



# MEMORANDUM

**Phone:** 452-5258; 452-4169  
**Date:** March 4, 2008  
**To:** Parks & Community Services Board  
**From:** Glenn Kost, Scott Vander Hyden  
**Subject:** Bellevue Botanical Garden Master Plan Update  
**Action Requested:** *Recommend approval of Master Plan Update*

**Summary of action requested:** Parks staff will present the preferred alternative Master Plan Update for review at your March 11th Park Board meeting. Depending on the public input received at your meeting, the Board may:

- Recommend approval of the Preferred Alternative;
- Recommend approval subject to specific changes; or
- Defer a recommendation to a later meeting, and provide staff with direction.

After the Board delivers a recommendation, staff will then present the preferred plan to the City Council for further review, and after a SEPA determination, adoption.

**Community involvement process since the October 2007 Parks Board Meeting:** After the October Park Board meeting, the alternatives were refined by the Task Force and Design Team and presented again to the Bellevue Botanical Garden Society Board at their monthly meetings in January and February. The City also hosted a second community meeting on January 17, attended by approximately 60 residents, to present the preferred master plan update and final recommendations. The preferred Master Plan was presented at the February 12<sup>th</sup> Park Board meeting where public comment was heard. Support for the plan, as well as several objections, were heard. Specific objections were raised about the large size of the visitor center and parking lot. Three board members were unable to attend, so a decision was made to defer recommendation until the March meeting when all board members are expected to be present.

**The Preferred Master Plan Alternative Update – Summary of key changes**

This master plan updates the 1997 master plan and 2002 visitor center plan. Key changes from those plans include:

- Larger visitor center facilities – this plan provides for a three-building campus totaling approximately 8,150 square feet including the existing Shorts House of 2,400 square feet. This compares to the 2002 plan of approximately 7,000 square feet. See full description

below and on the attached page. The Sharps cabin will be relocated within the garden to accommodate this expansion.

- Expanded parking lot – provides for an approximately 157-car parking lot, expanding the existing 53-car lot and the 2002 plan recommending an 83-car capacity.
- Expanded/relocated maintenance facilities – relocates the existing storage facilities off of Main Street to the newly acquired Wilburton Property house site, which provides for near-term expansion of storage and maintenance space. The plan also includes two small, satellite maintenance facilities for volunteer tool and supply space. Relocating the existing storage facilities allows for the reintroduction of a viewpoint feature included in the 1997 plan.
- Relocated the Eastern Garden – from near the existing Yao Garden to a location west of the existing wetland pond.
- Added features – provides a tree house feature to allow visitors to experience “treetop” and territorial views of the garden, and proposes a low-impact suspension bridge across the wooded ravine.

## **KEY PLANNING ISSUES AND TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATIONS**

**New Visitor Center** - The preferred plan contemplates that the scale and architecture of the buildings would be in keeping with the residential character of the Garden and its surroundings, allowing the Garden to remain the focal point for the visitor. The existing *Shorts House* would remain as-is, and serve much as it does today, as an informal gathering place with a small library. A smaller (1,450 sq. ft.) *visitor services building* would be located at the current main public entry point. A 4,200 sq. ft. facility serving educational and administrative functions would be located at the current Garden offices/caretaker’s house near Main Street. This facility would also include an outdoor patio area to compliment the meeting/classroom space and to provide flexibility for programming needs. Because of the inherent differences between the visitor services functions and those of a meeting/classroom facility, these two functions are recommended to be separate. The 1,500 sq ft meeting room would be able to accommodate up to 120 people in a classroom setting, and could be divided into two or three smaller spaces to accommodate meetings, classes, lectures, workshops, and special events.

**Sharps Cabin Relocation** - The construction of a new Visitor Center will require the cabin’s relocation. We recommend relocating the cabin to the south end of the Lost Meadow Trail near the remains of the original homestead foundation to celebrate the site’s historical significance. We are currently exploring potential interpretive uses and partnerships with the Eastside Heritage Center for this facility.

**Maintenance Facility Location** The current maintenance facility is a 5,000 square foot fenced holding yard located at the far west end of the developed portion of the Garden. The 2002 plan proposes the construction of a 3,000 square foot maintenance building and expanding the existing area to 15,000 square feet. Highly visible from Main Street, it is considered an aesthetically poor location and undersized for the long-term needs of the Garden. Rather than re-developing another portion of the Garden to build a maintenance facility, the task force has identified the existing home site located on the Wilburton property as the preferred choice. The existing 3,000 square foot house and garage is located on a site of approximately 1/2 acre (20-25,000 square feet), can be used immediately, and would require no tree removal. Future improvements will accommodate most long-range maintenance and storage needs. The plan also proposes two small (500sq ft or less) storage facilities (tool sheds) located strategically within the Garden to provide conveniently located space for small tools and supplies for volunteer gardeners. The task force also explored the possibility of locating a

small propagation greenhouse on site, but was unable to find an appropriate location for such a facility.

