
09/30/2034	500,000.00	4.150%	134,875.00	634,875.00
09/30/2035	500,000.00	4.150%	114,125.00	614,125.00
09/30/2036	500,000.00	4.150%	93,375.00	593,375.00
09/30/2037	500,000.00	4.150%	72,625.00	572,625.00
09/30/2038	500,000.00	4.150%	51,875.00	551,875.00
09/30/2039	500,000.00	4.150%	31,125.00	531,125.00
09/30/2040	500,000.00	4.150%	10,375.00	510,375.00
Total	\$10,000,000.00	-	\$4,253,750.00	\$14,253,750.00

Yield Statistics

Bond Year Dollars	\$102,500.00
Average Life	10.250 Years
Average Coupon	4.1500000%
Net Interest Cost (NIC)	4.1500000%
True Interest Cost (TIC)	4.1480092%
Bond Yield for Arbitrage Purposes	4.1480092%
All Inclusive Cost (AIC)	4.1480092%

IRS Form 8038

Net Interest Cost	4.1500000%
Weighted Average Maturity	10.250 Years

Table 5: Proposed 10 Year Financial Plan

2019 – 2023

Operating Budget					
	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Gross Revenue	\$ 5,847,798	\$ 7,392,016	\$ 7,495,591	\$ 7,920,355	\$ 8,012,569
Labor	\$ 3,461,619	\$ 3,838,246	\$ 4,133,797	\$ 4,347,991	\$ 4,587,909
Direct Expenses	\$ 1,987,401	\$ 2,047,023	\$ 2,108,434	\$ 2,171,687	\$ 2,236,837
Start Up Expenses	\$ 460,000	\$ 640,000	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Debt Service		\$ 756,281	\$ 915,000	\$ 868,313	\$ 847,563
Net to Programming	\$ (61,222)	\$ 110,466	\$ 338,360	\$ 532,364	\$ 340,260

2024 – 2028

Operating Budget					
	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028
Gross Revenue	\$ 8,347,835	\$ 8,580,151	\$ 8,817,022	\$ 9,060,662	\$ 9,311,268
Labor	\$ 4,725,547	\$ 4,867,313	\$ 5,013,333	\$ 5,163,733	\$ 5,318,645
Direct Expenses	\$ 2,303,942	\$ 2,373,061	\$ 2,444,253	\$ 2,517,580	\$ 2,593,108
Start Up Expenses	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Debt Service	\$ 826,813	\$ 806,063	\$ 785,313	\$ 764,563	\$ 743,813
Net to Programming	\$ 491,533	\$ 533,714	\$ 574,123	\$ 614,786	\$ 655,702

Table 6: Proposed Deferred Maintenance Funding

Proposed Deferred Maintenance Funding					
Year	Action	Funding Source	Principal	Interest Costs	Total Cost
2020	Bond 1	General Admission	\$ 10,000,000	\$ 4,263,750	\$ 14,263,750
2022	Bond 2	2022 Bond Election	\$ 5,000,000	\$ 2,131,875	\$ 7,131,875
2026	Bond 3	2026 Bond Election	\$ 2,000,000	\$ 852,750	\$ 2,852,750
Total Estimated Borrowing Costs			\$ 17,000,000	\$ 7,248,375	\$ 24,248,375

Table 7: 10 YEAR VISION PLAN

10 Year Vision Plan				
Goal		2022 Bond	2026 Bond	Philanthropy
Renovate Conservatory	\$ 5,300,000	\$ 500,000	\$ -	\$ 4,800,000
Reevaluate Mission				
Increase Flexibility				
Refocus Collection				
Increase Use				
Improve Circulation	\$ 6,800,000	\$ 1,000,000	\$ -	\$ 5,800,000
Increase Safety				
Improve Visitor Services				
Build Better Connections				
Provide Better Access				
Improve Parking				
Teaching Gardens	\$ 5,600,000	\$ 500,000	\$ -	\$ 5,100,000
Expand Culinary Displays				
Renovate West Vista				
Teaching Garden				
Trial Garden				
North Texas Dry Landscape				
Children's Garden	\$ 20,500,000	\$ 3,000,000	\$ 2,000,000	\$ 15,500,000
Relocate Maintenance Compound				
Improve Service Access				
Children's Garden				
Education Building				
Total Funding	\$ 38,200,000	\$ 5,000,000	\$ 2,000,000	\$ 31,200,000

