



# The Hudson Gardens & Event Center

Comprehensive Vision,  
Strategic, and Facility Plan

JULY 2025



**SOUTH  
SUBURBAN**  
PARKS & RECREATION





## Acknowledgements

Special recognition is given to the Hudson Gardens volunteers that contribute more than 4,700 hours each year to sustain the beauty and growth of the Gardens. The ongoing support from our patrons and community members allows Hudson Gardens to thrive as a cultural hub and keep the treasured landscape free and open to the public.

### South Suburban Board of Directors

Pam Eller, Chair  
Pete Barrett  
Cathie Frazzini  
Keith Gardner  
Ken Lucas  
Luke Lorenz  
Elizabeth Watson

### South Suburban Staff

Rob Schoeber, Interim Executive Director  
Nicole Stehlik, Director of Recreation  
Melissa Reese-Thacker, Director of Planning  
Tatianna Langjahr, Manager of Hudson Gardens  
Becky Grubb, Manager of Communications  
Mindy Albert, Strategic Initiatives Manager  
Olivia Olson, Marketing Specialist  
Joe Ott, Planning Analyst

### City of Littleton

Mike Gent, Deputy City Manager  
JD McCrumb, Chair, Arts and Culture Board  
Tim Nimz, Littleton Museum Director

### Focus Groups

Hudson Garden Volunteers  
Littleton Art & Culture Board  
Nature, Grounds, and Environmental Community Group  
Public Events and Performances Community Group  
South Suburban Staff at Hudson Gardens

### Consultants

BerryDunn  
Studios Collective  
DHM Design



# Table of Contents

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY ..... 4

A Living Legacy .....5

Hudson Gardens Mission Statement.....6

## OUR HISTORY ..... 7

Our History .....8

Operational Changes .....8

## HUDSON GARDENS TODAY ..... 9

The Heart of Operations ..... 10

Facilities and Grounds..... 10

Programs and Events ..... 10

Staffing ..... 10

The Greater Context ..... 10

■ South Suburban Mission ..... 11

■ South Suburban Vision ..... 11

■ South Suburban Values ..... 11

■ South Suburban Guiding Principles ..... 11

Map 1: Hudson Gardens Existing Site Plan ... 12

## LISTENING TO THE COMMUNITY ..... 14

Approach..... 15

Survey Responses..... 16

■ Top Reason for Visiting..... 16

■ Top Program Interests..... 16

■ Most Visited Areas ..... 16

Live Performances ..... 16

Large Scale Events ..... 17

Summary of Findings ..... 17

## NEEDS AND OPPORTUNITIES..... 18

Understanding the Gardens' Potential ..... 19

Facility and Site Assessment..... 19

Demographics .....20

Services Assessment .....21

Financial Analysis .....22

## NEEDS AND OPPORTUNITIES (CONTINUED)

Program-Specific Insights.....23

Market Analysis.....23

■ Visitor Patterns ..... 23

■ Opportunities for Growth ..... 24

■ Amenity Comparisons ..... 24

■ From Insights to Implementation..... 25

Prioritization Criteria .....25

## THE PATH FORWARD ..... 26

Vision For the Future .....27

Vision Fulfillment .....27

Services Recommendations.....28

Live Performances.....29

Capital Recommendations .....30

■ Short Term Recommendations.....30

■ Mid to Long Term Recommendations..... 32

Map 2: Hudson Gardens Capital Improvements  
Recommendations .....34

## APPENDICES

A. Community Engagement Summary

B. Environmental Scan

C. Services Assessment

D. Financial Analysis



# 4 EXECUTIVE O SUMMARY







## A Living Legacy

The Hudson Gardens & Event Center (“Hudson Gardens” or “Gardens”) is a beloved community asset known for its botanical beauty, cultural programming, and outdoor events. With deep roots in the region, it plays a critical role in enhancing the quality of life for residents and visitors alike. It’s a free gathering place, a classroom without walls, and a refuge from the rush of daily life. Set against the backdrop of the South Platte River in Littleton, Colorado, it is where memories bloom, from weddings and live performances to quiet strolls among the roses.

Like any living thing, Hudson Gardens must adapt to thrive. It has experienced growth, the evolution of amenities and programs, and heightened use and community expectation. With South Suburban Park and Recreation District (“South Suburban”) assuming operations of the property in 2023, the time was right to assess the impact to the facilities and grounds, listen to the desires of the community, and strategize for the future.

The Hudson Gardens Comprehensive Vision, Strategic, and Facility Plan (“Vision Plan”) documents this process of listening, technical and financial analysis, and strategic planning for the sustainability and enjoyment of this gem for generations to come.

## Why This Plan, Why Now

South Suburban’s new operational and management responsibilities provided an opportunity set a road map for the future of Hudson Gardens. The Vision Plan represents a collaborative effort to align Hudson Gardens’ operations, infrastructure, and offerings with the community’s vision and South Suburban’s Master and Strategic goals, ensuring long-term sustainability and relevance.

## Listening and Learning from the Community

At the heart of this Vision Plan is extensive community input gathered through surveys, interviews, public meetings, and interactive events. The message from visitors, volunteers, and neighbors was clear: Hudson Gardens is deeply valued as both a peaceful retreat and an active community gathering space. The community desires a balanced approach, honoring tradition and natural beauty while thoughtfully enhancing events, amenities, programming, and experiences.

## Understanding the Site

To chart a path forward, a detailed assessment of Hudson Gardens' physical spaces was conducted. The grounds, gardens, and facilities were evaluated to understand opportunities to improve accessibility, infrastructure, event spaces, and overall visitor experience.

## Evaluating Operations and Identifying Opportunities

An understanding of the services offered, the audience served, financial foundation, and comparison to other facilities was fundamental to developing the Vision Plan. It provided insights into operational realities and opportunities to enhance services desired by the community.

## A Shared Vision for the Future

A shared vision for the future of Hudson Gardens emerged from large-scale community input, volunteer and staff observations, and expert analysis throughout the planning process. It is not a vision of dramatic change, but of sustainable, incremental improvements that are responsive to the desires of the community, honor the history of the site, and respect the peace and natural beauty that Hudson Gardens affords. Future decisions will be guided by clear Prioritization Criteria that reflect this vision, ensuring investments align with community values and long-term stewardship.

## Hudson Gardens Mission Statement

The Hudson Gardens & Event Center is a 30-acre botanical garden featuring public spaces, private venues, and programs; serving as a vibrant regional hub for arts and culture, events, nature, and community connection.

## A Balanced Path Forward

Hudson Gardens aspires to be a vibrant community destination where nature, culture, and connection come together. With beautiful gardens, engaging events, and elegant spaces for gatherings, it offers something for everyone; from peaceful retreats to lively celebrations. Modern infrastructure and sustainable funding support free access and diverse experiences, ensuring the Gardens remain welcoming and accessible for generations to come.

Guided by community input, the Vision Plan prioritizes the following focus areas to ensure Hudson Gardens' continued success:

- ✓ **KEEP CURRENT BREADTH OF SERVICES AND OFFERINGS, BUT SEEK ENHANCEMENTS.**
- ✓ **IMPROVE THE CORE INFRASTRUCTURE, BEFORE ADDING NEW AMENITIES.**
- ✓ **INVEST IN SECURITY, ACCESSIBILITY, AND VISITOR EXPERIENCE.**
- ✓ **CONTINUE EMBRACING FLEXIBILITY WHILE DEFINING CLEARER VISITOR PATHWAYS.**
- ✓ **STRENGTHEN PARTNERSHIPS AND FUNDING TO SUSTAIN DIVERSE OFFERINGS.**
- ✓ **ALIGN WITH SOUTH SUBURBAN GUIDING PRINCIPLES.**

## Moving Forward Together

This Vision Plan sets a clear and balanced roadmap for Hudson Gardens; one that honors its heritage, reflects community aspirations, and strategically positions it for sustainable growth. Together, these recommendations will ensure Hudson Gardens remains a vibrant, welcoming place that enriches lives, connects people, and celebrates the natural world for generations to come.



# 2 OUR HISTORY



## Our History

Hudson Gardens began as the private estate of Colonel King C. and Evelyn Leigh Hudson, who established their home on a five-acre property in Littleton, Colorado, in 1941. Over the decades, they developed extensive gardens, drawing inspiration from their global travels and local landscape. The Hudsons also operated the popular Country Kitchen restaurant on the property, creating a beloved gathering place for the community.

Recognizing the value of their Gardens as a public resource, Evelyn Hudson established The King C. Hudson & Evelyn Leigh Hudson Foundation, Inc., a 501(3)(c) not-for-profit private foundation, before her passing in 1988, ensuring the Gardens' long-term preservation and public enjoyment.

Hudson Gardens opened to the public in 1996, expanding from the Hudsons' original gardens to a 30-acre site that includes themed landscapes like the Rose Garden, Water Garden, and Xeriscape Garden. These spaces highlight the diversity of Colorado's native and adapted plant species, emphasizing conservation and sustainable gardening practices.

In 1997, South Suburban purchased Hudson Gardens from the Foundation, eliminating incurred debt and providing initial funds for day-to-day operations. Operations of the Gardens remained the responsibility of The Hudson Foundation until the dissolution of the private foundation in December 2022.



---

## Operational Changes

In January 2023, South Suburban assumed operational responsibility of Hudson Gardens to advance the shared commitment to preserve the Gardens as a regional attraction. South Suburban earmarked nearly \$9.4 million in the Capital Improvement Projects Plan for the Gardens over the next five years. Included in this was a \$2.6 million Pond and Stream Improvement Project completed in 2024, and a comprehensive replacement of the irrigation system underway in 2025.

Recognizing the need to address current operational and infrastructure demands and plan for the future, South Suburban hired BerryDunn to prepare a Comprehensive Vision, Strategic, and Facility Plan.

### **The Vision Plan will address the following areas:**

- ✓ Long-term vision and feasibility for programs, events, and artistic displays.
- ✓ Expansion and enhancement of community programming and private occasions.
- ✓ Strategies for maintaining and improving the Gardens' assets for public enjoyment.
- ✓ Strategies for ensuring the site's long-term financial sustainability.



# 3 HUDSON O GARDENS TODAY



## The Heart of Operations

Behind the scenes of the serene natural setting of Hudson Gardens is a multifaceted organization that balances its mission as a free public garden, cultural venue, educational resource, and community gathering place. Its operations span a wide range of activities, from daily garden maintenance to large-scale event management, all aimed at enhancing visitor experience and supporting long-term sustainability. The current operational model is designed to provide high-quality visitor experiences while generating sufficient revenue to cover costs and support future growth.

---

### Facilities and Grounds

Hudson Gardens encompasses approximately 30 acres of themed gardens, natural areas, and flexible event spaces that serve both daily visitors and large-scale functions. Key features include the Rose Garden, Water Garden, Xeriscape Garden, Monet's Place, the Oval Garden, and the South Lawn, which are irrigated using untreated water from Englewood's City Ditch. Each area contributes to the site's horticultural diversity while also providing picturesque and functional settings for weddings, live performances, festivals, and other community gatherings.

### Programs and Events

Hudson Gardens offers a wide range of programs and events designed to engage diverse audiences. Seasonal events such as Hudson Holidays and Magic of the Jack O'Lanterns draw regional attendance and create memorable experiences for families. Educational offerings include workshops, guided tours, and classes focused on gardening, sustainability, and nature appreciation. The Gardens also foster community involvement through robust volunteer programs, partnerships with local schools, and collaborations with organizations that expand access and participation.

### Staffing

Hudson Gardens relies on a dedicated team of full-time and part-time staff, supported by a large network of volunteers. Staff roles include ground and facility maintenance experts, irrigation specialists, event coordinators, administrative professionals, and educational staff. Volunteers contribute thousands of hours annually, assisting with garden maintenance, event support, and educational programming. This combined effort is essential to maintaining the Gardens' high standards of operation and visitor experience.

### The Greater Context

As of 2023, Hudson Gardens operates as part of the South Suburban Park and Recreation District. Formed in 1959, South Suburban is a regional provider of parks and recreation services, and serves over 151,000 residents in the Town of Bow Mar, Town of Columbine Valley, City of Littleton, City of Sheridan, City of Centennial west of I-25, City of Lone Tree, and unincorporated portions of Douglas County, Jefferson County and Arapahoe County. The District is guided by the 2022 Master Plan and 2022 Strategic Plan updates.



## South Suburban Mission

To foster healthy living through stewardship of the environment, parks, trails, and open space and by providing recreational services and programs. We do this with more than 3,800 acres of natural open space and nearly 100 miles of trails right around the corner from where you live.

South Suburban helps residents explore close-to-home opportunities for mind body wellness, to seek out new activities, new amenities and to enjoy every moment of their free time.

## South Suburban Vision

South Suburban will lead the industry as an exceptional organization that provides innovative park and recreation opportunities for our diverse communities.

## South Suburban Values

- ▶ **Professional:** Have the competency and skill to carry out our mission with honesty and dedication.
- ▶ **Active:** Be a constant presence in the community by providing services and facilities that inspire recreation and play.
- ▶ **Innovative:** Incorporate sustainability, stewardship, recreational trends, and our community's current and future needs into our organization's practices.
- ▶ **Inclusive:** Incorporate the different needs of our diverse community and our partners into our work and decision making.

## South Suburban Guiding Principles

We are led by five guiding principles - broad initiatives describing what we aspire to achieve:

- ▶ **Quality First**  
We aim to consistently create positive experiences for our community. We strive to maintain and improve the quality of our offerings and customer service with innovations to remain industry leaders.
- ▶ **Connect Community**  
We create an inclusive culture that engages, welcomes, and connects all members of the community to feel a sense of belonging in our spaces and programs. We effectively communicate and provide diverse offerings which are accessible to all ages, abilities, and cultures.
- ▶ **Enrich Wellness**  
We prioritize wellness by offering indoor and outdoor recreation that strengthens bodies, engages minds, and refreshes a person's spirit. We facilitate wellness by providing recreation opportunities that represent the characteristics and needs of our diverse neighborhoods and communities.
- ▶ **Stewards of Nature and Sustainability**  
We conserve and enhance natural systems with green spaces, wildlife areas, and water recreation that promote interaction and respect for nature. We provide environmental education and volunteer opportunities to encourage community stewardship. Our spaces are designed and managed to be resilient environmental assets.
- ▶ **Fiscal Responsibility**  
We make investments with a long-range view of fiscal responsibility, balancing emerging needs while maintaining the quality of indoor facilities, outdoor spaces, and programs. We use funding responsibly and are transparent about priorities. We manage resources through extensive planning processes, investing in infrastructure, efficient operations, and strategic partnerships.

# Map 1: Hudson Gardens Existing Site Plan









# 4 WHAT WE O HEARD



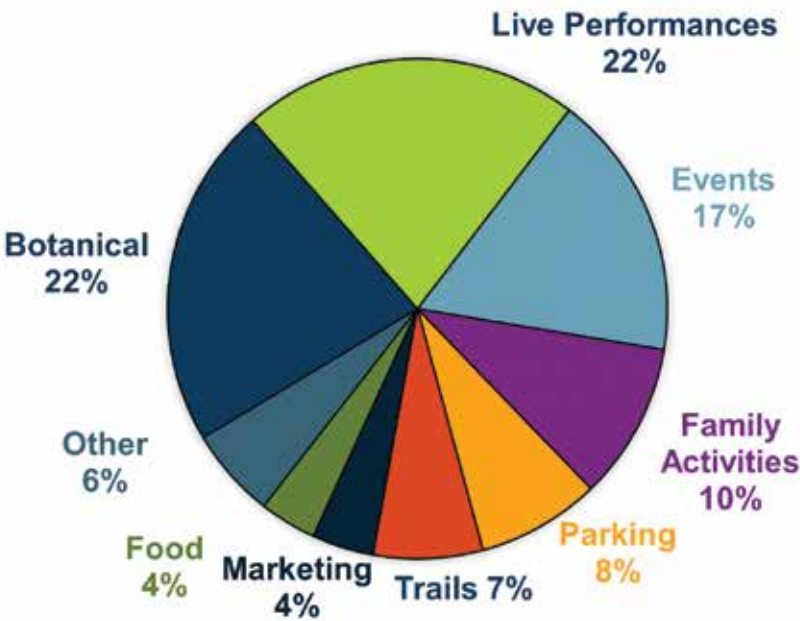


# Approach

The Vision Plan engagement reached a broad audience, helping ensure diverse community input. Social media and email campaigns connected with tens of thousands of people, while direct outreach engaged 27 local businesses. On-the-ground efforts included eight pop-up events, which fostered direct conversations. The project’s landing page had 2,317 visits, with 796 individuals becoming informed of project scope by seeking out additional information

on the project page, and 556 actively engaging with either the survey, interactive map, or other website elements. In addition to 518 completed surveys, 234 open-ended comments were captured through comment cards and online feedback. Additionally, staff interviews and volunteer group discussions provided further insights, helping ensure a well-rounded perspective in shaping the Vision Plan.

