



New England  
Botanic Garden  
AT TOWER HILL

Worcester County Horticultural Society  
181<sup>st</sup> Annual Meeting  
June 16, 2022  
Minutes

The 181<sup>st</sup> Annual Meeting of the Worcester County Horticultural Society was held on Thursday, June 16, 2022 at 4pm in a hybrid format. There were 84 pre-registrations. The day of the meeting, 20 people attended virtually on Zoom and 60 people were present in person.

- I. **Welcome and Call to Order** Lisa McDonough, President  
a. President Lisa McDonough welcomed everyone to the meeting and called the meeting to order at 4:05pm.

II. **Secretary's Report** Matt Mattus, Secretary

Secretary Matt Mattus reported that there were 84 Members who submitted their votes during registration, which fulfills the quorum of 60 members. Mr. Mattus made the MOTION: To waive the reading of the 180<sup>th</sup> Worcester County Horticultural Society Annual Meeting Minutes. John Lee seconded the motion. Mr. Mattus reported that of the submitted votes to waive the reading of the 180<sup>th</sup> Worcester County Horticultural Society Annual Meeting minutes, there were 67 in favor, 1 opposed, and 15 abstain. President Lisa McDonough declared that the motion carried.

Mr. Mattus made the MOTION: To approve the minutes of the 180<sup>th</sup> Worcester County Horticultural Society Annual Meeting. John Lee seconded. Mr. Mattus reported that of the submitted votes to approve the minutes of the 180<sup>th</sup> Worcester County Horticultural Annual Meeting, there were 68 in favor, 0 opposed, 16 abstain. President Lisa McDonough declared that the motion carried.

III. **Treasurer's Report** Michael Machnowski, Treasurer

Treasurer Michael Machnowski began his report by celebrating the extraordinary effort that we saw from the Garden's management team, its staff, and the Trustees to navigate the incredible challenges of the pandemic. This past year saw continued growth in membership and very strong results in the four pillars of the Garden's operating revenue - admissions, membership, private events, and garden shop sales – all exceeding the budgeted revenue targets for Fiscal Year 2022 by a combined total of more than \$1.5M. These results show that the Garden is in good shape.

When we consider the Garden's 2022 Fiscal Year snapshot without covid relief, the organization spent more than it made last year. Operating Revenue would have come in at about \$5,630,000, which would have been roughly \$220,000 less than it cost to run the organization, since Operating Expenses totaled about \$5,850,000. Thus, without the covid relief support, we would have experienced a net loss of about \$220,000. The actual results of FY2022 show that with the covid relief money, the organization's operating revenue for FY2022 was about \$6,412,000, resulting in net income of about \$563,000 for the 2022 fiscal year – a very positive result in a bounce back year for the Garden.



**New England  
Botanic Garden**  
AT TOWER HILL

Looking at the past five years, the Garden had a very good FY2022. It was a breakout year for operating revenue, but it's also worth noting that expenses for the Garden have increased dramatically in recent years. This is in part due to the Garden's expansion but also the rise in inflation. During FY2022, we saw an increase in both personnel costs (which is nearly 2/3rds of our annual budget), as well as our operating expenses. Thankfully, as a result of many thoughtful and strategic conversations had throughout the year, the organization was able to strike a healthy balance between investing in the Garden and its incredible staff, and also preserving a comfortable cash cushion in the operating account, should the inflation pressures persist. Going forward, we will continue to navigate this challenge and hopefully see some easing to the inflationary pressures in the near future.

The balance sheet shows that at the end of FY2022, we are in a very strong position. Total net assets for the Garden sat at roughly \$51,000,000, with about \$23,000,000 of that in fixed assets (ie; Buildings, land, plants, etc), about \$2,000,000 in cash as well as restricted accounts, and the remainder of that balance coming from our Endowment, which was worth about \$26,480,000 as of March 31, 2022. The year over year change in Total Assets saw a modest \$600,000 increase, a little more than 1%. As the stock market was very volatile during FY2022, there was only a small increase of 3% in the Investment Portfolio.