Programming Support

When additional fees are implemented, the visitors paying those fees will have commensurately higher expectations of their experience. As developing and funding new facilities, equipment, and staffing needed for accepting and managing those fees will take most of the additional revenue projected for the first 18 months, another source of funding for these service improvements will be needed.

It is recommended that the City provide an additional \$350,000 annually for two years in upfront funding to help support this enhanced programming, which in turn is expected to build demand and provide future returns on that investment. The recommendation is based on staff proposals for:

1. Expanded programs for elementary school groups,
2. Increased outreach in the Green Revolution education and skills development program for underprivileged teenagers,
3. Better wayfinding and interpretive/educational signage and facilities,
4. Improvements in plant collections to increase diversity of plant materials and improve the aesthetic and educational value of plantings, and
5. Expanded marketing program in order to keep the public informed of new programs available to them

Table 8: Proposed Programming

Upfront Programming	FY 2019	FY 2020	Program Descriptions
Seasonal color display change outs	\$40,000	\$40,000	Adding an additional color change throughout the Garden will improve the overall aesthetic and value of plantings.
Small Exhibits (2-3 month)	\$100,000	\$60,000	Small Exhibits like dragons in the garden, various art sculptor displays i.e. Big Bugs, rabbit exhibit.
Large Exhibits (3-4 month)	\$150,000*** already a part of FY2019 budget	\$120,000	Large exhibits attracting new audiences are needed to stay relevant and meet the higher expectation of our newly paying visitors. i.e. Japanese Lantern Festival, Christmas Light show, and Orchid Show.
Harvest Themed Programming	\$15,000	\$15,000	Seasonal programming that speaks to the importance of plants in our everyday lives. Partnering with BRIT and the back yard vegetable garden campaign.
Movie Nights	\$20,000	\$15,000	Movie nights geared towards targeted audiences that currently aren't represented in the Garden.
Additional Educational Programming BRIT	\$50,000	\$50,000	New educational programming that target demographics not currently represented at the Garden. Botanical art classes with exhibits and workshops.
Additional Marketing Support	\$20,000	\$20,000	Expanded marketing programming dollars to inform public of all of the new programs at the Garden.
Green Revolution/ Title One Outreach Program	\$30,000	\$30,000	Increased outreach to underprivileged teenagers to promote environmental sciences and Title 1 school outreach partnering with FWISD to promote accessibility.

Butterflies in the Garden	\$0	\$150,000*** Will be budgeted for FY20	B.I.T.G. reaches over 30k people over a one month period.
Wayfinding/ Interpretive Signage	\$75,000		Interpretive signage that tells the story of each garden from an educational standpoint.
Grand Total	\$500,000	\$500,000	

Recommendation: A future licensing or management agreement with a non-profit organization should include provisions for hiring development staff by FY 2020, funded through generated revenue and/or donated funds.

Financial Accessibility

While it is unquestionable that fees can be an impediment to access if not thoughtfully implemented, research shows that a number of other issues are often as important, or more so, than cost in deterring visitation by low income and other underserved residents. These issues include:

1. Time constraints due to long work schedules and multiple jobs,
2. Difficulty finding transportation,
3. Not feeling welcome,
4. Poor access to informational channels where they can learn about cultural offerings available,
5. And most importantly a lack of programming that addresses their lives, needs, and interests.

A traditional response has been free days, but multiple studies show that the demographic makeup of visitors to cultural institutions on free vs. ticketed days is almost identical. This is in large part because many of the key concerns above are not addressed by free days, most importantly the flexibility to visit whenever time and availability of transport allow. Free days, in essence, have been an “easy out” allowing cultural institutions to say they are reaching out to underserved audiences without doing the hard work required to really do so.