Figure 2: Visual Representation of Comment Card Themes by Frequency



Connecting with the community was at the heart of this process. From casual visitors and event attendees to dedicated volunteers and local leaders, we sought to capture a wide range of perspectives.

	<b>STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS AND FOCUS GROUPS</b>  Engaging staff, volunteers, and community leaders to capture diverse perspectives.		<b>DIGITAL ENGAGEMENT</b>  Reaching broader audiences through online platforms and interactive mapping tools.
	<b>PUBLIC INPUT SESSIONS</b>  Gathering direct feedback from residents and visitors on their vision and ideas.		<b>SURVEY RESPONSES</b>  Analyzing over 500 responses to understand visitor preferences and expectations.

# Survey Responses

The survey allowed for multiple responses within these categories.

## Top Reason for Visiting



Enjoying the gardens and plant displays **(58%)**



Attending seasonal or holiday events **(57%)**



Attending concerts or live performances **(55%)**



Going on nature walks and trails **(39%)**

## Top Program Interests



Art and culture **(51%)**



Nature and education **(49%)**



Social **(37%)**



Lifestyle/wellness **(28%)**



Environmental conservation **(28%)**

## Most Visited Areas



Walking paths **(72%)**



Ponds and cascades **(52%)**



Water lilies **(46%)**



Rose garden **(45%)**



Wetlands and natural areas **(42%)**



South Lawn Performance Space **(38%)**

# Live Performances

When asked about the types of concerts they would most like to see at Hudson Gardens, respondents expressed strong interest in purchasing tickets for both national and local acts, with 65% and 62% favorability respectively. Family-oriented events also drew moderate interest, with 35% expressing a preference for paid family or community performances, and 28% interested in free offerings of a similar nature.

While these figures reflect a desire for live performances that are accessible and community-focused, 16% of respondents said their attendance would depend on specific factors like pricing, artist, or timing. A small segment (5%) indicated they were not willing to pay for concert events at all.

Overall, the findings suggest that live performances at Hudson Gardens should prioritize diversity, offering a balance of recognizable names, community talent, and family-friendly performances, while preserving the character and accessibility that make the Gardens a unique venue.



## Large Scale Events

Community feedback indicates strong support for hosting large-scale public events at Hudson Gardens, as long as these gatherings are thoughtfully planned to minimize impacts on the natural setting. While many respondents support temporary closures to accommodate major events, there is less enthusiasm for permanent modifications to the Gardens' physical features. This suggests a clear preference for preserving the site's natural beauty while creating

flexible spaces that can adapt to a range of community uses.

Overall, the findings reflect a shared interest in maintaining the integrity of the Gardens while allowing for community programming that aligns with its setting. These insights suggest future planning should aim to strike a balance between conservation and activation.

## Summary of Findings

Through the engagement process, it became clear that Hudson Gardens holds a special place in the hearts of its visitors, volunteers, and staff. People see it as both a peaceful retreat and a vibrant gathering place, a space where quiet reflection and lively celebration can coexist.

Participants consistently highlighted the value of open green spaces, the sense of calm the Gardens provide, and the importance of free daily access. At the same

time, there was strong enthusiasm for seasonal events, live performances, and new programming that can bring even more life to the space.

A common theme emerged: the desire to balance conservation with activity, education with entertainment, and tradition with growth. People want Hudson Gardens to remain a welcoming, inclusive, and inspiring destination that evolves with the community while staying true to its unique character.

### The following themes were consistently observed throughout the engagement:

- ▶ **Strong Interest in Reviving Life Performances and Events:** Community members repeatedly called for the return of live music, with broad support for a range of public events that celebrate arts, culture, and seasonal traditions.
- ▶ **Preservation of the Gardens' Experience:** While residents support more activity, they remain protective of the Gardens' natural beauty, emphasizing the importance of minimal disruption to existing landscapes.
- ▶ **Facility and Infrastructure Needs:** Upgrades to bathrooms, the greenhouse, railroad garden, pathway lighting, and signage were frequently cited as essential improvements.
- ▶ **Educational and Interpretive Programming:** There is clear enthusiasm for expanding educational offerings, hands-on workshops, and interpretive signage that enhances visitor learning and engagement.
- ▶ **Volunteer and Staff Support:** Sustaining the volunteer program, addressing staff workload, and clarifying internal processes were common priorities shared by both staff and volunteers.
- ▶ **Improved Visibility and Marketing:** Many residents were unaware of existing offerings, pointing to the need for stronger outreach, signage, and promotion—especially highlighting free access and community value.
- ▶ **Event Access and Affordability:** Participants value both free and ticketed experiences, with an emphasis on affordability, resident pricing, and transparency around operations and funding.

As Hudson Gardens plans for the future, these insights underscore the need for an intentional, balanced approach that honors its botanical and community roots while creating space for new ideas and varied activities.

# 5 NEEDS AND OPPORTUNITIES







## Understanding the Gardens' Potential

Understanding Hudson Gardens' current strengths and challenges is essential for shaping its future. This section provides a closer look at the physical condition of the grounds, the services that bring it to life, the diverse audiences it serves, and the financial foundation that supports its mission. By identifying these needs and opportunities, the Gardens can grow thoughtfully, preserving its unique character while evolving to meet the needs of the next generation.

## Facility and Site Assessment

Hudson Gardens is more than just a collection of buildings and pathways – it's a living landscape where moments of reflection, celebration, and connection unfold. To ensure it continues to thrive, the planning team conducted a comprehensive assessment of both the physical facilities and the broader 30-acre grounds, considering everything from visitor experience to the longevity of its infrastructure.

### Key Findings:

#### ACCESSIBILITY CHALLENGES

Many areas, both inside buildings and throughout the grounds, have barriers to accessibility, highlighting the need for ADA upgrades.

#### AGING INFRASTRUCTURE

Critical systems, including mechanical, electrical, and plumbing (MEP), show signs of age, requiring modernization to improve reliability and efficiency.

#### SAFETY AND SECURITY

Enhancements are needed to address security gaps and improve overall site safety for visitors, staff, and volunteers.

#### INFRASTRUCTURE STRAIN

Storm drainage, lighting, walkways, and fencing require attention to prevent deterioration and support long-term site health.

#### VISITOR EXPERIENCE GAPS

Opportunities exist to improve wayfinding, acoustics, and overall visitor experience, ensuring every visit is enjoyable and memorable.

Together, these insights provide a foundation for thoughtful, phased improvements that honor the Gardens' past while building for its future.



## Demographics

Hudson Gardens serves a diverse audience, each bringing unique interests, needs, and opportunities for connection. Understanding these core groups helps shape programming, marketing, and long-term planning.

### ADULTS, 28.4% (AGES 35-54)

This group represents the largest share of the surrounding population, with a strong interest in family-friendly events, cultural experiences, and outdoor recreation. With higher discretionary spending, they often seek meaningful, shared experiences that create lasting memories.

### FAMILIES WITH CHILDREN

Many nearby communities have high concentrations of families (up to 33% in some zip codes), creating demand for programs that engage all ages, from interactive learning to outdoor play.

### HIGHER-INCOME HOUSEHOLDS

The median household income for service area is \$102,802. Higher-income visitors are more likely to invest in weddings, private events, memberships, and unique experiences, supporting the Gardens' financial sustainability.

### ACTIVE ADULTS, 25.3% (AGES 55+)

With more leisure time, this group often seeks wellness programs, cultural events, and opportunities for social connection, aligning well with the Gardens' mission to inspire, educate, and connect.





# Services Assessment

Hudson Gardens provides a diverse range of services, including programs, self-guided activities, ticketed events, facility rentals, photography permits, memberships, and merchandise sales. These offerings form the core of Hudson Gardens' visitor experience and contribute significantly to its financial sustainability.

## Key Findings:

### PROGRAMS

There were 100 programs offered between October 2023 and September 2024, including 62 paid and 38 free programs serving a total of 1,051 participants. Popular options like Yoga in the Park and Meet the Beekeeper consistently draw strong interest. These programs not only engage the community but also strengthen Hudson Gardens' role as an educational and recreational hub, reinforcing its mission to connect people with nature and each other.

### SELF-GUIDED ACTIVITIES

Open 365 days a year for independent exploration, Hudson Gardens had over 246,000 visitors in 2024. This continuous access supports Hudson Gardens' commitment to being a welcoming, reflective space for all.

### EVENTS

Large-scale events like Hudson Holidays and Red, White, & ROCK! attracted 138,407 visitors and generated \$575,500 in net revenue, despite high production costs. These events not only boost financial sustainability but also strengthen the Gardens' identity as a vibrant cultural destination that brings people together.

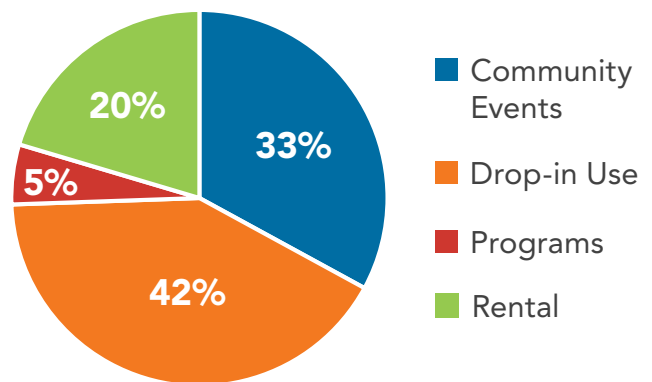
### FACILITY RENTALS

The largest revenue source, generating \$950,428 in 2024, with 129 rentals hosting over 15,000 guests for weddings, celebrations of life, and corporate events.

### CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

Opportunities exist to improve pre-visit planning, arrival signage, on-site amenities like restrooms and shade, real-time visitor engagement, and post-visit connections.

2024 Usage Breakouts



# Financial Analysis

Hudson Gardens is not just a place of natural beauty and community connection. It’s also a complex operation that requires thoughtful financial management to thrive. A clear understanding of Hudson Gardens’ financial position is essential for effective planning and long-term sustainability. This Financial Analysis provides a snapshot of recent financial performance (2023-2025), capturing the diverse revenue streams, operating costs, and cost recovery rates that shape the Gardens’ financial health.

## Key Findings:

### DIVERSE REVENUE STREAMS

Hudson Gardens relies on a mix of income sources, including facility rentals, ticketed events, public programs, and community outreach. This diverse portfolio balances mission-driven activities with revenue-generating services, supporting both community impact and financial stability.

### REVENUE TRENDS

Total revenues reached \$3.1 million in 2024, up from \$1.89 million in 2023, reflecting strong private and public event performance, but are expected to stabilize at \$2.73 million in 2025. This underscores the need for reliable, diversified revenue streams as event timing and demand fluctuate.

### EXPENDITURE TRENDS

Annual expenses have remained relatively consistent, ranging from \$2.6 million to just under \$3 million, with significant costs for facility maintenance, landscaping, and large-scale events. Controlling these costs is essential for long-term financial health.

### COST RECOVERY

From 2023 to 2025, Hudson Gardens’ cost recovery demonstrates year-to-year variability. In 2023, revenues did not fully cover operational expenditures, while in 2024, strong public and private event revenues resulted in a temporary surplus with cost recovery at 119.11%. The 2025 budget projects a return to partial cost recovery at 91.76%. These trends highlight that in most years, Hudson Gardens relies on some level of subsidy to support its operations.

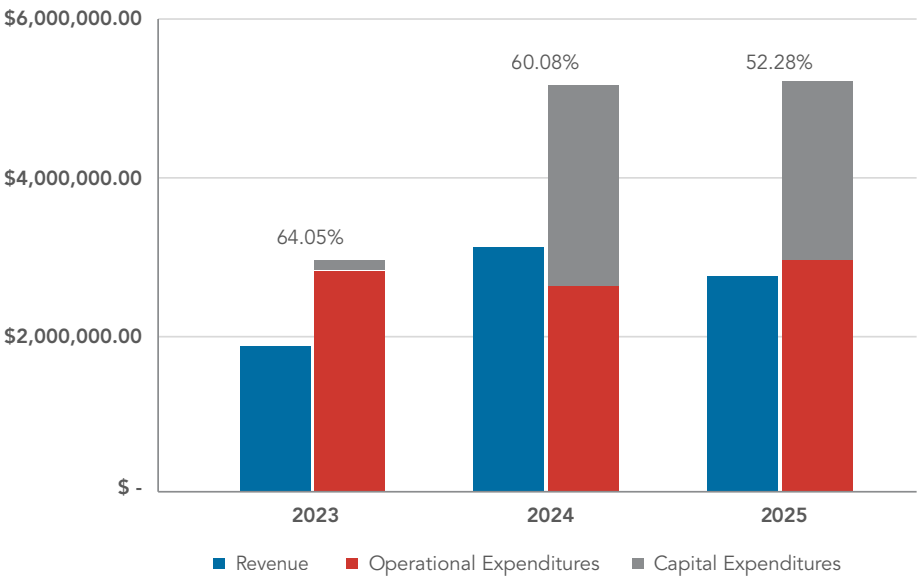
### BALANCING MISSION AND REVENUE

Long-term financial stability will depend on balancing mission-focused programs with revenue-generating services, ensuring Hudson Gardens can remain both a cherished community resource and a sustainable operation.

### SPONSORSHIPS AND GRANTS

External funding, including critical support from the Scientific and Cultural Facilities District (SCFD), Littleton Arts and Culture Grant, and local government grants, provides essential resources for core operations, special projects, and community programming, helping sustain Hudson Gardens.

Hudson Gardens & Event Center Cost Recovery





## Program-Specific Insights



### Rentals

Consistently high cost recovery, exceeding 225% annually, reinforcing the importance of this revenue stream.



### Community Programs

Significant improvement from 21% in 2023 to 170% in 2024, reflecting growing volunteer engagement and targeted programming.



### Events

High variability, with recovery rates ranging from 33.63% in 2023 to 152.17% in 2024, highlighting the need for careful planning, partnerships, and sponsorship support.



### General Operations

Strong recovery, boosted by substantial grants, but reliant on external funding for financial stability.

## Market Analysis

Hudson Gardens is more than just a place. It's an experience and understanding how visitors engage with the space is key to shaping its future. By looking at visitation trends, regional reach, and the unique advantages that set Hudson Gardens apart, a clearer picture of its potential emerges.

### Visitor Patterns

#### ENGAGEMENT AND DURATION

Visitors spend an average of 74 minutes at Hudson Gardens, reflecting the appeal of its natural beauty and open spaces, but also highlighting opportunities for expanded amenities and programming to encourage longer stays.

#### WEEKEND AND EVENING PEAKS

Hudson Gardens sees its highest traffic on Saturdays and in the evenings, suggesting potential for more weekday and daytime offerings to broaden appeal and better distribute attendance.

#### LOCAL AND REGIONAL REACH

While most visitors come from nearby areas, larger peers like the Denver Botanic Gardens draw from a wider region, with 449,300 more visitors over a twelve-month period, pointing to opportunities for building broader brand recognition.

## Opportunities for Growth

### FREE ADMISSION ADVANTAGE

As one of the few regional gardens with free general admission, Hudson Gardens stands out for its accessibility, supporting community engagement and encouraging repeat visits.

### UNIQUE POSITIONING

With its flexible event spaces, picturesque landscapes, and educational programming, Hudson Gardens offers experiences that set it apart, creating opportunities for deeper brand differentiation.

### PEAK DEMAND POTENTIAL

High weekend and evening attendance creates a strong foundation for live performances, seasonal festivals, and after-hours programming that can boost revenue and community connection.

### EDUCATIONAL IMPACT

Investing in interpretive signage, interactive exhibits, and volunteer engagement can strengthen Hudson Gardens' role as a learning destination, connecting visitors to nature in meaningful ways.

## Amenity Comparisons

	Hudson Gardens (CO)	Cheyenne Botanic Gardens (WY)	Denver Botanical Gardens York Street (CO)	Knoxville Botanical Garden (TN)	Descanso Gardens (CA)	State Botanical Garden of Georgia (GA)	Denver Botanic Gardens Chatfield Farms (CO)
Amphitheatre					•	•	
Arboretum		•					
Art Gallery			•				
Business Center	•						
Classrooms	•		•			•	
Conservatory		•					
Food/Beverage Options	•		•		•	•	•
Gift Shop	•	•	•		•	•	
Library			•				
Outdoor Classroom				•			
Parking	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Picnic Shelters/ Area		•				•	
Play Area/ Playground/ Childrens Area	•	•	•				
Restrooms	•	•	•		•	•	•
Trail Access	•			•	•		•
Visitor Center			•	•		•	



## From Insights to Implementation

The market conditions, visitor behaviors, and financial realities demonstrate that Hudson Gardens has immense potential but needs targeted investment to thrive. Its free access model, tranquil setting, and flexible spaces set it apart in the region, but aging infrastructure and shifting community expectations require thoughtful updates. The overall visitor experience can be enhanced through improvements to safety, accessibility, wayfinding, and interpretive elements. There are opportunities to extend visitor duration on site, broaden regional reach, and attract new audiences during off-peak hours. Financial fluctuations underscore the importance of strategic planning, long-term sustainability, and securing funding partners to support core operations and new initiatives. This analysis directly informed the prioritization criteria and recommendations that follow, ensuring the path forward is not only aspirational but grounded in evidence.