**Wilburton Acquisition Property Use** - In March 2006, the last large open space parcel adjacent to the Bellevue Botanical Garden was purchased by the City of Bellevue. This heavily wooded 17 acre parcel preserves the Garden's existing seclusion and wildlife habitat. Except for using the existing home site as a maintenance location, no major development is recommended on this parcel. Much of the site's topography is steeply sloping and classified as sensitive area, restricting site development. This property's greatest asset is simply the natural buffer and wildlife habitat it maintains from encroaching urban development. This area, and all natural areas throughout the Garden, should be preserved and enhanced through good forest management practices. The existing gravel roadway would be partially relocated and utilized as a service drive and public trail access. A habitat study, along with a tree inventory, is underway which will guide the future of the Garden's forest management practices.

**Parking Needs and Access** - The increasing popularity of the Garden, coupled with future Visitor Center development plans and continued Garden expansions, require planning for future parking capacity. The existing 53-car parking lot is often full during nice weather, and the Garden continues to grow in popularity. The frequency of special events is also increasing, placing greater pressure on nearby overflow lots. The 2002 Visitor Center plan proposed an additional 30 spaces, which the task force believes to be inadequate to accommodate the projected long-term growth of the Garden. The proposed plan provides for an expansion of approximately 100 spaces. The task force believes that expansion beyond this size is inappropriate and not keeping with the character and scale of the Garden. The parking lot is the first point of contact for many Garden visitors and must create a good first impression. Any design should include the use of natural drainage practices and other sustainable techniques to minimize the lot's visual and environmental impacts to the Garden. A continued dependence on the use of nearby parking lots is recommended to accommodate special events and other heavy use days. The staff is working closely with the Bellevue School District staff to ensure the long-term use of the adjacent WISC site (73 spaces) and School District facility across Main Street (over 100 spaces), together with the continued use of the parking lot in Wilburton Hill Park (155 spaces). The staff is also exploring the potential to include a Metro Bus stop along Main Street, a crosswalk across Main Street, and to provide a more convenient bicycle route to and from the Garden. A traffic analysis is also being conducted as part of the Master Plan process.

**Main Street Frontage and Garden Entrance** - A more inviting, visible, and safe Garden entry are high priorities. The existing parking lot's entrance is difficult to see from Main Street when approached from the west. First time visitors frequently drive past. Better traffic sightlines and stronger entry presence are needed for safety and aesthetic reasons, so the plan proposes a modest (15-40') relocation of the entry to the west, along with additional landscape modifications to improve sight visibility and to create a more inviting entry along Main Street. Creating landscape improvements and a stronger pedestrian connection along Main Street, especially along the adjacent school district-owned WISC site and Wilburton Park, are recommended to add to the Garden's presence for passersby and to add to the convenience for overflow users attending special Garden events.

**Public Access and Lake to Lake Trail Connection**-To address existing conflicts between the trail and the pedestrian-vehicular circulation at the Garden entrance, the plan recommends rerouting the Lake to Lake Trail away from the drop-off/pedestrian entrance.

The existing Lake-to-Lake Trail (LLT) enters the Garden and hugs the western and southern edges of the parking lot. The Master Plan realigns the trail to follow Main Street, cross the parking lot entrance and parallel the eastern edge of the parking lot. Paths leading to the Garden from the LLT compel visitors to make an intentional choice to enter the Garden. This alignment separates Garden foot traffic from LLT walkers, runners and cyclists. The Master Plan Update reinforces previous plans to create a pedestrian circulation system that is served by a single public point of access – the Garden entrance. The design strives to make visits to the Garden intentional by restricting the entrance and exiting options. This eliminates the Garden from becoming a short-cut or corridor for other pedestrian, jogger or bicycle routes. This approach is a realistic and appropriate way to protect the Garden’s integrity, mission and plant collection.

The plan also recommends the long-term elimination of the pedestrian access from the multi-family residential property to the west, which has caused security problems over the years. This would be only be completed when a convenient pedestrian alternative has been developed along the east side of 118<sup>th</sup> Ave SE.

**Accessibility** - Accessibility is a critical component of the garden experience. While not all areas may become accessible, a good faith effort will be made to provide opportunities for all visitors to experience the Garden.

**Tree House/Overlook** – To provide visitors the ability to experience treetop and territorial views of the surrounding gardens, a unique tree house feature is proposed. The preferred location is along the southern end of the main loop trail leading to a vista that would provide territorial views south across the Great Meadow.