As a result, the task force believes the following **key concerns** must be addressed by a successful accessibility program:

1. Provide multiple free or low cost options for accessing the Garden that allow the same flexibility to visit enjoyed by guests paying regular fees.
2. Reduce impact on revenue and membership through carefully crafted programs providing access targeted at those who need them.
3. Avoid issues other institutions have experienced relying on free admission to assure accessibility.

Recommended Accessibility Options

1. **Membership.** Family membership \$100 (cost of ~3.5 visits for family of 4) or \$8.33 a month. Reciprocal admission to 200+ gardens.
2. **Lone Star Card Discounts (SNAP/WIC Card).**
 - Discounted Family Membership \$30 or \$2.50 per month. Includes Reciprocal Admission.
 - Museums4All. National program allows family visits for \$1.00 admission per adult family member, children under 18 free.
3. **MusePass.** Free family passes in each Fort Worth public library. Encourages library visits.
4. **Sponsored Field Trips.** Sponsored 3rd grade field trips for local Title I schools. Includes one free family pass per student.
5. **Blue Star Program.** Free admission to families of active military members from Memorial Day to Labor Day
6. **Community Based Free Family Passes.** Free admission to a family distributed to locations that specialize in meeting the needs of underserved populations. Free passes would be distributed on request to non-profit organizations providing services to underserved children and families. This program has been highly successful at the Fort Worth Zoo. In the first year approximately 4,500 passes would be offered (based on 4.8% of visitors reported as low income in visitor intercept study and average family size of 2.86 per US Census).

These are initial accessibility recommendations. All are proposed for testing and evaluation upon implementation of an admission fee. Some of these programs may not be available permanently as staff should be authorized to discontinue programs that do not accomplish the goals stated above. However, staff is charged to assure that a range of these or similar options are always available to assure accessibility to all who wish to visit.

Governance Recommendation

The Garden is in transition. Recent changes include creation of a special revenue fund, allowing all public-support to flow into a single fund administered by the city. This replaces a system in place for many years in which the city issued contracts to the Fort Worth Botanical Society and the Fort Worth Garden Club. Under those agreements these important supporting organizations received and managed generated funds from various facilities and activities around the Garden. Bringing together all funding and employees under a single management system was the first step in creating a unified institution.

At the current time, the City of Fort Worth, through the Park & Recreation Department and the Garden Director, directly manages all funding and how it is used. However, there has been movement away from direct public management of municipal cultural institutions, as best exemplified locally by the Fort Worth Zoo. The next major opportunity to transform the Garden's future is a proposed change of governance model.

Criteria for Governance Model

The task force considered the following criteria in evaluating possible management models.

1. Quality of service
2. Revenue generation and efficiency of operation
3. Feasibility
4. Long-term development goals

Possible Governance Models

The task force considered three potential management systems:

1. Continued City management
2. Single support group, **Friends**, that reports to the Garden Director
3. License or management agreement with an existing non-profit to operate the Garden

The consensus on the pros and cons of each proposal are:

Option 1: City Management

Structure	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Council is primary governance board 2. City Manager's Office maintains direct management 3. All funds held in city accounts 4. All staff are city employees 	
Pros	Cons
Fully integrated operation	Less responsive to changing needs
Direct public oversight of finances and operations	City processes not designed for business focus
City provides support services (HR, legal, payroll, etc.)	Soliciting philanthropy is difficult under municipal management
City guarantees of solvency	No good structure for holding/managing private funds
	Subject to annual budget process and competing priorities.