In summary, FY2022 proved to be the bounce back year from FY2021. There are certainly many challenges still ahead as we continue to navigate all of the economic concerns swirling around but given the extremely strong results seen last year in admissions, membership, private events, and garden shop sales – the Garden's revenue engine, the New England Botanic Garden at Tower Hill is in a strong financial position, and on a very good path moving forward.

#### **IV. President's Report** Lisa McDonough

President Lisa McDonough again welcomed everyone to the meeting. She highlighted three accomplishments from the last year. In April, we adopted the new name New England Botanic Garden at Tower Hill. The new name includes all of the parts of the old one as a nod to our past but also looking towards the future. The new name was inspired by our 2020-2025 Strategic Plan and wanting to be seen as New England's botanic garden. We hope that this new name will help to welcome people from our own Worcester County community as well as different communities throughout New England, the United States, and the world to our gardens.

Also in April, we finally opened the Ramble, a garden for children of all ages. We were able to welcome the designer, Gary Smith, to the opening and we will also hear a lecture from him this afternoon. The garden truly turned out to be beyond our expectations.

Last fall, we kicked off a \$1.5 million Endowment Challenge Match. We have currently raised \$285,000 towards the match. Ms. McDonough made a call to action to complete the match as funding the endowment will keep our gardens beautiful for generations to come.

Ms. McDonough concluded her report by thanking everyone for their continued loyalty and support.



New England  
Botanic Garden  
AT TOWER HILL

**V. Development Report** Dix Leeson, Chairperson of the Development Committee

Dix Leeson presented the Development Report. In comparison to FY2021, the number of donors in FY2022 increased by 304. This was partly driven by the success of our first ever Giving Week where 355 donors gave \$135,000 in one week! Mainly due to the majority of the Capital Campaign gifts coming in in FY2021, we were down in overall gifts by \$2.2M from individuals and grant funders. Grants were also down by more than \$500K. However, membership reached an all time high of 10,359 members which included a revenue increase of \$234,134.

Thanks to the generosity of so many people, we have completed the construction phase of the campaign resulting in expanded parking, greater accessible pathways all over the formal gardens, and the completed garden for children and families – the Ramble. Thank you to everyone who supported this the Growing Boldly campaign, but we're not quite done! Thanks to a generous \$1.5 matching grant from the McDonough Foundation, each gift earmarked for the endowment will be matched, dollar for dollar.

**VI. Chief Executive Officer's Report** Grace Elton

Grace Elton, CEO, welcomed everyone to the meeting noting that this was the first in-person Annual Meeting since 2019 and the first ever hybrid Annual Meeting. She shared the personal news that FY2022 started off with the birth of her daughter Estelle. She expressed her gratitude to Jane Ellis, CFOO, for taking on the role of Acting CEO during her maternity leave.

FY2022 started with a slow creep towards normalcy and ended with some of the highest numbers in the Garden's history: admissions were just shy of 150,000 visitors and we have reached over 10,000 members! Nearly 11,000 youth and adults took a class, joined us on a tour, or engaged in our outreach programs this past year, and we engaged 200 volunteers who donated 5,653 hours of help in all aspects of our operations.

We achieved these milestones and attracted this interest because we have focused on listening to our members' needs and authentically connecting with our community. In 2019 and 2020, we engaged over 1,000 stakeholders both from the current Garden community and those that we had yet to engage in creating our strategic plan. The process inspired us to make a bold move: to rename us New England Botanic Garden at Tower Hill. Our new name is not about redefining who we are as a Botanic Garden and 180-year-old horticultural society, but embracing who we have become and opening up the possibilities to be more.