## Prioritization Criteria

Every decision made at Hudson Gardens shapes the experiences of its visitors and the future of its landscapes. To ensure investments reflect the needs of the community, a clear set of criteria will guide capital and operational priorities. These principles align with Hudson Gardens' vision, the South Suburban Master Plan, and the voices of the community, creating a thoughtful roadmap for growth and improvement.

### ✓ ALIGNMENT WITH HUDSON GARDENS' VISION AND SOUTH SUBURBAN PRIORITIES

#### ► SUPPORTS: Quality First, Connect Community

Projects should reinforce Hudson Gardens' role as a multi-use destination for gardens, private events, education, and recreation, aligning with the SSPRD Master Plan and Strategic Plan for regional consistency and long-term success.

### ✓ INFRASTRUCTURE RESILIENCE AND LONG-TERM VIABILITY

#### ► SUPPORTS: Quality First, Fiscal Responsibility

Prioritize repairs and upgrades to existing infrastructure (e.g., utilities, pathways, lighting, restrooms) to ensure long-term durability, reliability, and cost-effectiveness before considering expansion.

### ✓ ACCESSIBILITY, SECURITY, AND VISITOR EXPERIENCE ENHANCEMENTS

#### ► SUPPORTS: Quality First, Connect Community, Enrich Wellness

Focus on improvements that enhance safety, comfort, and accessibility, including better lighting, ADA compliance, clear wayfinding, and access control.

### ✓ COMMUNITY BENEFIT AND DEMAND-DRIVEN DEVELOPMENT

#### ► SUPPORTS: Connect Community, Enrich Wellness

Invest in projects that respond to high community demand, fill service gaps, and expand engagement, ensuring the Gardens remain relevant and responsive to changing visitor needs.

### ✓ SUSTAINABILITY & ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP

#### ► SUPPORTS: Stewards of Nature and Sustainability, Fiscal Responsibility

Focus on protecting natural ecosystems, improving resource efficiency, and building resilient landscapes to promote long-term environmental health.

### ✓ FINANCIAL RESPONSIBILITY & FUNDING POTENTIAL

#### ► SUPPORTS: Fiscal Responsibility, Quality First

Ensure projects are financially sustainable, balancing costs and benefits, with consideration for long-term affordability, operational efficiency, and opportunities for outside funding through grants, sponsorships, or partnerships.

# 9 THE PATH O FORWARD







## Vision For the Future

Hudson Gardens aspires to be a cherished cultural and natural hub for the local community and regional visitors, blending stunning botanic displays with vibrant arts and community events. A diverse array of performances, from local artist showcases and creative workshops to musical and seasonal celebrations, will draw crowds. Dedicated spaces for weddings and private events will offer elegant, nature-inspired venues, enhanced by modernized infrastructure. Improved pathways, signage, and security will help ensure safe, accessible exploration, anchored by a remodeled welcome center and gift shop that educate visitors on the gardens' history and sustainability best practices. Tranquil areas, including shaded pathways and reflective ponds, will provide peaceful retreats. Partnerships, fees, and sustainable funding will support free access and diverse offerings, ensuring Hudson Gardens remains a cherished destination for nature, culture, and community.

## Vision Fulfillment

To ensure the continued success of Hudson Gardens and the fulfillment of the vision, the focus must be on maintaining and enhancing its breadth of services, investing in infrastructure and safety, and strengthening visitor experience and accessibility. By aligning with South Suburban priorities, leveraging partnerships and funding, and fostering a balance between preservation and growth, Hudson Gardens can evolve while staying true to its mission.

# Services Recommendations

To ensure Hudson Gardens remains a cherished destination for generations to come, the focus must be on preserving the breadth of its offerings while making thoughtful improvements that support long-term sustainability.

This means finding the right balance between gardens, events, and educational programs, while enhancing visitor support, strengthening operational flexibility, and reintroducing live performances in a way that respects the Gardens' unique character. It also involves expanding partnerships, securing new funding sources, and aligning closed with South Suburban's Guiding Principles.

Together these strategies will help Hudson Gardens continue to grow:

## ✓ **IMPROVE THE CORE INFRASTRUCTURE, BEFORE ADDING NEW AMENITIES.**

Prioritize repairing and upgrading existing facilities, utilities, pathways, lighting, restrooms, and other infrastructure before adding new amenities or refining services. This ensures that current operations are stable, functional, and meet community needs before considering new investments.

## ✓ **KEEP CURRENT BREADTH OF SERVICES AND OFFERINGS, BUT SEEK ENHANCEMENTS.**

Maintain Hudson Gardens' wide range of services—including gardens, performances, private events, and education—while making targeted improvements to enhance quality, accessibility, and visitor engagement. This means refining rather than reducing offerings, ensuring each component is well-supported and sustainable.

## ✓ **INVEST IN SECURITY, ACCESSIBILITY, AND VISITOR EXPERIENCE.**

Improve safety measures, lighting, wayfinding, accessibility, and emergency preparedness to create a more secure and welcoming environment for all visitors and staff. This includes better signage, controlled entry points, ADA compliance, and proactive maintenance to enhance both safety and the overall guest experience.

## ✓ **CONTINUE EMBRACING FLEXIBILITY WHILE DEFINING CLEARER VISITOR PATHWAYS.**

Maintain spaces that can accommodate diverse programming (e.g., live performances, nature walks, private events), while ensuring better organization of traffic flow and visitor movement. This includes wayfinding signage, designated areas for events, and better integration between gardens, pathways, and facilities to create a seamless and intuitive experience.

## ✓ **STRENGTHEN PARTNERSHIPS AND FUNDING TO SUSTAIN DIVERSE OFFERINGS.**

Build and reinforce relationships with community partners, businesses, and grant providers to secure funding and operational support. This includes leveraging sponsorships, memberships, and collaborations to sustain Hudson Gardens' mix of free and paid experiences.

## ✓ **ALIGN WITH SOUTH SUBURBAN GUIDING PRINCIPLES.**

Ensure Hudson Gardens complements and integrates with the broader South Suburban system by aligning offerings with district-wide initiatives and strategic goals. Leverage partnerships, shared resources, and coordinated programming to maximize impact while maintaining Hudson Gardens' unique identity. Future development and services should reference the South Suburban's Master Plan and Strategic Plan to enhance regional cohesion and avoid duplication of efforts.





## Live Performances

Community feedback strongly supports the return of music experiences at Hudson Gardens, but successful, sustainable live performances will require careful planning and strategic investments. To preserve the Gardens' unique character while enhancing visitor experiences, several key milestones should be achieved:

### 1. SECURE PARKING AND TRAFFIC MANAGEMENT:

Finalize agreements with nearby organizations, such as Arapahoe Community College or Denver Seminary, to provide overflow parking. Develop clear traffic management plans to ensure smooth event operations.

### 2. ASSESS INFRASTRUCTURE AND COSTS:

Conduct a full cost and operational impact analysis, including stage setup, security, impacts to other Gardens' activities, ADA compliance, staffing, and insurance. Given the current limitations, focus on smaller, local performances until permanent infrastructure can support larger events.

### 3. EXPLORE PARTNERSHIPS FOR LONG-TERM VIABILITY:

More funding resources are needed for infrastructure improvements. Once these improvements are made, consider utilizing a contractor or collaborating with local partners to share costs and operational responsibilities. Ensure ticketing models are equitable, offering resident discounts and a thoughtful mix of free and paid events.

# Capital Recommendations

As Hudson Gardens looks to the future, thoughtful investment in its physical spaces will be essential to preserving its unique character while enhancing visitor experiences and supporting long-term sustainability. These capital recommendations provide a roadmap for improving infrastructure, enhancing accessibility, and creating welcoming, flexible spaces.

The estimated costs provided are Rough Order of Magnitude (ROM) figures intended solely for budgetary strategy purposes. They are based on conceptual/programmatic sketches and narratives and Opinion Probable Cost (OPC) from one or more sources.

## Short Term Recommendations

Focusing on projects that can be implemented within the next few years, these short-term improvements aim to address immediate needs, enhance visitor experiences, and set the foundation for long-term growth:

### ✓ **BOTANICAL GARDEN MASTER PLAN**

**Estimated cost: \$165,000 - \$180,000**

Develop a comprehensive master plan for the gardens, including public and stakeholder input, site planning, priority projects, and cost estimates.

### ✓ **BRANDING AND WAYFINDING**

**Estimated cost: \$55,000 - \$70,000 (design only)**

Establish a cohesive brand identity with updated website, wayfinding, interpretive signage, and visitor orientation systems to enhance the overall experience.

### ✓ **CAFÉ AND RESTROOMS**

**Estimated cost: \$1,100,000 - \$1,400,000**

Modernize the café to expand menu options and improve vendor operations, while updating adjacent restroom facilities for better accessibility and guest comfort.

### ✓ **PATHWAYS AND ACCESSIBLE ROUTES**

**Estimated cost: \$830,000 - \$980,000**

Upgrade pathways to ensure ADA compliance, improve drainage, and provide accessible routes, and wayfinding signage to key areas like the Bloom Room, Inn, and other programmed spaces.

### ✓ **SITE SECURITY**

**Estimated cost: \$780,000 - \$920,000**

Install perimeter fencing, lockable gates, and upgraded locks to enhance security while maintaining a welcoming atmosphere.



## ✓ WELCOME FACILITY AND GARDEN ENTRANCE

**Estimated cost: \$10,700,000 - \$12,600,000**

Reimagine the main entrance to include a new welcome center, gift shop, administrative offices, wayfinding and visitor orientation signage, and flexible event spaces to better serve visitors and staff.

### Welcome Facility and Garden Entrance



*Look and feel images of new garden entry.*

## Mid to Long Term Recommendations

These projects focus on transformative improvements that will expand Hudson Gardens' capacity, enhance its educational offerings, and strengthen connections to the surrounding community:

---

### ✓ BOTANICAL GARDEN ENHANCEMENTS

**Estimated cost: Dependent on the Botanical Garden Master Plan and the Branding and Wayfinding standards.**

Implement the Botanical Garden Master Plan, including new themed gardens, expanded planting areas, wayfinding and interpretive signage, and upgraded pathways to improve the visitor experience.

---

### ✓ EDUCATION CENTER

**Estimated cost: Dependent on the Welcome Facility program and design.**

Convert the existing Administration Building to a flexible indoor-outdoor education center to support classes, workshops, field trips, and community programming, reinforcing Hudson Gardens' mission as a hub for learning and discovery.

---

### ✓ LIVE PERFORMANCE SPACE

**Estimated cost: \$12,000,000 - \$14,000,000**

Develop a permanent structure with infrastructure and amenities to support various types of live performances and events.

#### Live Performance Space



*Look and feel images of potential new live performance space.*



### ✓ MAINTENANCE BARN

**Estimated cost: Dependent on the Welcome Facility program and design.**

Enhance to provide a modern maintenance facility with secure indoor and outdoor storage, office space, and utilities to support long-term operations and staff needs.

### ✓ NORTH RESTROOM

**Estimated cost: \$1,900,000 - \$2,500,000**

Replace the aging north restroom with a larger, fully accessible facility to better support the Bloom Room, Rose Garden, and nearby event spaces.

### ✓ PARKING IMPROVEMENTS

**Estimated cost: \$950,000 - \$1,100,000**

Upgrade parking lots with improved paving, wayfinding, lighting, drainage, and landscaping to enhance visitor safety and capacity during peak events.

### ✓ RIVER INTEGRATION PROJECT

**Estimated cost: \$1,900,000 - \$2,300,000**

Strengthen connections to the Mary Carter Greenway, enhancing access points, creating new garden entrances, and integrating landscape improvements along the South Platte River.

#### River Integration Project



*View looking north with pollinator gardens and a re-aligned Mary Carter Greenway Trail.*



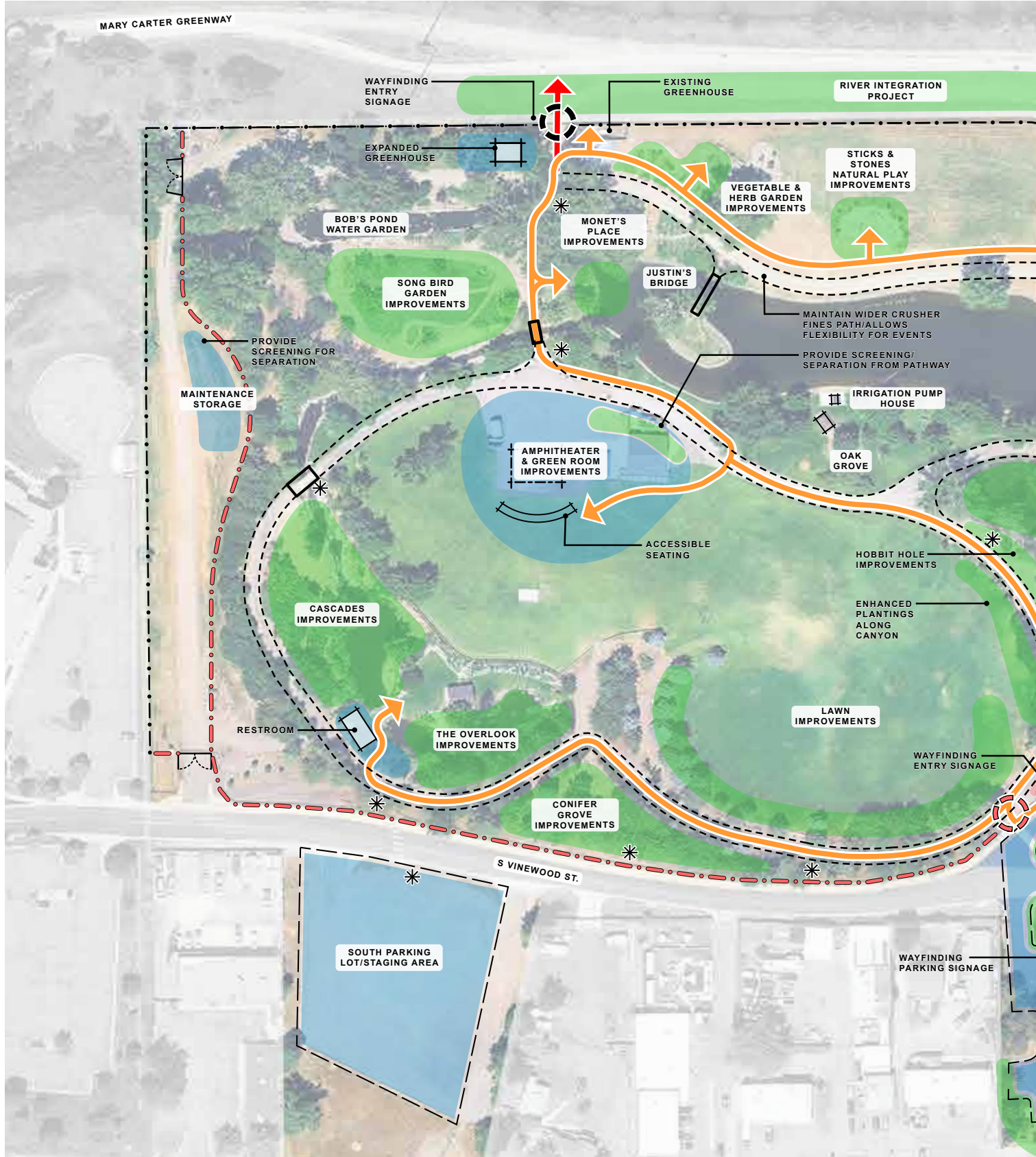
*View looking southeast toward possible Health and Wellness Garden along Mary Carter Greenway.*