**Eastern Garden Sequence** - The Yao Garden was developed as a part of the sister city relationship between Bellevue and Yao, Japan. Very popular with Garden visitors, Yao Garden is one of the many jewels of the Garden. The 1997 plan shows an area south of the Yao Garden to be developed as an “Eastern Garden,” which is an area currently occupied by the most significant stand of Douglas Fir in the garden. While the Task force continues to support the creation of an “Eastern Garden,” it is proposed to be relocated to the northwest shore of the pond near the Garden’s center. Interest in this Garden Room springs from members of various Asian communities. Thematic development would focus on a fusion of Pacific Rim and Pacific Northwest Garden cultures and traditions.

**Technology in the Garden** - Technological advances present new and affordable opportunities to enhance educational and interpretive programs within the Garden. Plant identification and collection databases could be accessed in the Visitor Center, in classrooms and in the field. Remote controlled digital cameras could provide real time images from a lofty coniferous canopy to specific wildlife habitat sites. Provisions for technological integration should be a consideration in future Garden development.

**The Perennial Borders** – the plan recommends that the City work with our partners to make modest revisions to the perennial borders to create better visual and physical integration access to the rest of the Garden, particularly views to the west toward the future Wetland-Sun Terrace Gardens.

**GARDEN DESIGN PROJECTS** – While not part of the formal master plan, further design work is proceeding in the following two areas:

- **Hanging Gardens-** A major natural feature of the Garden is a significant ravine identified as the future “Hanging Gardens” in the 1997 plan. This potential “garden room” has enjoyed staff and society support and may pique significant donor interest. Visitors can now experience this unique natural feature from a pedestrian loop trail constructed this past spring. The preferred plan proposes an extension of the existing trail system, including a low-impact pedestrian loop trail that includes a significant suspension bridge that allows visitors the ability to experience the tree canopy unlike anywhere else in the Garden. Low impact construction techniques would be used to minimize the impact of this structure on vegetation.

- **Wetland-Sun Terrace Gardens-** The existing Master Plan identifies the westernmost portion of the Garden as a wetland garden, sun terrace, and view point. The “view point” would be located in the area now occupied by the existing maintenance yard. It would provide territorial views into the Garden and seasonal views toward Downtown Bellevue.

## Bellevue Botanical Garden Proposed Facility Programming

### **Visitor Services Center**

**Function:** Visual/Physical Sense of Entry, Greeting and Orientation

**Components:** Tour gathering place; way-finding; interpretation, small exhibition; donor recognition ; gift shop (and shop support); restrooms

**Description:**

Located at the desired entrance to the BBG, this building, staffed by volunteer greeters and docents, gives visitors their first impression of the Garden. It is visually stunning, well integrated into the topography of the site, and fully accessible. Visitors are welcomed, oriented, and encouraged to visit the gift shop. They have access to garden guides, maps and other print materials. A small exhibition space allows rotation of interpretive displays consistent with BBG education program objectives and areas of current special interest within the garden. This is where all garden tours begin and end, with room for docents to greet and orient their tour groups before heading into the garden.

### **Shorts Center**

**Function:** Visitor Amenity

**Components:** Restrooms; food service; resource center (reference library, computer stations)

**Description:**

We envision a comfortable, welcoming space for visitors to enjoy “light fare” in a small café, along with access to computer stations and small reference library. This space is not suitable for exhibitions, lectures or interpretive displays. Rather, it is a “sweet spot” from which to enjoy views of the garden, seek shelter, linger over horticultural and botanical publications, and access our searchable on-line database. The gift shop may be located here, pending further study. We anticipate very limited modifications to the existing Shorts house.