The pandemic showed us that our Gardens are a place of respite and reflection, of joy and inspiration, and a place where people could come together regardless of background, political affiliation, or economic status, to enjoy nature. The Garden staff and the Board of Trustees have made it clear that connecting with our community and being focused on inclusivity are at the backbone of our Garden values. An important component of our strategic plan is making our Garden more accessible and welcoming to groups that traditionally haven't been visitors to our site. By working with our Community Advisory Committee we are using an individualized approach based on the needs of each community. Examples include expanding our work with the Worcester Refugee Assistance Project, partnering with the India Society of Worcester to host a Diwali celebration, hiring interns through Girls, Inc., and hosting a naturalization



**New England  
Botanic Garden**  
AT TOWER HILL

ceremony. We have also grown our outreach efforts off the hill, by bringing large planters to urban sidewalks and education opportunities directly into Worcester schools.

Ms. Elton expressed her gratitude to the staff, especially highlighting the Senior Leaders: Jane Ellis, Chief Finance and Operating Officer; Theresa Lee, Chief Development Office; Mark Richardson, Director of Horticulture; Jessica Pederson, Director of Education; Gitu Jain, Senior Communications Manager; Heather Griffin, Senior Finance Manager; and Andy Piacentini, Senior Facilities Manager. She also requested that all staff members present rise to be recognized.

Ms. Elton wrapped up her report with an update on the capital construction. The two-year construction project is nearly complete and focused on improving the visitor experience including improvements to accessibility. The most exciting part of the construction is the long-awaited Ramble, dedicated by the McDonough Family. The Ramble invites the young and the young at heart to learn about plants and nature. With accessible paths that all can enjoy, and immersive activities designed to spark the imagination, the Ramble draws families in ways not possible in the past. Ms. Elton expressed her gratitude to everyone who helped make the Ramble possible and made a call to action to support the next phase of the campaign: the endowment match challenge of \$1.5M generously offered by the McDonough Foundation.

**VII. Governance Report** John Lee

Trustee John Lee, member of the Governance Committee, presented the Nomination Slate. He made the following nominations:

- Patricia Bigelow, Curtis Falzoi, Dr. Abraham Haddad, Thomas Halpin, Dennis Murphy, and Michael Pagano for second 3-year terms as trustees.
- Richard Leif, Indira Maini, Shiamin Melville, and Emily Wood for a first 3-year term as trustees.
- Matthew Mattus and Lisa McDonough for a 1-year term to continue serving as an officer.
- The following individuals as officers of the Society: President, Lisa McDonough; Treasurer, Michael Machnowski; Secretary, Matthew Mattus; Vice Presidents Catherine Colinvaux, Richard Leif, Michael Pagano, Diane Robbins, and Kent dur Russell.
- The following individuals to new terms on the Governance Committee: UlumPixan Athoh'il and Shiamin Melville for three years

Catherine Colinvaux seconded the motion. President Lisa McDonough reported of the submitted votes, there were 67 in favor, 0 opposed, 17 abstain. The motion carried.

**VIII. Salute to Retiring Trustees** Lisa McDonough

Lisa McDonough expressed gratitude to the three retiring trustees, Jim Karadimos, John Lee, and Shirley Williams. She shared that Jim has been a wonderful mentor to her and he will continue to volunteer at NEBG at Tower Hill as the chairperson of the new John Green Society Committee. John Lee is extremely knowledgeable on all things Tower Hill and will continue to serve on various committees. Shirley Williams was the first person to welcome Lisa to the Board and mentored her. Shirley will also be involved with the John Green Society Committee.

**IX. Presentation of Awards** Lisa McDonough

Lisa McDonough invited forward Suzanne Hauerstein, Volunteer and Intern Services Coordinator, to present the Volunteer Award, Amy Nyman, Horticulture Outreach Manager, to



**New England  
Botanic Garden**  
AT TOWER HILL

present the Community Greening Awards, and Mark Richardson, Director of Horticulture, to present the Alice Milton Award for Excellence in Horticulture Design.