### ✓ THE OVERLOOK RESTROOM

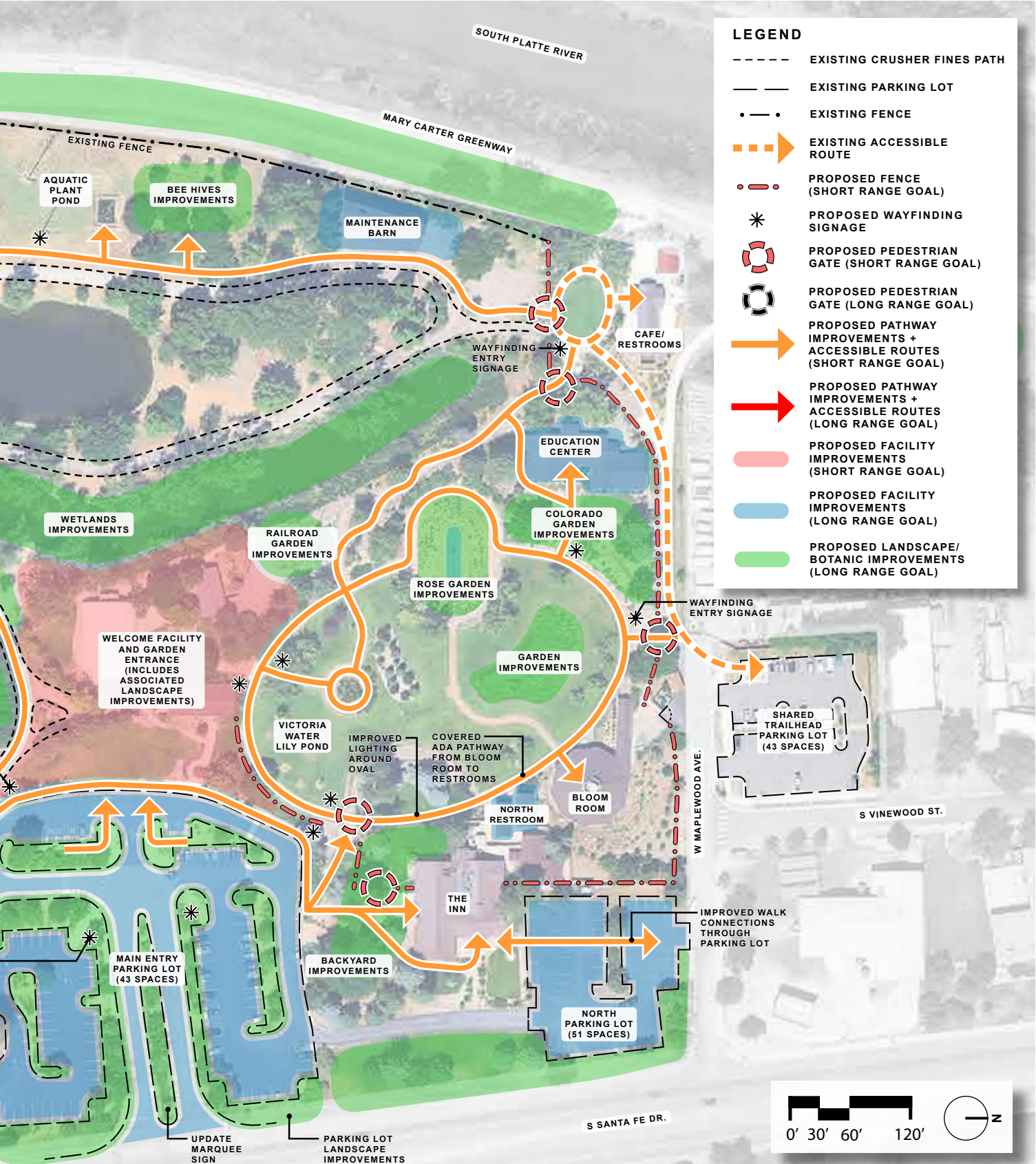
**Estimated cost: \$930,000 - \$1,100,000**

Add a restroom facility and catering/bar station to the Overlook Pavilion, expanding its functionality for programming and rental events.

## Map 2: Hudson Gardens Capital Improvements Recommendations













# The Hudson Gardens & Event Center

## Appendix A - Community Engagement Summary



**SOUTH  
SUBURBAN**  
PARKS & RECREATION

JULY 2025





## APPENDIX A - COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT SUMMARY

<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Vision Plan Engagement Approach.....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>In-Person Engagement.....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Consolidated Insights from Volunteers and Staff.....</b>	<b>6</b>
▸ Priorities (Based on Frequency and Emphasis) .....	7
▸ Key Observations from Staff Interviews.....	7
▸ Littleton Cultural Arts Partners Feedback Summary .....	8
▸ Community Focus Groups.....	9
▸ Focus Group Themes and Suggestions .....	9
▸ Comment Card and Online Comments .....	10
<b>Interactive Map .....</b>	<b>13</b>
▸ Survey Question Responses.....	14
▸ Survey Response Summary .....	16
<b>Attitudes Toward Modifying or Closing the Gardens for Special Events .....</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Modifying the Gardens for Special Events.....</b>	<b>17</b>
▸ Closing the Gardens for Special Events.....	17
<b>Summary.....</b>	<b>18</b>



# Appendix A – Community Engagement Summary

## Introduction

The Hudson Gardens and Event Center (Hudson Gardens or Gardens) in Littleton, Colorado, offers more than 30 acres of garden exhibits, pathways, open spaces, and event venues for both residents and visitors to enjoy. It encourages people to bond over nature, artistry, health and wellness by making its facilities available for community events and private occasions, providing free admission from sunrise to sunset every day of the year for self-directed exploration.

In 2024, Hudson Gardens began a visioning process to better understand community needs and plan for its future. BerryDunn, a consulting firm, was hired to lead a public engagement strategy to gather input from a broad set of stakeholders. The process included surveys, focus groups, stakeholder interviews, and online feedback.

The goal of this effort was not only to gather input but to help build trust and strengthen connections with the community, helping ensure that all voices are represented in shaping the future of Hudson Garden’s offerings. This engagement strategy is depicted in Figure A1.

This summary presents the key themes, findings, and priorities that emerged from the engagement process and helps inform the development of a long-term vision and strategy for Hudson Gardens.

Figure A1: Framework for Designing the Hudson Gardens Engagement Strategy



# Vision Plan Engagement Approach

The vision plan engagement reached a broad audience through a multi-channel approach, helping ensure diverse community input. Social media and email campaigns connected with tens of thousands of people, while direct outreach engaged 27 local businesses. On-the-ground efforts included eight pop-up events, which fostered direct conversations. The project's landing page had 2,317 visits, with 796 individuals becoming informed of project scope by seeking out additional information on the project page, and 556 actively engaging with either the survey (518 completed), interactive map, or other website elements. Capturing 235 open-ended comments and 58 contributions on an interactive map. Additionally, staff interviews and volunteer group discussions provided further insights, helping ensure a well-rounded perspective in shaping the vision plan.

- **Staff Interviews and Volunteer Group Discussions**
- **Social Media and Email Campaigns**
- **Local Businesses (27)**
- **Pop-Up and Event Engagements (8)**
- **Community Focus Groups (3)**
- **Littleton Cultural Arts Partners Engagement (15)**
- **Landing Page (2,317 visits, 796 informed, 556 engaged)**
- **Open-Ended Comments (235)**
- **Interactive Map Comments (58)**
- **Completed Online Surveys (518)**





# In-Person Engagement

There were multiple events and on-site opportunities for interactions and conversations with Hudson Gardens' community members. These efforts focused on meeting the community where they gather most often, allowing for meaningful conversations about the future of Hudson Gardens.

## Consolidated Insights from Volunteers and Staff

### Overall Observation:

Hudson Gardens lacks a clear identity in the community and the region.

### 1. Educational and Interpretive Opportunities

- Expand educational signage and self-guided tours.
- Offer more workshops such as gardening classes, plant sales, and model railroading.
- Introduce hands-on learning experiences like iris-dividing workshops.

### 2. Facility and Infrastructure Improvements

- Install better wayfinding signage throughout the Gardens.
- Add shade structures, seating areas, and upgraded restroom facilities.
- Repair the greenhouse and upgrade the garden scale train area.
- Improve parking availability and enhance trail lighting for accessibility and safety.

### 3. Community Engagement and Programming

- Strengthen volunteer recruitment efforts and develop succession planning strategies.
- Launch new events like festivals, farmers markets, and local band concerts.
- Reintroduce regular concerts to attract and engage more visitors.

### 4. Environmental and Garden Maintenance

- Preserve the Gardens' peaceful, nature-focused atmosphere.
- Expand the greenhouse to support better plant care and variety.
- Upgrade raised garden beds and implement solutions for water plant management.

### 5. Marketing and Awareness

- Promote Hudson Gardens' free admission more effectively.
- Increase visibility on community connection platforms, like NextDoor, and enhance signage on Santa Fe Drive.
- Implement targeted outreach to families and surrounding local communities.

## Priorities (Based on Frequency and Emphasis)

- **Wayfinding and Signage Improvements:** Critical for enhancing visitor experience.
- **Concert and Event Programming:** Strong interest in reviving concerts and events.
- **Educational Opportunities and Classes:** Broad support for expanding community learning.
- **Facility Upgrades (Restrooms, Greenhouse, Railroad Garden):** Addressing infrastructure issues is essential.
- **Community Engagement and Volunteer Growth:** Helping ensure sustainable volunteer support.
- **Marketing and Outreach Efforts:** Increasing visibility to new and local audiences.

## Key Observations from Staff Interviews

### 1. Operational and Staffing Challenges

- Staff frequently feel overwhelmed with immediate demands, leaving little time to improve processes.
- Communication with the larger South Suburban Park and Recreation District (South Suburban) has improved as staff navigate different systems and procedures.
- Staffing challenges include difficulties recruiting and retaining staff due to pay rates and workload.

### 2. Facility and Infrastructure Concerns

- Parking limitations create ongoing frustration for visitors and event planning.
- Lack of lighting, especially on pathways, presents safety concerns for staff and guests.
- Facility maintenance is complicated by the age and variability of equipment and infrastructure.
- Inadequate storage and breakroom spaces hinder daily operations.

### 3. Programming and Community Engagement

- Staff see potential to expand educational programs and events, especially with more resources.
- The public's desire for the return of concerts is perceived as an opportunity to attract and engage the community.
- Community partnerships, such as collaborations with local schools and organizations, are viewed as promising.

### 4. Safety and Security Issues

- Pathway lighting and nighttime security are top safety concerns.
- The shared administrative space with public-facing areas poses security risks.
- The introduction of security cameras is a positive step, but more proactive measures may be warranted.



## 5. Long-Term Vision and Strategy

- Staff expressed uncertainty about the long-term identity of Hudson Gardens, balancing its roles as a public garden and event venue.
- There is a need for a strategic vision to guide decisions about programming, facility investments, and partnerships.
- There is interest in exploring models like the Denver Botanic Gardens for educational and community engagement ideas.

## 6. Priority Areas for Action

- **Safety Improvements:** Address the immediate need for better lighting and security measures.
- **Parking Solutions:** Develop solutions for overflow parking and better visitor guidance.
- **Facility Upgrades:** Focus on restrooms, greenhouse repairs, and storage expansion.
- **Staffing Support:** Streamline processes and improve hiring practices.
- **Strategic Direction:** Define Hudson Gardens' long-term role and programming strategy.

## Littleton Cultural Arts Partners Feedback Summary

Littleton Cultural Arts Partners indicated their appreciation for the following:

- **Nature:** Unique, nature-filled space with walkable, peaceful gardens.
- **Access:** Convenient access from Mary Carter Greenway; family-friendly atmosphere.
- **Events:** Popular seasonal events like pumpkin displays, holiday lights, and concerts.
- **Connection:** Community gathering spot with Nixon's Coffeehouse, picnic areas, and art.

Littleton Cultural Arts Partners indicated following opportunities for improvement:

- **Concerts and Events:** Bring back summer concert series; expand event offerings.
- **Family Amenities:** Add a play structure, carousel, and more picnic tables.
- **Connectivity:** Improve entrance traffic flow to enable better downtown connections.
- **Programming:** Increase activities, rotate art exhibits, and develop school partnerships.
- **Community Appeal:** Enhance marketing to strengthen regional draw.

## Community Focus Groups

Three focus groups were conducted to gather targeted insights into specific areas of interest. Each focus group concentrated on a unique aspect of Hudson Gardens, enabling more in-depth discussions:

- Nature, Grounds, and Environment
- Public Events and Performances
- Arts and Culture

## Focus Group Themes and Suggestions

### OPERATIONS/MANAGEMENT

- Clarify and communicate a distinct identity and mission for Hudson Gardens.
- Enhance marketing efforts and improve website content management.
- Build public trust and demonstrate South Suburban's expertise in managing a unique venue.
- Expand ticketed events while preserving free daily admission and offering a few free community events annually.
- Implement tiered pricing for ticketed events with resident and non-resident rates.
- Increase transparency around funding and address perceptions of financial imbalance.
- Strengthen the volunteer program through better structure, support, and recognition.
- Ensure all design and programming decisions reflect intentionality, quality, and harmony with the setting.

### PROGRAMMING

- Balance quiet, reflective experiences with vibrant, active programming.
- Increase the number of live performances, including concerts and cultural events.
- Leverage and expand partnerships rather than developing all offerings in-house.
- Grow educational programming to engage diverse audiences.
- Regularly refresh programs and events to encourage repeat visits and longer stays.
- Develop cozy, off-season programming like indoor music series and workshops.
- Host outdoor experiences that align with Colorado's lifestyle, such as food and wine festivals and farm-to-table dinners.

### FACILITY

- Prioritize environmental sustainability with native plants and reduce turf areas.
- Construct a permanent performance space, such as a stage or band shell.
- Leverage riverfront access to increase visibility and attract new visitors.



## Comment Card and Online Comments

Feedback from 235 comment cards or online comments, submitted by community members, were organized by themes as shown in Figure A2. The majority of these comments were collected at pop-up engagement activities at Hudson Gardens and nearby community venues and events, including the Buck Recreation Center, Breckenridge Brewery, Bemis Library, and the Aspen Grove Halloween Extravaganza.

Figure A2: Visual Representation of Comment Card Themes by Frequency



### MAINTAIN AND ENHANCE BOTANICAL FEATURES (72 MENTIONS)

The most mentioned theme was the enhancement and preservation of botanical features. Respondents expressed strong support for maintaining the gardens and improving the landscape, emphasizing the following:

- More flowers and diverse plant species
- Additional shaded areas and tree planting
- Continued upkeep and beautification efforts

### REINSTATE SUMMER CONCERT SERIES (71 MENTIONS)

Many respondents reminisced about past summer concerts and voiced a strong desire for their return. Key suggestions included:

- A variety of musical acts for different audiences
- More family-friendly performances
- Affordable or free concert options

### **OFFER MORE AFFORDABLE SPECIAL EVENTS (56 MENTIONS)**

There was significant interest in more events, particularly accessible, budget-friendly options. Common themes included:

- Festivals and seasonal celebrations
- Cultural and arts-based events
- More frequent and affordable ticket pricing

### **OFFER MORE FAMILY-FRIENDLY AND KID-ORIENTED ACTIVITIES (33 MENTIONS)**

Several respondents emphasized the need for additional activities catering to children and families, such as:

- Playgrounds and interactive play spaces
- Family-focused events and programming
- More hands-on educational activities

### **EXPAND PARKING AND TRAFFIC MANAGEMENT (26 MENTIONS)**

Concerns about parking and traffic were frequently raised, with suggestions including:

- More parking spaces to accommodate visitors
- Improved traffic flow and entrance/exit management
- Dedicated parking areas for special events

### **ENHANCE WALKING TRAILS AND PATHWAYS (23 MENTIONS)**

Many respondents expressed a desire for improved and expanded walking paths, including:

- Additional nature trails and looped paths
- Better lighting and safety measures
- Enhanced connections to existing trails

### **CONDUCT MORE MARKETING AND OUTREACH (13 MENTIONS)**

Some respondents felt that marketing efforts could be improved to better inform the community about events and activities. Suggestions included:

- Increased social media engagement
- More visible signage and advertisements
- Expanded email and newsletter updates

### **EXPAND FOOD AND BEVERAGE OPTIONS (12 MENTIONS)**

Visitors wanted more food and drink choices available during their visits, including:

- A café or permanent food vendor
- A variety of snack and drink options
- More food trucks during events

### **PROVIDE MORE RESTROOMS AND WATER STATIONS (8 MENTIONS)**

Several respondents highlighted a need for more restrooms and hydration options, specifically:

- More evenly distributed restroom facilities
- Additional water refill stations

### **IMPROVE SEATING AND ACCESSIBILITY (7 MENTIONS)**

A few respondents mentioned a need for better seating and improved accessibility, including:

- More benches and shaded seating areas
- Improved wheelchair accessibility and Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)-compliant features

### **ENABLE BETTER INTEGRATION WITH THE SOUTH PLATTE RIVER AND SUSTAINABILITY INITIATIVES (4 MENTIONS)**

A small number of respondents emphasized the importance of sustainability and river integration, including:

- Improved access to the South Platte River
- More eco-friendly and green initiatives



# Interactive Map

The interactive map allowed residents to provide location-specific feedback, helping identify areas of interest or concern within the parks and recreation network. Participants highlighted opportunities for new pathways, improvements to existing parks, and other site-specific suggestions that were valuable in understanding community spatial preferences.

A total of 59 pins were dropped across the map. Common themes are listed below:

- Many participants desire to bring back concerts, highlighting it as a top priority (23).
- Many comments pointed to the need for facility and infrastructure improvements (14).
- There was interest in expanding educational programs and learning opportunities (7).
- Several comments supported hosting more cultural and community events (6).
- Some participants shared general positive feedback about their experiences (9).