### **Education Center**

**Function:** Education, Special Event, Administrative

**Components:** Classroom/workshop/meeting; administrative offices; restrooms; storage; catering kitchen

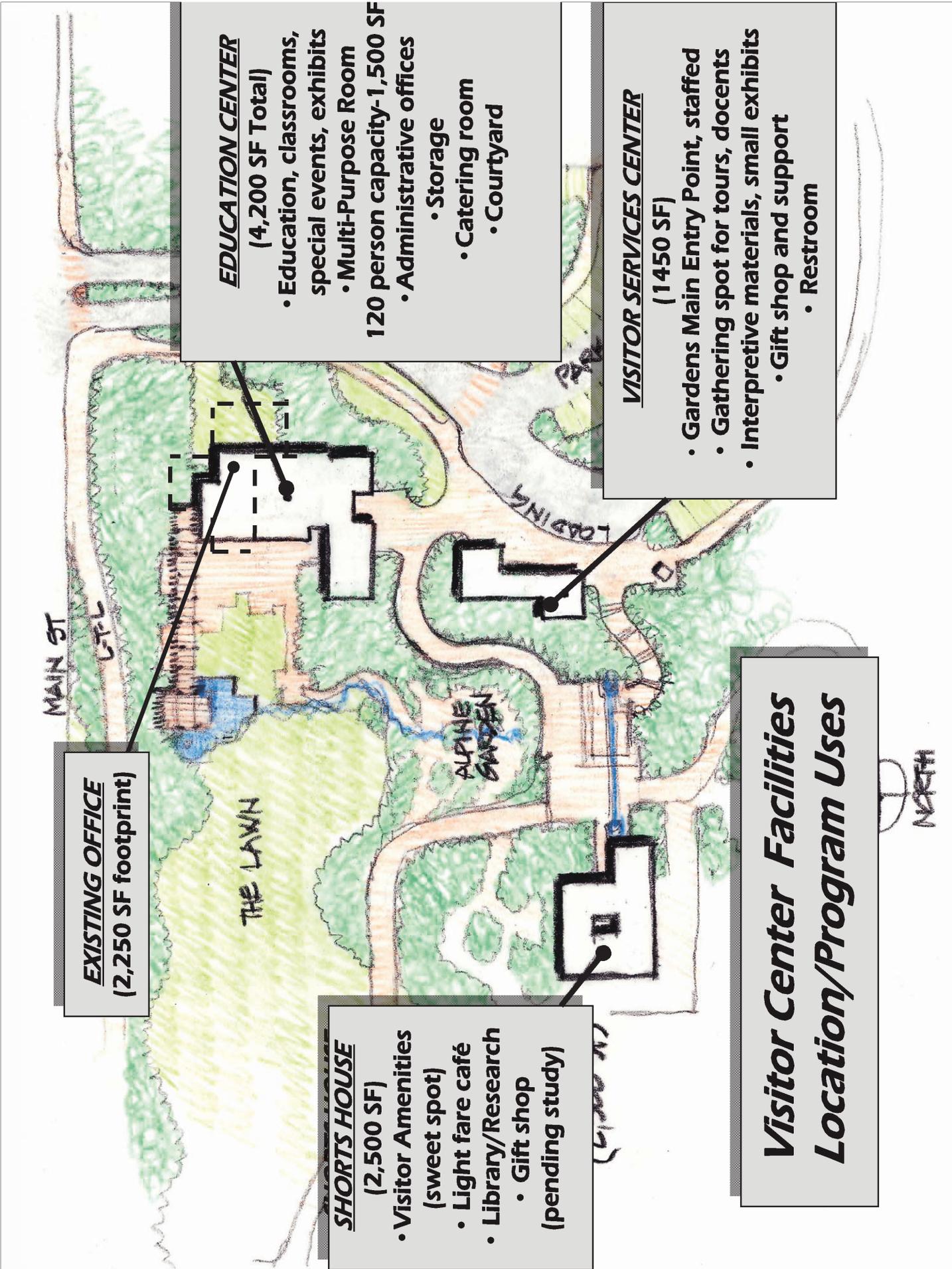
**Description:**

We envision a space that is as modular and flexible as possible to accommodate a broad spectrum of multipurpose use, beautifully designed to be in keeping with large-residential scale, and which opens out onto courtyard space to blur the line between indoor/outdoor and gives the sense of meeting “in the garden”. Administrative offices and storage to support education and event programming will be housed here.

We anticipate a broad spectrum of mission-based programming to include adult education programs, workshops, and expanded Living Lab children’s education program. The assembly room would accommodate approximately 120 people in a lecture-style seating configuration, though a modular design will allow multiple concurrent uses for smaller groups in either workshop, conference, or lecture-style configurations within partitioned spaces. The ability to open the room onto a courtyard will allow some flexibility to host small exhibitions, fund-raising events, plant shows and sales, and public events.

Revised February 1, 2008





**EXISTING OFFICE**  
(2,250 SF footprint)

**SHORTS HOUSE**  
(2,500 SF)

- Visitor Amenities (sweet spot)
- Light fare café
- Library/Research
- Gift shop (pending study)

**EDUCATION CENTER**  
(4,200 SF Total)

- Education, classrooms, special events, exhibits
- Multi-Purpose Room

120 person capacity-1,500 SF

- Administrative offices
- Storage
- Catering room
- Courtyard

**VISITOR SERVICES CENTER**  
(1450 SF)

- Gardens Main Entry Point, staffed
- Gathering spot for tours, docents
- Interpretive materials, small exhibits
- Gift shop and support
- Restroom

***Visitor Center Facilities Location/Program Uses***



**Relocate entry 15-40ft west**

- Increased visibility
- More inviting entry presence

**Parking lot expansion**

- Increase of approx. 100 spaces (53 existing) and 20,000 SF of new parking area
- Expansion as parking demand requires
  - Latest “green” technologies
  - Sustainable practices to minimize environmental impacts