Option 2: Single Support Group

Structure	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Council maintains primary governance, Garden Director manages non-profit board 2. Management split between city oversight of publicly funded operations and non-profit board oversight of privately funded efforts 3. Generated and other public funds held in city accounts, membership and donated funds held in non-profit accounts 4. Staff work for both city (operations) and non-profit (membership, development) 	
Pros	Cons
Coordinates public and private garden operations under Garden Director	Management challenges of dual governance of funds and staff, similar to past
Private funds improve flexibility	Perceptions of city control will likely affect fundraising efforts

Allows highest and best use of resources	Challenges remain with flexibility of use for generated funds
Preserves strong public oversight	Different staff salary/benefit structures creates fairness/liability concerns

Option 3: License or Management by Independent Non-Profit

Structure	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Non-Profit board operates and governs Garden under licensure or management agreement with the City of Fort Worth 2. City provides support through licensure or management fee 3. All generated and donated funds are held and managed in non-profit accounts 4. All staff are non-profit employees 	
Pros	Cons
All operations combined under single management	Loss of city support services, requiring sophisticated organizational structure to support
Maximum flexibility in use of funds	100% independent and responsible beyond licensing/management fee
Operational model can be business-based	Less public influence on decision-making beyond contract terms
Best model for philanthropic support efforts	Pension and other issues with transitioning staff to private employment
Council retains oversight under contract	
Contract can ensure long-term city operational support level	

Findings and Recommendation

In order for the Botanic Garden to achieve its full potential as a world class garden, the Task Force recommends a non-profit management structure. Given the similar mission, physical presence and established relationship with BRIT, due consideration should be given to the management of the Botanic Garden by this institution. This recommendation is based on the following:

1. The unmet needs of the Garden are significant enough that generated revenue and tax support alone will never allow the Garden to become the outstanding cultural institution Fort Worth needs and deserves. A vibrant philanthropic base of support is essential that can only be fully realized through an entity independent of the bureaucracy, fiscal constraints, and political uncertainties of city government.
2. A strong and well-conceived agreement between the City and an independent institution allows contractual guarantees of continued city support that can leverage other revenue sources through philanthropy, membership, and generated revenue. All are needed in order for the Garden to achieve a more balanced and resilient funding formula.
3. A single team, working under one management, is better able to develop a strong mission and present a unified and inspiring vision to citizens and the philanthropic community. This has

proven extremely difficult in the past with separate public and private entities fulfilling different responsibilities within the overall operation.

4. A non-profit allows important operational efficiencies and more agility in responding to challenges.
5. As demands for basic public services grows, most models of best practices in public administration no longer find managing cultural institutions to be part of the core responsibility of governmental entities.
6. Many financial management instruments and strategies are available to a non-profit that would not be possible under public management. This larger portfolio of options can be critical to managing growth and building assets, especially endowment.
7. Compliance issues with government accounting standards (GASB) are greatly reduced when all funds are held privately and all employees work for a single employer.

Recommendation:

Due to the complexity of this decision, it is further recommended that staff be authorized, within a framework of criteria approved by City Council, to engage in discussions with potential non-profit partners, negotiate an agreement, and create a plan including goals and deadlines for implementation with the most suitably matched partner. The final structure should demonstrate due appreciation and opportunity for the continued engagement and support of existing partners, such as the Fort Worth Garden Club and the Fort Worth Botanical Society. The resulting proposal would be presented to council for final approval.

Recommendations for those criteria are:

1. Existing or achievable alignment of the missions of the non-profit and the Garden
2. Demonstrated financial stability of the proposed non-profit partner
3. Strong ties to the Fort Worth community and to Texas, but also with a broader national or global perspective on programs and impacts
4. A strong, diverse governing board able to assume responsibility for the combined needs of both organizations and willing to build strong, mutually beneficial working relationships with existing support groups
5. An existing, highly professional staff of sufficient size and with a skill set complementary to the needs and priorities of the Garden, including a strong development/membership staff
6. Demonstrated, sustained record of successful fundraising
7. Ability to satisfy legal selection requirements for a city licensure or management agreement
8. A clear track record of service to all citizens of Fort Worth, including underserved and diverse audiences
9. A carefully conceived transition plan for current Garden employees to suitable positions within the new organization whenever possible