Figure A3: Interactive Map



## Survey Responses

To gather community input on the future of Hudson Gardens, an open survey was made available to residents and visitors through the project website and a QR code (518 completed). Unlike a statistically valid mailed survey, this approach allowed anyone interested in participating to share their feedback. The responses provide valuable insights into visitor preferences, priorities, and potential improvements for Hudson Gardens. Key findings highlight strong community interest in expanding event offerings, enhancing amenities, and maintaining the gardens' natural beauty while exploring opportunities for new programming.

Additionally, survey results reveal notable differences in attitudes toward modifying Hudson Gardens and temporarily closing the space for special events among three distinct groups: those who did not list concerts as a reason for visiting, those who did, and those who only listed concerts as their reason for visiting.

### Survey Question Responses

#### TOP REASON FOR VISITING

- Enjoying the gardens and plant displays (58%)
- Attending seasonal or holiday events (57%)
- Attending concerts or live performances (55%)
- Going on nature walks and trails (39%)

#### OBSTACLES TO VISITING

- Nothing (28%)
- Lack of time (24%)
- Not interested in current offerings (22%)
- Unaware of events or activities (20%)

#### PRIVATE EVENTS AND RENTALS

Most respondents (72%) have not considered hosting an event at Hudson Gardens. For the 8% of respondents who have hosted an event at Hudson Gardens, satisfaction is high.

- Very satisfied (83%)
- Somewhat satisfied (13%)
- Neutral (2%)
- Dissatisfied (0%)
- Very dissatisfied (0%)

Satisfaction is also high for the 39% of respondents who have attended a private event.

- Very satisfied (74%)
- Somewhat satisfied (22%)
- Neutral (4%)
- Very dissatisfied (1%)

### **MOST IMPORTANT FOR AN EVENT VENUE**

- Scenic outdoor setting (69%)
- Affordability (65%)
- Adequate parking (47%)
- Flexibility in choosing vendors (44%)
- Indoor facilities with climate control (44%)
- Accessibility for guests with disabilities (27%)

### **MOST VISITED AREAS**

- Walking paths (72%)
- Ponds and cascades (52%)
- Water lilies (46%)
- Rose garden (45%)
- Wetlands and natural areas (42%)
- Amphitheater (38%)

### **LEAST VISITED AREAS**

- Children's play areas (10%)
- Gazebo (11%)
- Garden Railroad (19%)

### **TOP PROGRAM INTERESTS**

Of respondents that participate in programs, 54% occasionally participate and just 3% regularly participate; 7% were not interested in programming.

- Art and culture (51%)
- Nature and education (49%)
- Social (37%)
- Lifestyle/wellness (28%)
- Environmental conservation (28%)

### **OTHER INTERESTS INTERESTED IN FARMERS MARKETS, CRAFT FAIRS, SEASONAL FESTIVALS**

- Interest in new community events such as farmers markets, craft fairs, and seasonal festivals is high, with **53%** very interested and **35%** somewhat interested.
- Interest in other types of performances such as theater, dance, and comedy is relatively high with **36%** very interested and **39%** somewhat interested.



### CONCERTS INTEREST\*

- National acts (65%)
- Local acts (62%)
- Paid family/community acts (35%)
- Free family/community acts (28%)
- Unsure/depends (16%)
- Not willing to pay (5%)

### Survey Response Summary

The data reflects a community that values Hudson Gardens as both a serene natural environment and a vibrant venue for cultural and social experiences. Visitors are most drawn to the gardens, pathways, seasonal events, and performances, while barriers to greater use often stem from time constraints or lack of awareness. Although most have not hosted private events at the Gardens, those who have report high satisfaction. The most visited areas align with the site's natural features, while interest in future programming and events—particularly farmers markets, arts performances, and concerts—demonstrates strong community support for a diverse mix of offerings that complement the Gardens' scenic setting. These findings suggest that enhancing awareness, maintaining affordability, and expanding both informal and structured programming can help Hudson Gardens serve a broader and more engaged audience.

*\*Note that multiple selections could be chosen.*

# Attitudes Toward Modifying or Closing the Gardens for Special Events

## Modifying the Gardens for Special Events

Among respondents who did not list concerts as a reason for visiting, 38% supported modifying existing garden features or spaces to accommodate concerts, performances, or large private events. Support was slightly lower among those who attend concerts (32%), suggesting that even concertgoers have reservations about altering the gardens for event purposes. Due to insufficient data, BerryDunn could not determine the level of support among those who only listed concerts as their reason for visiting.

## Closing the Gardens for Special Events

When asked about acceptable reasons for temporarily closing portions of Hudson Gardens, both concertgoers and non-concertgoers largely supported closures for large public events, such as concerts and ticketed gatherings. Individuals who listed concerts as a reason for visiting were more supportive of closures (82%) for large public events, compared to those who did not list concerts (74%).

Support for closing the gardens for private events, such as corporate functions and weddings, was more evenly distributed across all groups, with 56% of non-concertgoers and 55% of concertgoers agreeing that private events justified temporary closures.

There was a more pronounced divide in support for closures related to community and educational programs. Of non-concertgoers, 42% supported closing the gardens for educational programs, while only 33% of concertgoers agreed. This suggests that those who visit the gardens for reasons other than concerts place a higher value on its role as an educational and cultural resource.

Finally, opposition to closing Hudson Gardens for any public or private events was more common among those who did not list concerts as a reason for visiting, with 12% expressing that the gardens should never be closed, compared to only 7% of concertgoers.

The data suggests that while concertgoers and non-concertgoers have slightly different views on specific types of closures and modifications, they share a common appreciation for Hudson Gardens as both a natural retreat and a community venue. Both groups show caution toward altering the gardens for events and largely support temporary closures for public gatherings. Differences emerge in the degree of support for closures related to educational programming and a small subset of visitors who oppose any closures, but overall, the findings reflect a shared interest in preserving the natural environment while thoughtfully supporting events that align with the setting. These nuanced perspectives should inform future planning that maintains the gardens' character while accommodating diverse uses.

## Summary

The engagement process revealed that Hudson Gardens is valued as both a sanctuary and a gathering place. Community members consistently expressed appreciation for the site's open green spaces, peaceful atmosphere, and free daily access, while also showing strong enthusiasm for seasonal events, performances, and future programming. Stakeholders across all groups, whether staff, volunteers, or visitors, emphasized preserving the gardens' identity while making strategic improvements that increase accessibility, enhance amenities, and support meaningful community connections.

What emerged from the engagement was a shared commitment for a balance between conservation and activity, education and entertainment, tradition and growth. Participants expressed a clear desire for Hudson Gardens to remain a welcoming, inclusive, and inspiring space that continues evolving with community needs while staying rooted in its unique character.

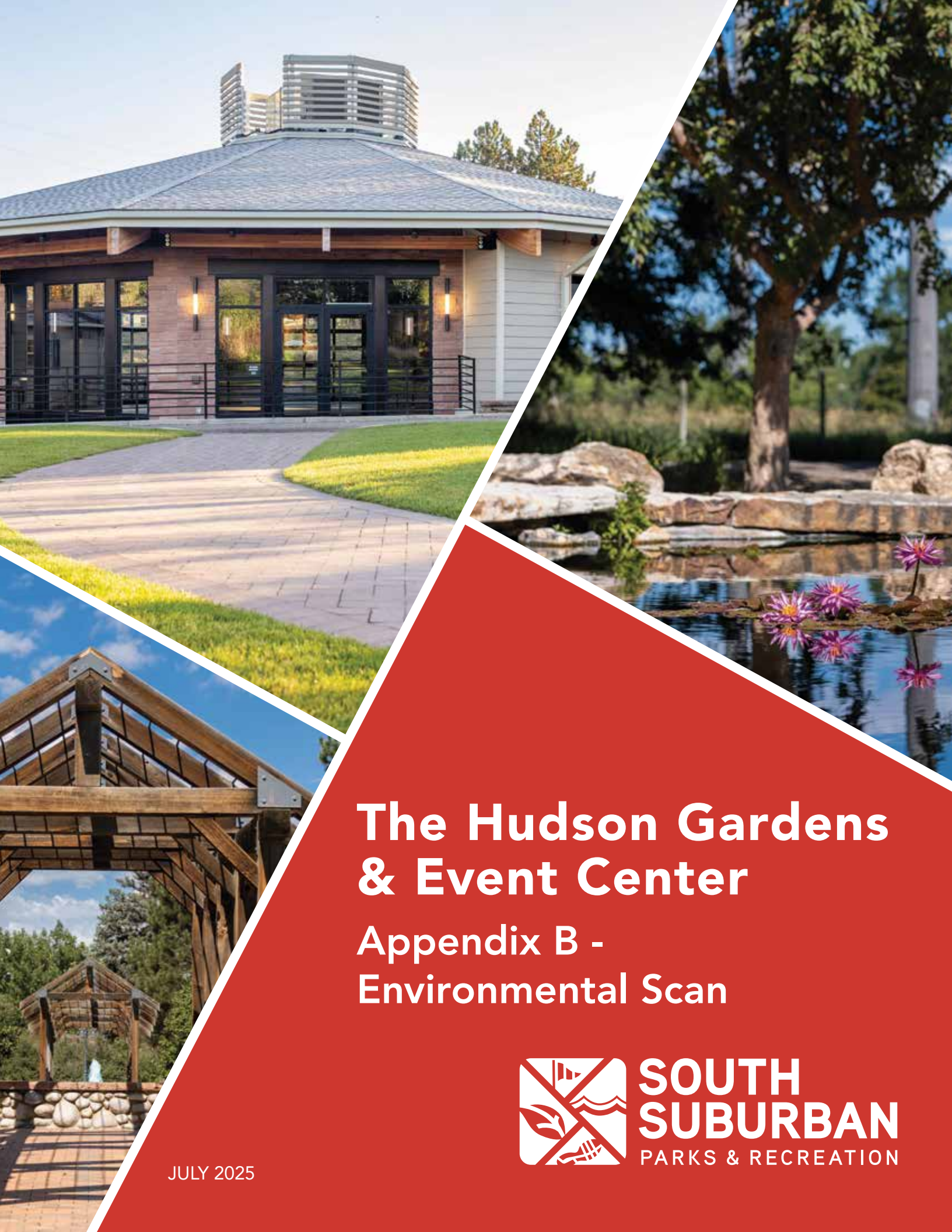
The following themes were consistently observed throughout the engagement:

- **Strong Interest in Reviving Live Performances and Events:** Community members repeatedly called for the return of summer concerts, with broad support for a range of public events that celebrate arts, culture, and seasonal traditions.
- **Preservation of the Garden Experience:** While residents support more activity, they remain protective of the gardens' natural beauty, emphasizing the importance of minimal disruption to existing landscapes.
- **Facility and Infrastructure Needs:** Upgrades to restrooms, the greenhouse, pathway lighting, and signage were frequently cited as essential improvements.
- **Educational and Interpretive Programming:** There is clear enthusiasm for expanding educational offerings, hands-on workshops, and interpretive signage that enhances visitor learning and engagement.
- **Volunteer and Staff Support:** Sustaining the volunteer program, addressing staff workload, and clarifying internal processes were common priorities shared by both staff and volunteers.
- **Improved Visibility and Marketing:** Many residents were unaware of existing offerings, pointing to the need for stronger outreach, signage, and promotion—especially highlighting free access and community value.
- **Event Access and Affordability:** Participants value both free and ticketed experiences, with an emphasis on affordability, resident pricing, and transparency around operations and funding.

As Hudson Gardens plans for the future, these insights underscore the need for an intentional, balanced approach that honors its botanical and community roots while creating space for new ideas and varied activities.







# The Hudson Gardens & Event Center

## Appendix B - Environmental Scan



**SOUTH  
SUBURBAN**  
PARKS & RECREATION

JULY 2025



**APPENDIX B - ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN**

**Demographics ..... 4**

- Service Area Analysis ..... 4
- Population Growth Rates ..... 5
- Age Distribution ..... 6
- Household Income ..... 7
- Primary Target Market..... 8

**Alternative Provider Assessment ..... 9**

- Amphitheaters and Concert Venues ..... 10
- Celebration of Life Venues ..... 10
- Botanical and Community Gardens ..... 10
- Wedding and Event Venues ..... 10
- Target Services ..... 10

**Peer Comparisons .....11**

- Selection Criteria for Peer Comparisons..... 11
- Mission Statements and Organizational Focus.....12
- Admission Fee Structures.....13
- Amenities and Visitor Experience .....14

**Visitation Trends and Market Reach ..... 16**

- Operational Structures and Staffing .....18

**Takeaways for Hudson Gardens..... 18**



# Appendix B - Environmental Scan

The Environmental Scan provides a data-driven overview of the regional context, demographics, market competition, and peer institutions that shape the strategic environment in which The Hudson Gardens & Event Center (Hudson Gardens or Gardens) operates. It provides a foundational understanding of the broader context in which Hudson Gardens operates.

This section covers three primary areas:

- **Demographics:** An overview of the population, age distribution, income levels, and household characteristics within the 5-, 10-, and 20-mile service radii. This analysis provides insights into the current and future market for Hudson Gardens, helping identify key audience segments and growth opportunities.
- **Market Analysis:** A review of the competitive landscape, including other botanical gardens, event venues, and community amenities that serve similar audiences. This assessment helps Hudson Gardens position itself effectively within a crowded regional market.
- **Peer Comparisons:** A benchmarking analysis of similar institutions across the country, focusing on visitation patterns, amenities, and financial models. This section highlights best practices and potential opportunities for Hudson Gardens to differentiate itself and enhance visitor experience.

Together, these components provide a comprehensive view of the factors shaping Hudson Gardens' operating environment, supporting strategic planning and long-term growth.

## Demographics

Understanding the demographic profile of the communities surrounding Hudson Gardens is critical for effective planning and long-term sustainability. This section provides insights into the current and potential market for Hudson Gardens by examining key population characteristics within 5-mile, 10-mile, and 20-mile service radii. Population, age distribution, income, race/ethnicity, and other household characteristic data was sourced from ArcGIS Business Analyst using October 2024 U.S. Census estimates.

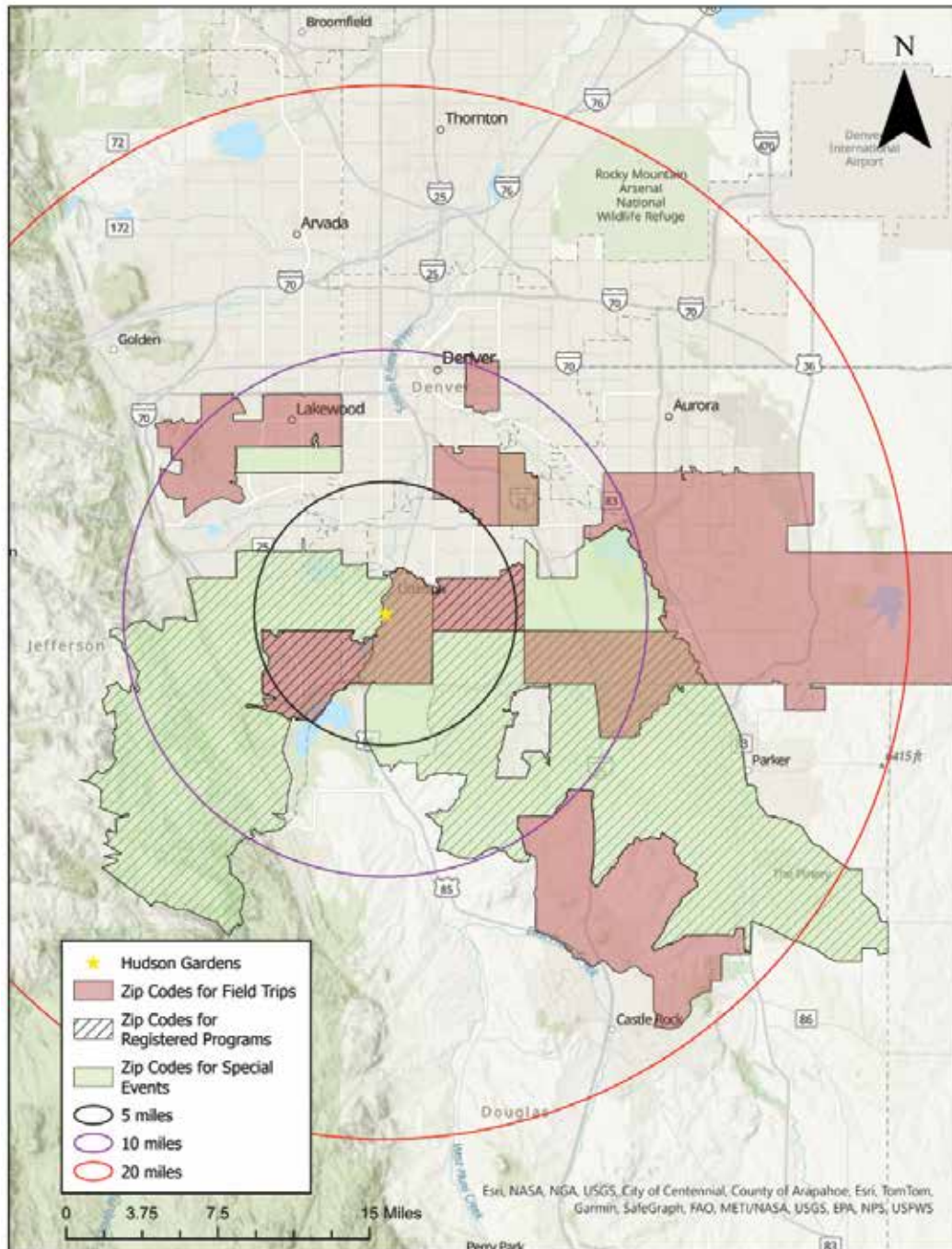
### Service Area Analysis

The service area analysis for Hudson Gardens covers three primary geographic zones:

- **5-Mile Radius:** Represents the core local market, capturing frequent visitors and those likely to engage in regular programming.
- **10-Mile Radius:** Reflects a broader regional market, including visitors who may travel for events, concerts, and seasonal attractions.
- **20-Mile Radius:** Encompasses a wider regional area, capturing occasional visitors and those drawn to major events or unique attractions.

Figure 1B below shows the 5-mile, 10-mile, and 20-mile service areas around Hudson Gardens to provide a visual reference for the geographic scope of this analysis.

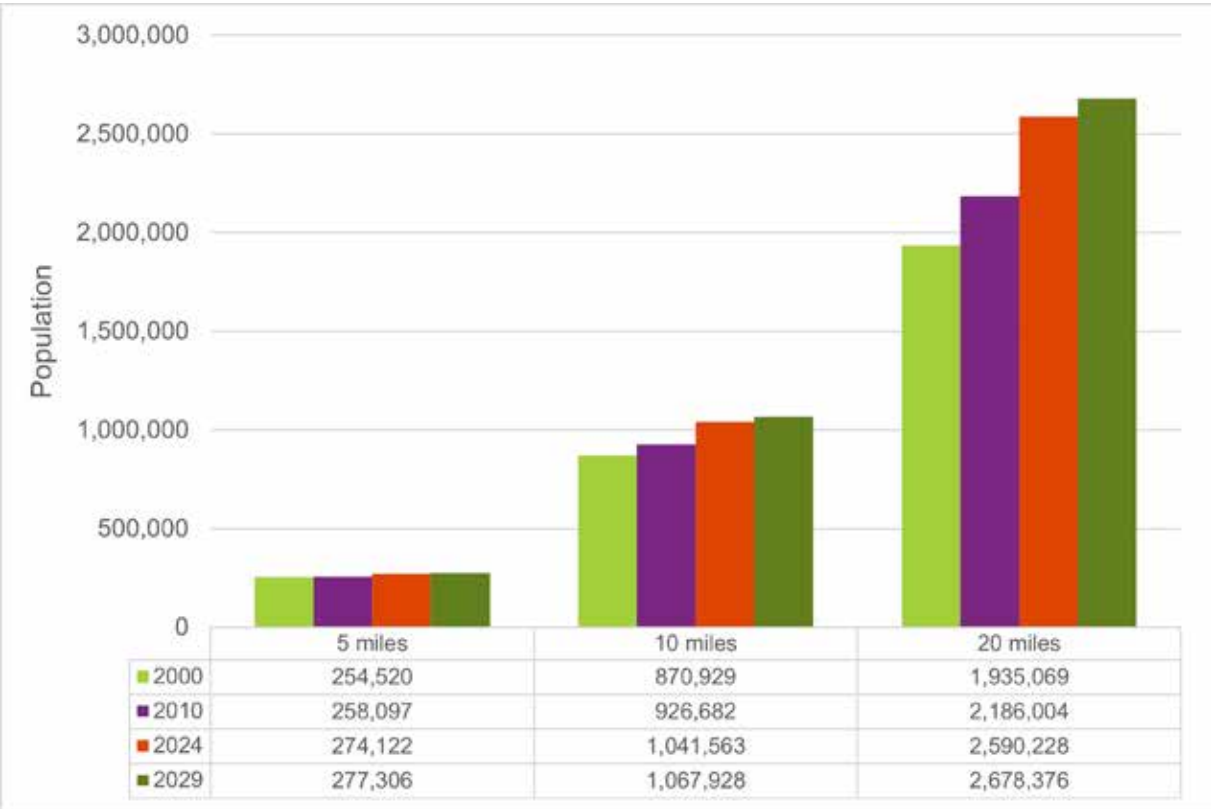
Figure 1B: 5-mile, 10-mile, and 20-mile Service Radius of Hudson Gardens



## Population Growth Rates

- **Current Population:** As of 2024, the population within the 5-mile service area is approximately 274,122, the 10-mile area includes 1,041,563 residents, and the 20-mile area covers 2,590,228.
- **Projected Growth Rates:** Population growth across all three service areas is expected to remain modest, with average compound annual growth rates of 0.23% (5 miles), 0.50% (10 miles), and 0.67% (20 miles) projected through 2029.

Figure 2B: Total Population and Population Change (2000 – 2029)



Age Distribution

- **Median Age Trends:** The median age within the 5-mile service area is 40.6 years, slightly higher than the 10-mile (37.9 years) and 20-mile (37.3 years) areas, reflecting a mature population base. This trend is expected to continue, with the median age increasing across all areas by 2029.
- **Core Target Market:** Adults aged 35 to 54 make up the largest percentage of the population across all service areas, representing a key target audience for Hudson Gardens due to their higher spending power and interest in family-friendly events, cultural experiences, and outdoor recreation.



Table 1B: Median Age (2024)

	5 miles	10 miles	20 miles
2010	39.4	36.7	35.6
2024	40.6	37.9	37.3
2029	42.2	39.4	38.7

### Household Income

- **Income Distribution:** Median household incomes within the service areas are relatively high, averaging \$102,802, with the 5-mile area slightly exceeding this figure. This higher income level indicates strong potential for discretionary spending on weddings, special events, memberships, and premium experiences.
- **Areas of Higher Median Income:** Certain ZIP codes within the 5-mile radius exhibit significantly higher household incomes, making them attractive targets for high-value programming and exclusive offerings.

## Primary Target Market

Based on the information provided above, the following groups have been identified as potential target markets to consider.

### Adults aged 35-54

- Adults aged 35 to 54 represent the largest percentage of the population across the 5-, 10-, and 20-mile service areas, accounting for 27%-29% of residents.
- Adults in this age range are typically in their peak earning years, often have children, and engage in recreational, cultural, and event-related activities such as field trips, special programs, and family-friendly events.
- Programs like outdoor concerts, cultural festivals, and family-focused experiences are likely to resonate with this group.

### Families with Children Under 18

- Certain ZIP codes have high concentrations of children under 18 (up to 33%). This demographic points to the need for family-oriented programs and child-friendly activities.
- Families often look for outdoor, educational, or recreational experiences that align with school schedules and family time.
- Activities like summer camps, field trips, interactive exhibits, and family-friendly festivals.

### Residents with Higher Median Incomes

- The median household income across service areas is \$102,802, which is above the national average. The 5-mile area has an even higher median income.
- Higher incomes suggest the ability and willingness to spend on discretionary activities like weddings, special events, and paid programs.
- Opportunities to market premium experiences, memberships, and event rentals to affluent households.

### Older Adults (55+)

- This demographic is prevalent in the 5-mile service area.
- Older adults have time for leisure and community-based activities and may be drawn to wellness programs, cultural events, and gardens.
- Programs like horticulture workshops, senior-friendly fitness, and daytime social events.

## Alternative Provider Assessment

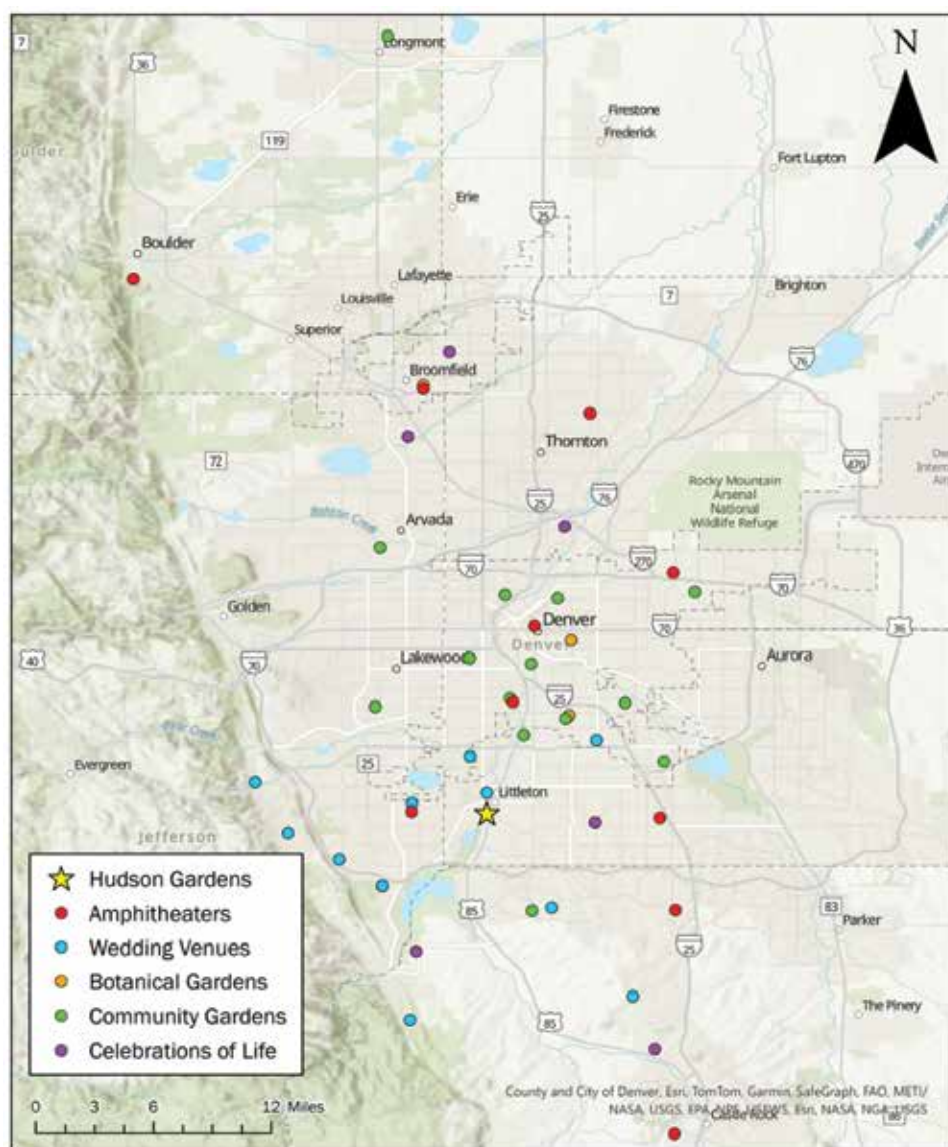
Understanding the landscape of alternative service providers is essential for positioning Hudson Gardens within the regional market and ensuring its long-term competitiveness. This section provides an overview of similar venues within the region, including:

- Amphitheaters and Concert Venues
- Botanical gardens and community gardens
- Celebration of life venues
- Wedding/event spaces

These comparisons highlight the range of services available to Hudson Gardens' target audiences and help identify potential opportunities for differentiation, collaboration, and market positioning.

Figure 4B shows the distribution of alternative providers for these services in the region.

### Figure 4B: Top Alternative Providers to Hudson Gardens





## Amphitheaters and Concert Venues

Hudson Gardens is part of a network of outdoor performance spaces in the region, competing with venues like Levitt Pavilion Denver, Fiddler's Green Amphitheatre, and Conservatory Green at Central Park. Unlike Hudson Gardens, many of these venues feature purpose-built infrastructure for concerts, including permanent seating, advanced sound systems, and dedicated staging areas, providing a distinct competitive advantage for larger, more technically demanding performances.

## Celebration of Life Venues

Hudson Gardens' serene landscapes and flexible event spaces make it a popular choice for memorial services and life celebrations, providing a peaceful backdrop for honoring loved ones. It competes with similar venues like Chatfield Farms, Church Ranch Event Center, and Seven Stones Chatfield, which also offer a combination of indoor and outdoor spaces tailored to intimate gatherings and reflective ceremonies. In addition to these venues, there were over 75 funeral and cremation providers in the Denver-metro area. These are typically more traditional venues that provide end-of-life services.

## Botanical and Community Gardens

Hudson Gardens is part of a broader network of botanical destinations in the region, including the Denver Botanic Gardens and Betty Ford Alpine Gardens, which offer educational and recreational experiences focused on plant conservation, horticulture, and environmental stewardship. Additionally, nearby community gardens like Ruby Hill and Arvada Community Gardens cater to residents seeking accessible green spaces for gardening and community connection.

## Wedding and Event Venues

Hudson Gardens is part of a competitive market for weddings and private events, alongside well-established venues like Highlands Ranch Mansion, Arrowhead Golf Club, and Willow Ridge Manor. These locations offer picturesque settings, full-service event support, and distinctive architectural styles, making them attractive options for couples seeking memorable, nature-inspired venues.

## Target Services

Despite a competitive landscape, Hudson Gardens offers unique features that make it a premier and desirable destination for a wide range of uses. Its combination of tranquil gardens, diverse event spaces, and rich cultural programming sets it apart, providing a compelling alternative to more conventional venues. This distinctive mix of natural beauty and flexible facilities supports strategic planning for programming, marketing, and capital investments, ensuring Hudson Gardens remains a leading choice for cultural, educational, and special events in the region.

# Peer Comparisons

To better understand its position within the broader botanical garden and cultural attractions market, Hudson Gardens conducted a peer comparison analysis. This effort aimed to identify key differentiators, market opportunities, and potential areas for growth. The analysis included a review of visitation patterns, physical size, admission fees, amenities, and operational strategies at comparable institutions across the United States.

## Selection Criteria for Peer Comparisons

Peer institutions were selected based on several factors, including geographic diversity, visitation volume, garden size, and admission structure. The primary criteria included:

- **Free Admission:** Like Hudson Gardens, a few peers offer free entry, enhancing accessibility and broadening visitor appeal.
- **Visitation Volume:** Gardens with comparable or higher annual visitation were prioritized to benchmark performance.
- **Physical Size and Facility Scope:** Peer gardens were chosen to reflect a range of acreage and facility complexity, providing insights into diverse operational models.
- **Regional and National Reach:** The list includes both regional competitors and nationally recognized destinations to capture a wide spectrum of visitor dynamics.

Table 2B: Peer Botanical Garden Comparison

Venue	Location	Year over Year Visitation	Number of Acres	Admission Fee or Membership Required?
Chatfield Farms	Colorado	74,600	700	Yes - \$12 adult
Cheyenne Botanic Gardens	Wyoming	223,500	9	Free
Denver Botanical Gardens - York	Colorado	695,300	24	Yes - \$15.75 adult
Descanso Gardens	California	552,100	150	Yes - \$15 adult
Hudson Gardens	Colorado	246,000	30	Free
Knoxville Botanical Garden	Tennessee	49,300	44	Free
State Botanical Garden of Georgia	Georgia	244,800	313	Free

## Mission Statements and Organizational Focus

The mission statements of peer gardens were also reviewed to identify common themes and strategic priorities. Many emphasize community connection, education, conservation, and the preservation of natural spaces. Key mission themes include:

- **Community and Education:** Focus on fostering connections, providing learning opportunities, and engaging diverse audiences.
- **Conservation and Stewardship:** Emphasis on preserving native habitats and promoting sustainable practices.
- **Cultural and Recreational Engagement:** Support for arts, wellness, and outdoor recreation through diverse programming.

Figure 5B: Common Words of Mission Statements





## Admission Fee Structures

Admission pricing varied significantly across peers, with Hudson Gardens standing out as one of the few free-admission sites. This approach supports broader community access and potentially higher visitation but may limit direct revenue generation.

- **Free Entry:** Hudson Gardens, Cheyenne Botanic Gardens, Knoxville Botanical Garden, and State Botanical Garden of Georgia do not charge an entry fee, aligning with a mission of accessibility.
- **Paid Admission:** Most peers charge admission, with adult fees ranging from \$9 to \$35, reflecting diverse revenue strategies.
- **Discounted Rates:** Some peers offer reduced rates for seniors, students, and military personnel, adding flexibility to their pricing models.
- **Demand-Based Pricing:** Examples like The Morton Arboretum use dynamic pricing to balance attendance and optimize revenue.

Table 3B: Comparison of Admission Fees

	Fee to Enter	Adults	Seniors (65+)	Military/ Veterans	Students (w/ ID)	Children (3-15)	Children Free Under Age
Hudson Gardens	No	Free	–	–	–	–	–
Chatfield Farms	Yes	\$12	\$9	\$9	\$7	\$7	2
Cheyenne Botanic Gardens	No	Free	–	–	–	–	–
Denver Botanical Gardens	Yes	\$15.75	\$12	\$12	\$11.50	\$11.50	2
Descanso Gardens	Yes	\$15	\$11	N/A	\$11	\$5	4
Knoxville Botanical Garden	No	Free	–	–	–	–	–
State Botanical Garden of Georgia	No	Free	–	–	–	–	–

## Amenities and Visitor Experience

Peer gardens offer a wide range of amenities, including event spaces, educational centers, and specialized attractions like conservatories and arboretums. Key findings include:

- **Core Amenities:** Parking, restrooms, food and beverage options, and gift shops are standard across most facilities.
- **Specialized Features:** Unique offerings like amphitheaters, children's play areas, and dedicated business centers distinguish some sites.
- **Learning and Engagement Spaces:** Many peers include classrooms, outdoor classrooms, and dedicated visitor centers to support educational programming.

Table 4B: Amenity Comparison Across Peer Botanical Garden

Amenity Comparison	Hudson Gardens	Cheyenne Botanic Gardens	Denver Botanical Gardens	Knoxville Botanical Garden	Descanso Gardens	State Botanical Garden of Georgia	Chatfield Farms
Amphitheatre					●	●	
Arboretum		●					
Art Gallery			●				
Business Center	●						
Classrooms	●		●			●	
Conservatory		●					
Food/Beverage Options	●		●		●	●	
Gift Shop	●	●	●		●	●	
Library			●				
Outdoor Classroom				●			
Parking	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Picnic Shelters/Area		●				●	
Play Area/Playground/ Childrens Area	●	●	●				
Restrooms	●	●	●		●	●	●
Trail Access	●			●	●		●
Visitor Center			●	●		●	



# Visitation Trends and Market Reach

Understanding visitor behavior helps Hudson Gardens align its programming and marketing strategies:

- **Visitation Volume:** Hudson Gardens ranks in the middle of its peers, indicating potential for growth.
- **Average Visit Duration:** Visitors spend an average of 74 minutes at Hudson Gardens, reflecting a need for expanded amenities or programming to encourage longer stays.
- **Peak Visitation Times:** Hudson Gardens peaks on Saturdays and in the evening, suggesting opportunities to expand weekday and daytime offerings.
- **Service Area Reach:** While most peers attract local and regional visitors, some, like Denver Botanical Gardens, draw from much larger geographic areas, reflecting broader brand recognition.

Figure 6B: Visitation Data for Peer Agencies (2023)

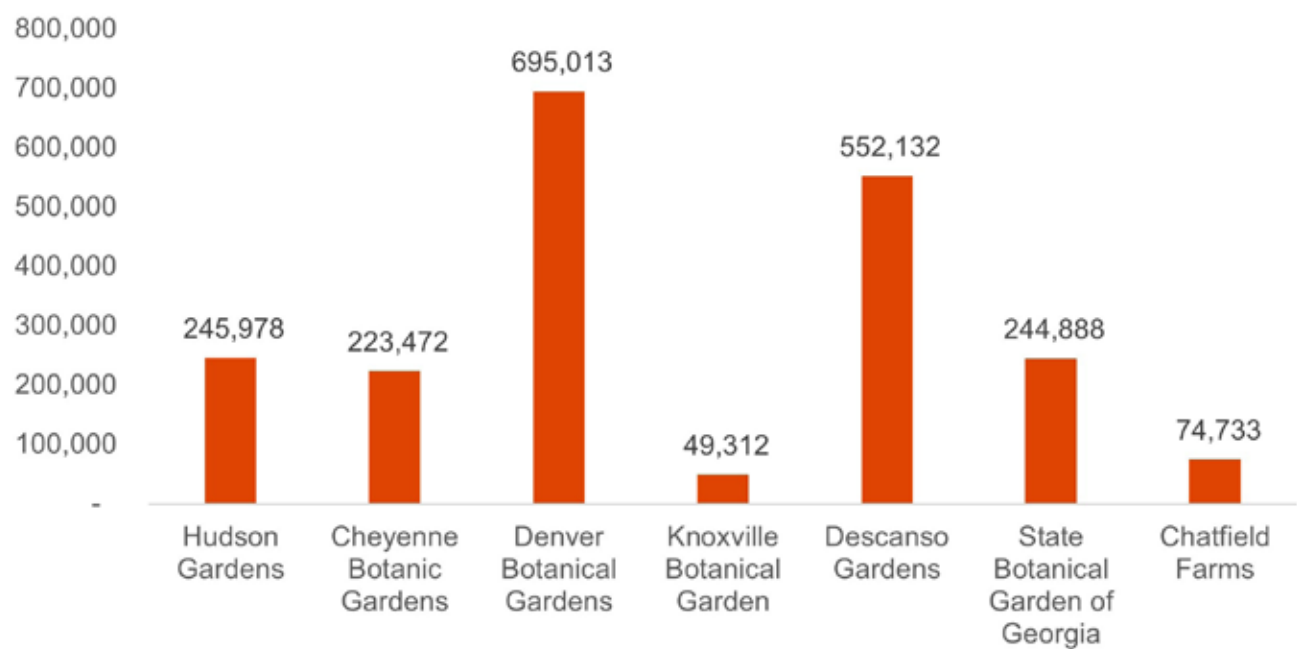
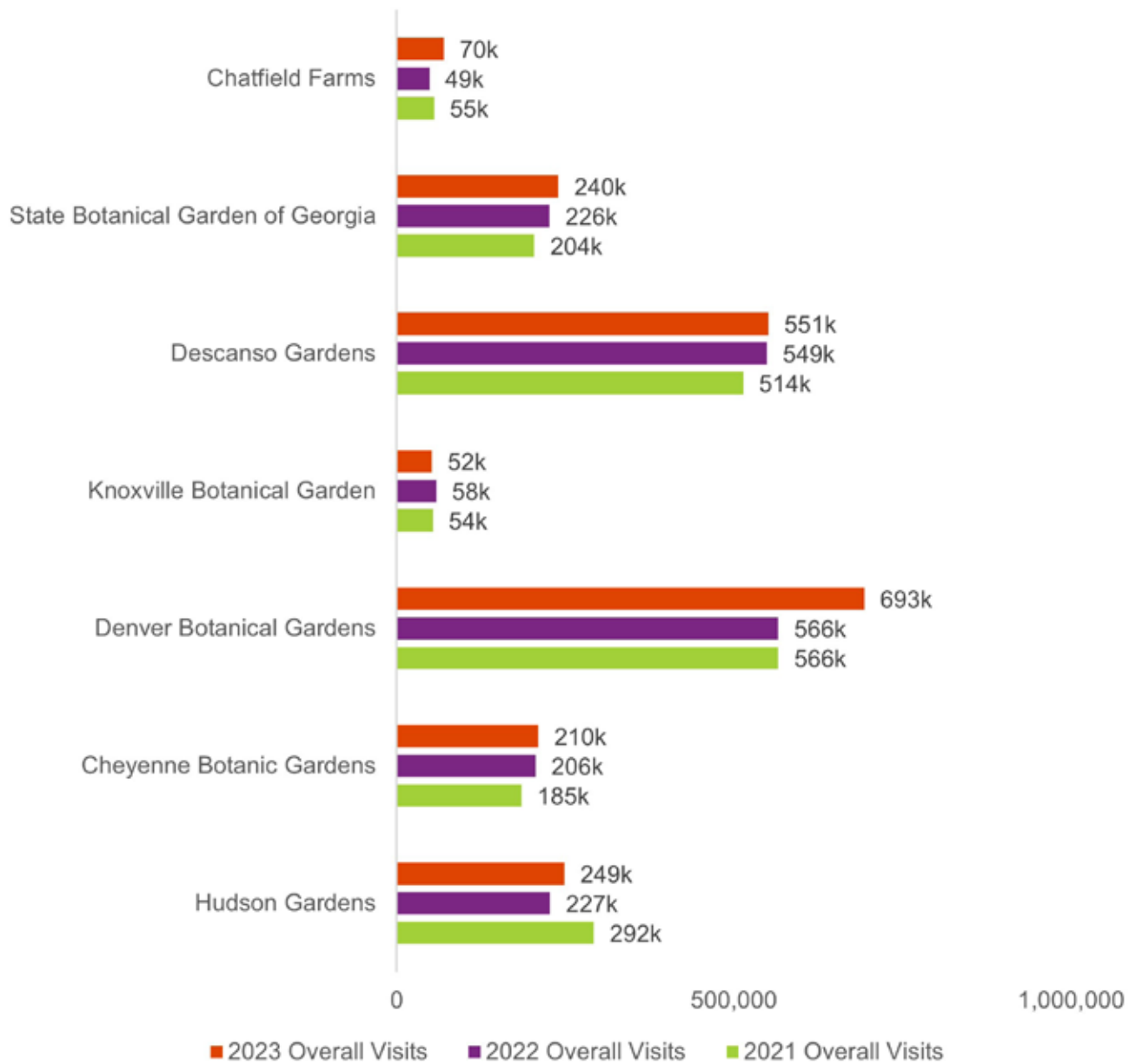


Figure 7B: Visitation Data for Peer Agencies (2021–2023)



## Operational Structures and Staffing

Staffing strategies vary significantly among peer institutions, reflecting differences in mission focus and operational scale:

- **Specialized Roles:** Positions like “Conservation Horticulturist” and “Visitor Services Manager” reflect a strong focus on education, conservation, and visitor experience.
- **Executive Leadership:** Many gardens have dedicated directors overseeing education, horticulture, and visitor services, highlighting the importance of specialized expertise.
- **Volunteer and Educational Coordination:** Roles supporting volunteer management and educational programming are critical for community engagement.

## Takeaways for Hudson Gardens

- **Free Admission as a Strategic Advantage:** Hudson Gardens stands out as one of the few botanical gardens in this analysis that offers free general admission. This model supports broad community access, encourages repeat visitation, and aligns with its mission of accessibility and public engagement.
- **Brand Differentiation Through Unique Experiences:** Hudson Gardens’ diverse amenities, including flexible event spaces, picturesque natural settings, and educational programming, position it uniquely among its peers.
- **Peak Demand:** Visitation data reveals that Hudson Gardens peaks on weekends and evenings, indicating strong potential for concert series, seasonal events, and after-hours programming.
- **Educational and Community Focus:** Many peer institutions prioritize education, conservation, and community connection in their mission statements. Hudson Gardens can expand its impact by investing in educational programming, interpretive signage, and volunteer engagement, reinforcing its role as a community hub for learning and environmental stewardship.







# The Hudson Gardens & Event Center

## Appendix C - Services Assessment



**SOUTH  
SUBURBAN**  
PARKS & RECREATION

JULY 2025



**APPENDIX C - SERVICES ASSESSMENT**

Programs ..... 4

Self-Guided Activities ..... 4

Events..... 4

Facility Rentals ..... 5

Photography Permits ..... 5

Benefactor Club Membership ..... 5

Merchandise Sales..... 5

Service Performance ..... 6

Program Performance ..... 6

Self-Guided Activities Performance..... 6

Events Performance ..... 6

Facility Rental Performance ..... 6

Photography Permit Performance ..... 9

Benefactor Club Membership Performance ..... 9

Merchandise Sales Performance ..... 9

Customer Experience Audit ..... 10

Planning.....11

Arrival.....11

Exploration.....11

Engagement .....11

Exit .....11

Post-Visit .....11

Purpose ..... 12

Operations ..... 12

Safety and Security ..... 13

The Customer Experience ..... 13



# Appendix C - Services Assessment

The purpose of the Services Assessment is to establish a baseline understanding of existing conditions for programs, activities, events, ticketed experiences, merchandise sales, and facility use reservations. The Hudson Gardens & Event Center's (Hudson Gardens or Gardens) core services include programs, self-guided activities, events, merchandise sales, facility use rentals, photography permits, and benefactor memberships. This section reviews a description of each provided service.

## Programs

Since assuming operations in 2023, Hudson Gardens staff have expanded their program offerings to include a mix of educational, recreational, and wellness activities. These programs are typically fee-based or free and often leverage the unique features of the gardens as interactive learning spaces.

- **Examples:** Beekeeping, rose care, bird walks, forest bathing, yoga, mindfulness, and sound bathing.
- **2023-2024 Performance:** 100 programs held, serving 2,393 participants (1,342 paid and 1,051 free), generating \$24,913 in gross revenue.
- **Top Programs:** Petting Farm, Yoga in the Park, Bemis Bookmobile, and Meet the Beekeeper, each regularly attracting over 30 participants per session.

## Self-Guided Activities

Hudson Gardens is open year-round for self-guided exploration, offering free access to individuals and small groups. To reduce crowding and improve visitor experience, larger groups are encouraged to register in advance, a policy introduced in 2024.

- **2023-2024 Performance:** 26 registered self-guided tour groups, totaling 1,390 participants.

## Events

Signature events like Hudson Holidays, Light Up the New Year, and Red, White, & ROCK! attract large crowds and generate significant revenue. These events typically feature themed experiences, live music, food trucks, and seasonal displays.

- **2023-2024 Performance:** 27 events, including 5 paid internal events (e.g., Red, White & ROCK!), 7 external community events (e.g., races, walks), and 15 smaller gatherings, drawing 138,407 visitors.
- **Revenue Impact:** Special events generated \$575,500 in net revenue, despite high production costs for seasonal displays.

Hudson Holidays and Light Up the New Year illuminate the grounds with outdoor light displays and offer extra experiences such as a holiday maze, beverage sales, and photos with Santa. The show runs from late November to early January, with a few of the nights hosting special themes (i.e., ugly sweater, national cocoa day).

Tickets to events like Hudson Holidays and Light Up the New Year are sold for specific dates and priced according to participant age, but if a more flexible "Any Day" ticket is desired, the participant can pay an additional \$5. A similar ticketing format was used for the recent Magic of the Jack O'Lanterns event.

To celebrate Independence Day, the Red, White, & ROCK! concert was held in July 2024. The family-friendly event featured live music, food trucks, kids' activities, and fireworks. Ticket prices for this event were based on age: youth, ages 3 – 12, and adult.

Prior to South Suburban Park and Recreation District (South Suburban) assuming operation of Hudson Gardens, large concerts—featuring high profile acts—would be held on the grounds.

## Facility Rentals

The general public can rent specific spaces within Hudson Gardens, or the entire Hudson Gardens complex, for private, nonprofit, corporate, and community events. Examples of private rentals include weddings, celebrations of life, and family parties. Examples of other rental events include walk/run races, corporate parties, and banquets.

Rental fees vary by function, season, and time of day. For example, wedding and reception pricing during the peak seasons of May – October and December is higher on weekends than on weekdays. The price includes tables and chairs, a catering preparation area, parking, and access to the gardens for all event types, as well as two dressing areas for weddings and receptions.

## Photography Permits

Photos taken for personal use are allowed at any time and location, whereas photos taken for professional or commercial reasons must have a permit. General single day, single wedding day, and annual permits are available for sale online. Wedding day permits are priced higher than general single day photography permits, which aligns with typical fee structures in the industry.

## Benefactor Club Membership

Annual \$35 memberships to the Benefactor Club are sold to financially support garden exhibits, pathways, public sculptures, and the beekeeping program. Benefactor club members receive admission privileges and discounts to participating gardens nationwide, exclusive opportunities, and a one-year subscription to one of two magazine choices.

## Merchandise Sales

The gift shop sells novelty merchandise, souvenirs, seasonal decorations, and items representing the history of Hudson Gardens. Staff intentionally stocks items created by local vendors, such as lip balm, hats, gloves, scarves, specialty umbrellas, etc. Any food items for sale are also sourced locally, and there is bottled water available.

# Service Performance

In addition to assessing the menu of programs offered, it is helpful to gauge program performance. The extent of program performance can be measured by participation and financial performance.

## Program Performance

The Hudson Gardens staff offered 100 programs between October 2023 and September 2024; 62 were paid programs, and 38 were free. Reaching 2,393 total participants, the paid programs served 1,342 participants, while the free programs served 1,051 participants.

Programs that reach the most participants include the Petting Farm, Yoga in the Park, Bemis Bookmobile and Meet the Beekeeper. Held monthly through the summer season, these programs consistently reached over 30 participants with each session.

Gross program revenue for the year examined was \$24,913.

## Self-Guided Activities Performance

Due to the operational change of asking field trip groups to pre-register, the total of 26 self-guided tour groups only reflects the number of groups registered in advance. Hudson Gardens staff continue to try to educate groups that show up unannounced, requesting they register prior to future visits. Groups that visited in 2024 ranged from 10 to 150 participants each and totaled 1,390 participants.

## Events Performance

Of the 27 events held between October 2023 and September 2024, five were paid internal community events (e.g., Red, White & ROCK!, Hudson Holidays), seven were community events hosted by external entities (e.g., Walks, Runs, Races, Magic of the Jack O’Lanterns), and 15 were one-time smaller events (e.g., birthday parties, baby showers). At least 138,407 visitors enjoyed events on the Hudson Gardens grounds in the year examined.

Although special events were budgeted to gross the highest revenue total in 2024, the service line had the second-highest net, at \$575,500. This is due to the large contractual service required to provide the seasonal garden light displays.

## Facility Rental Performance

The most popular facility rental type is weddings; 52 weddings and/or wedding receptions were held on the grounds in the year examined. The second most popular facility rental is for celebration of life events; 32 were held in the year examined.

Facility rentals generate the largest amount of revenue for the Hudson Gardens. In 2024, rentals were budgeted to net \$950,428. The overall Hudson Gardens budget relies on the rental revenue to not only maintain the grounds, but also help support other indirect costs like District administrative salaries and the registration software fees.

At least 15,011 people participated in facility rentals between October 2023 and September 2024. The 129 rentals averaged 116 participants. Table 1E demonstrates the number of rentals, guests, and average number of guests per rental type.



Table 1C: Hudson Gardens Rental Data, October 2023-September 2024

Rental Type	Number of Rentals	Guests	Average
Corporate Event	21	2,221	106
Weddings and Receptions	52	4,519	87
Celebrations of Life	32	3,515	110
Holiday Parties	17	2,071	122
Nonprofit	7	2,685	384

While weddings and receptions hosted the largest number of guests (4,519), nonprofit rentals reached the largest average of guests per event.

In addition to hosting an average of one wedding or reception per week in the year examined, the staff provided 231 tours to interested renters.

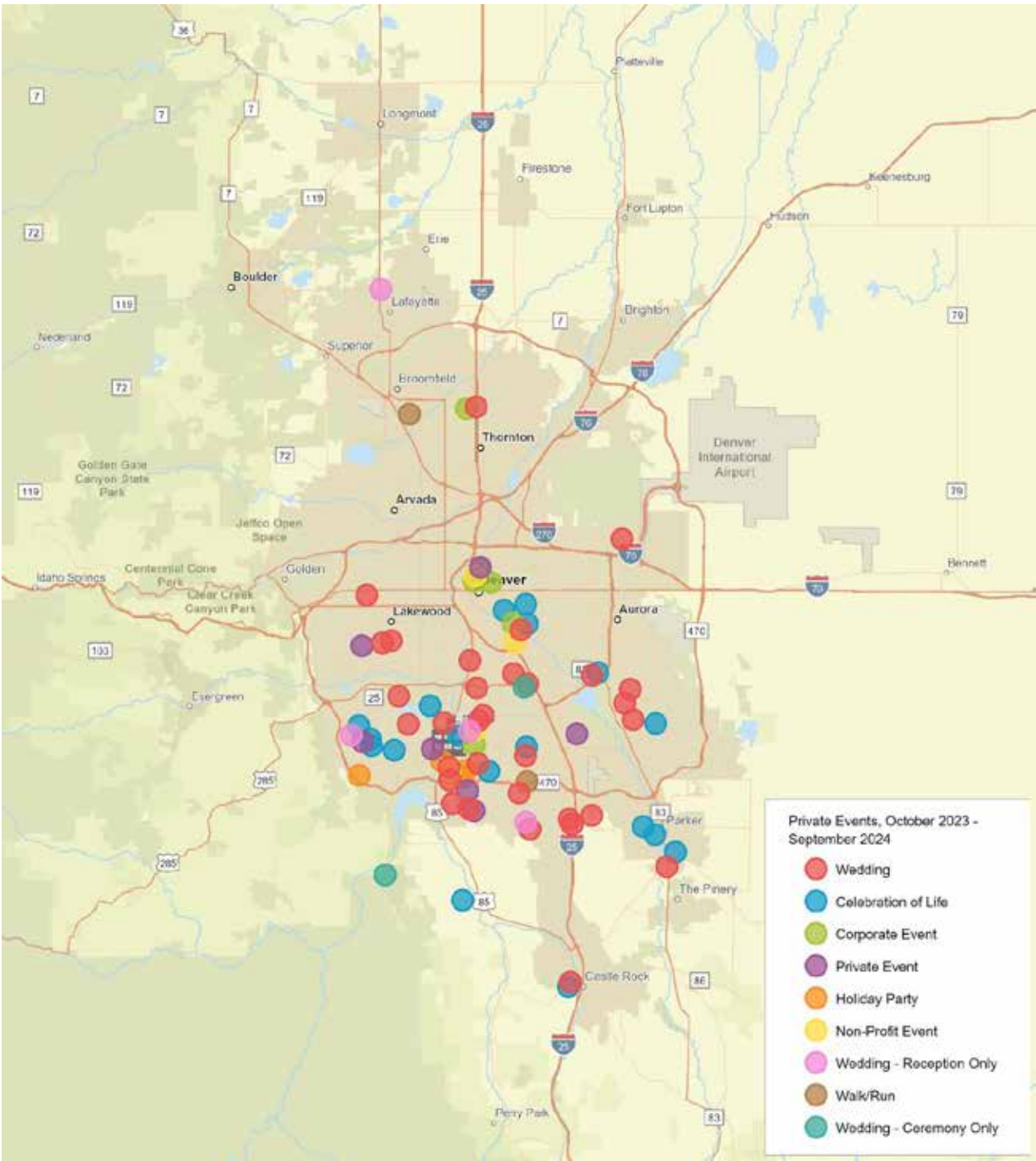
While most Hudson Gardens renters are local to the Denver area, at least seven rentals were coordinated by out-of-state guests. Figure 1C depicts the national reach of Hudson Gardens rentals:

Figure 1C: Hudson Gardens National Rental Reach, October 2023-September 2024



The regional draw for Hudson Gardens rentals is centered largely around Denver and the surrounding communities. Figure 2C depicts the regional reach of Hudson Gardens rentals:

Figure 2C: Hudson Gardens Regional Rental Reach, October 2023 – September 2024



Observations regarding the Hudson Gardens rental reach include:

- Most celebrations of life are local, south of I70
- Corporate event renters span from Northglenn, CO to Littleton, CO, with several in Denver, CO
- Holiday parties were typically very close in proximity to Hudson Gardens
- A majority of weddings were from south of I70, although a few were from north of I70, and some were from as far as the state of Washington
- Celebration of Life events were nearly all from south of I70, yet a handful were from as far as California and South Carolina

## Photography Permit Performance

The 2024 budget anticipated \$19,750 in photography permit sales, for both one-day and annual permits.

## Benefactor Club Membership Performance

Although memberships are not a major revenue source for Hudson Gardens, their sales provide the estimated 85 members an opportunity to give a structured financial contribution to the gardens. The 2024 budget estimated \$3,000 in membership sales.

## Merchandise Sales Performance

Merchandise sales anticipated \$147,000 in revenue and \$75,000 in expenses in 2024, resulting in an anticipated \$72,000 net revenue total. According to figures from the Retail Owner's Institute, gross profit margin percent trends for gift, novelty, and souvenir stores averaged 51.0% between 2017 and 2021. The budgeted profit margin for merchandise sales in 2024 was 51.02%. This baseline calculation assumes all merchandise purchased for sale in 2024 was also sold in 2024 and does not account for merchandise purchased in previous fiscal years. It appears the gift shop sales are on par with industry trends.

<https://retailowner.com/Benchmarks/Other-Specialty-Retail-Stores/Gift-Novelty-and-Souvenir-Stores#marginsprofit>



# Customer Experience Audit

The customer experience audit reviews the customer journey from awareness to post-purchase engagement. While the customer experience is different according to the distinct purposes for which participants visit, this customer journey map in Table 2C focuses on the common purpose of enjoying the gardens (regardless of scheduled program, rented space, or event).

**Table 2C: Customer Journey Map, Self-Directed Visit**

Stage	Customer Actions	Touch Points	Pain Points
Awareness	Learns about or is reminded of Hudson Gardens through an ad, social media post, or word of mouth.	Social media, website, brochure, ads	Website provides basic information, not interactive
Planning	Visits the website to check hours, ticket prices, events, photography policies, and map.	Event inquiry form, photos, virtual tour, email inquiries	Map is not to scale and could better-support successful navigation
Arrival	Drives to the location, parks, optional check-in at gift shop.	Entrance sign, parking lot, gift shop, or Mary Carter Greenway Trail entrance	Lack of defined entrance; no check-in requirement; lack of clarity regarding facility use and navigation.
Exploration	Walks through gardens, uses a map, takes photos, appreciates art and nature.	Art displays, ponds, gardens, benches	No clear trail map; wayfinding is difficult; space between key locations is undefined; minimal directional signage; accessibility for mobility impaired difficult
Engagement	Purchases gift shop items, interacts with staff for information, purchases coffee/food from on-site restaurateur.	Gift shop, Cafe	Restroom locations not conveniently accessible; little staff/volunteer presence on grounds; no guided in-person or audio tour; variable and unpredictable cafe hours
Exit	Completes visit, exits the grounds, and considers future engagement.	Parking lot	Missed call-to-action opportunity
Post-Visit	Shares photos on social media, leaves reviews, subscribes to newsletters, or donates.	Website, social media	Google and Facebook review quantities low relative to facility reach

## Awareness

The beloved facility is already well-known to the local community and surrounding region. Customer research relies heavily on electronic information; therefore, a robust website experience, search engine optimization, and continued social media campaigns can support the consumers' desire for electronic information sources.

## Planning

While there is a map available online, it only provides a general idea of the amenities' approximate locations. A map that was to scale and included pathways, artwork, and amenities would help a visitor plan. An interactive map would be ideal.

Due to the varied uses of the grounds, there are times when a general visitor cannot access the entire facility. Currently there is no clear way for the visitor to know about partial facility closures prior to arrival.

## Arrival

While there is a very large facility sign that is clearly visible from the roadway, once visitors enter the parking lot, there is a lack of clarity regarding where to park for each function, as well as where the main entry point is located. For a new visitor, it is difficult to independently determine the first step in their experience after parking.

The alternative entrance into the grounds is via the Mary Carter Greenway Trail. Here, the paths seem to indicate a clear access point to the coffee shop, but do not indicate anything beyond the shop.

## Exploration

Unobstructed entry allows for free, independent exploration of the grounds. Wayfinding support, via signage, maps, and clearly marked pathways would greatly enhance the user experience. Comfort amenities, such as shade, benches, and restrooms are not readily accessible. Accessibility for those with mobility difficulties could be enhanced. While food and beverage options are available at the coffee shop, its operation is privately managed and therefore not consistently available.

## Engagement

The peaceful, serene grounds are the draw—inviting visitors to engage with nature and art in their own meaningful way. Increased use of technology could enhance the visitor's experience, with features such as an app with an interactive trail map, audio tour, art exhibit explanation, and a donation button.

## Exit

Visitors may exit at any time, generally with no staff interaction or farewell signage.

## Post-Visit

Because there is no fee and/or check-in procedure, a post-visit experience evaluation opportunity is not procedurally built in. Hudson Gardens must rely on self-initiated post-visit engagement.

# Service Improvement Opportunities

During the discovery session meetings, Hudson Gardens staff presented themselves as a team of passionate employees who have customers' best interests at heart. They are eager for clarity and definition for the direction in which they should take future planning for operational events within the grounds. To that end, this section identifies service improvement opportunities for the staff's consideration.

## Purpose

The Hudson Gardens staff have an opportunity to better define the Gardens' core purpose. Specifically, the core purpose of whether the facility should serve community benefit or individual benefit more should be discussed and determined. The juxtaposition between the drive to increase facility-supporting earned revenue and uphold the longstanding tradition of free public access every day of the year results in a lack of purpose clarity. Deciding whether the grounds should be open primarily for open visitor use or closed use for private events will help staff prioritize facility use allocations. The creation of service menu distribution allocations can help articulate the degree to which the staff should focus on and prioritize their daily efforts.

When offered the idea of creating a pie chart visualization that depicts the percentage of function that represents each service component, staff were very receptive and eager to define what those percentages would be. One consideration of percentage delineation would be community benefit versus individual benefit. Another percentage breakdown definition opportunity would be the service components of community events, educational and recreational programs, private facility, rentals, and open/free use.

Additionally, operational areas like the beekeeping and bug barn exhibits demonstrate a conservation- and sustainability-focused philosophy, while the impeccably maintained lawns and gardens demonstrate a majestic philosophy. The contrasting operational approaches are causing a lack of purpose clarity in grounds maintenance and programming. It is difficult for both approaches to work in tandem; for example, reducing the frequency of the South Lawn mowing would increase sustainability efforts, yet would decrease its clean-cut appearance. Determining whether Hudson Gardens' core purpose should be to maintain a conservation- and sustainability-focused experience or an immaculate garden experience will provide staff with clearer direction regarding how to maintain the grounds, and what types of programs and experiences to provide.

## Operations

BerryDunn observed that since taking over operations of the gardens, Hudson Gardens staff have done a tremendous job in keeping an operation going for which they had minimal historic data or background information. Determining the best approach to customers' nuanced facility use requests has been difficult, largely due to a lack of institutional knowledge and established procedures. Drawing some lines in the sand, per se, will greatly assist the staff in conducting smooth operations moving forward. Little changes, such as assigning individual spaces in the gardens identifiable names, and then using the facility management software to reserve the individual space, will greatly assist the staff in managing the whole facility's schedule. The outcome of these changes will result in the staff's greater ability to respond to customer requests more promptly, use the spaces more efficiently, and subsequently enhance the overall customer experience.

Facility schedule planning is an area of opportunity for refinement and revision. Regular planning meetings, optimally on a weekly basis, can help ensure the staff are appropriately scheduling the grounds in an efficient manner. Defining access to the grounds by function in a more intentional way will also help with schedule management.

A proactive approach to managing visitor use patterns would help all visitors enjoy a better Hudson Gardens experience. Staff indicated that there are times when groups with competing interests arrive to the gardens

at the same time and want to use spaces in the garden simultaneously. Examples include photo sessions for homecoming dances, high school graduations, and family portraits; group field trips; drum circles; and private weddings.

While the shift to a reservation procedure for group self-guided tours has been a positive change in staff's ability to control and monitor the use of the facility, further procedures and communication about group visits should occur. In addition to only allowing visits during specific days and times, a nominal booking fee could be charged to help commit the group to their timeslot. Staff could also meet each group upon arrival, so the group leaders clearly understand the facility's spaces that are accessible to their group. More clearly defined and published procedures can help manage the groups' competing interests.

## Safety and Security

Security of the grounds could be enhanced with added perimeter fencing and more controlled access to the grounds. A centralized entrance could help control and monitor the flow and access of Hudson Gardens patrons, which could result in a greater ability to provide a secure and safe patron experience.

Controlled access to the gardens will greatly increase the safety of patrons visiting Hudson Gardens. The Hudson Gardens team stationed at the access control location(s) can monitor the people entering and exiting the garden. This will enable them to verify group reservations, direct program participants to the correct location, greet private event managers, help connect guests with other Hudson Gardens staff, conduct exit surveys, and provide donation information to visitors exiting the gardens. Stationing a staff member at these access control points does not suggest the facility should collect entrance fees; however, stationing staff at these locations will allow patrons who want to financially contribute to pay point in time with a staff person prior to leaving the complex.

There is an opportunity for the Hudson Gardens staff to establish more robust emergency plans. Once better-defined, emergency plans should be documented, and staff subsequently trained. Hudson Gardens can host thousands of visitors concurrently, and their safety in the event of inclement weather, active shooters, and other high-risk scenarios is of the utmost importance.

## The Customer Experience

There is an opportunity to create a more customer-centric experience. Currently, wayfinding tools throughout the grounds are minimal. New pathway intersection signage and markers—clearly indicating the direction of amenities, and their distance to those amenities—would help the visitor better navigate space the grounds.

Hudson Gardens has an opportunity to better utilize technology to support the customer experience. Technological approaches to the customer experience include an app, an interactive map, a more engaging website experience, digital signage throughout the grounds, an audio tour, and more.

Modifying the landscape architecture throughout the grounds could help improve the visitor experience. Sound barriers created by shrubs, hedges, bushes, and trees can help reduce road noise and create a more tranquil environment. Solace sections or pockets can help provide spaces for quiet reflection. Finally, strategically reconfiguring approaches to various specialty areas and amenities can help provide a clear delineation of where private event functions, i.e. weddings, start and stop. The addition of high-quality gate and/or access barriers can help staff block off sections of the grounds for private use when appropriate.

There is opportunity to understand whether the community misses the concerts themselves or simply more opportunities to connect with their community members in a positive and unified manner. The results of the community survey should help answer this question.



Placing the customer needs first, with the addition of amenities such as restrooms, facilities, accessible paths, shade, information stations, food and beverage, and wayfinding signage will greatly enhance the facility's service provision.