Suzanne Hauerstein, Volunteer and Intern Services Coordinator, presented the Volunteer of the Year Award to Bill Whalen. The annual volunteer award is presented to volunteers who have demonstrated outstanding service to the New England Botanic Garden. Bill began volunteering here in 2015 and has given over 815 hours to the Gardens. Bill has been a regular garden volunteer with us, has led several youth education programs including field trips and firefly walks, has led special tours of our exhibitions, and has helped with exhibition setup. Bill took on a new task last year which was to help the Education Department update our class registration on the New England Botanic Garden website. During a time of ever-changing covid 19 policies and guidelines, he helped us update last-minute changes to course schedules and procedures which was an integral part of our communication with our students. Thank you, Bill, for your continued support and dedication to the Gardens!

Amy Nyman, Horticulture Outreach Manager, presented four Community Greening Awards:

**Armsby Abbey Window Boxes – Best Store Front or Commercial Area**

For over a decade, Armsby Abbey has maintained stunning window boxes outside of their storefront at 144 Main Street in Worcester. Today, the neighborhood is undergoing an \$11 million “reimagining” on behalf of the City and the Urban Cultural Institute. Armsby Abbey Co-Owner Sherri Sadowski reimagined her slice of Main Street long before the rest of us and brought her vision to life by getting her hands dirty.

**Shrewsbury Garden Club – Best Street Beautification**

Every season the local garden club works diligently to create beautiful arrangements for all to enjoy. We are all very grateful for the hard work these volunteers put into to this and other spaces around town.

**Unitarian Universalist Church of Worcester – Best Sustainable Public Green Space**

The Garden On Team at UUCW has created a model native plant garden that restores biodiversity and contributes to the overall resiliency of the area. The native plants play not only in climate change mitigation, but also in restoring a healthy ecosystem that will support increased biodiversity.

**Regional Environmental Council YouthGROW Farm – Other Community Greening Project**

The YouthGROW Farm is a beautiful community space in the center of Main South, Worcester. Every summer 30-40 youth from the city are employed to work on the farm, where they learn about urban agriculture, professional development, and community building. YouthGROWers and REC staff grow a variety of plants, including locally culturally relevant crops. The food grown on the YouthGROW farm is sold to the REC Mobile Market, which travels to food insecure neighbors in Worcester to sell affordable, local produce.

Mark Richardson, Director of Horticulture, presented W. Gary Smith with the Alice Milton Award for Excellence in Horticulture Design. The Alice Milton Award is presented in recognition of a person for a lifetime achievement of excellence in horticulture design. Gary has spent decades



**New England  
Botanic Garden**  
AT TOWER HILL

building gardens, teaching landscape design at universities in Delaware, Pennsylvania, Texas, and Louisiana, and carrying out his personal mission to connect people, plants, and the natural world. Gary's work can be seen at many public gardens, like the Southern Highlands Reserve in North Carolina, the Tropical Mosaic Garden at Naples Botanic Garden, the Santa Fe Botanical Garden, and now right here, with the Ramble. Gary's reputation for designing children's gardens brought him to the attention of the staff and trustees of New England Botanic Garden at Tower Hill. His first children's garden, Enchanted Woods at Winterthur, built in the late 1990's remains a shining example of a beautiful garden, designed for the young and the young at heart, where kids of all ages can enjoy the wonders of nature in a garden designed for them.

We are proud that Gary Smith designed the Ramble and that generations of kids visiting New England Botanic Garden at Tower Hill will grow up enjoying his creativity and finding a connection to the natural world through his work.

President Lisa McDonough returned to the podium to present the final two awards. The honor of Trustee Emeritus was bestowed to Franklin Reece. Mr. Reece devoted many volunteer hours to the Worcester County Horticultural Society. Frank served two terms as Trustee including four years as a vice-president and is currently a member of the Audit Committee. In addition to his volunteer service, Frank stepped in as interim executive director for the Garden ten years ago, at a critical time between the retirement of the longtime founding executive director and the arrival of a new CEO.

Lisa presented the final award of the meeting: the Silver Medal to Rick Leif. The Silver Medal is the highest honor given out by the Worcester County Horticultural Society and is presented to a person or affiliate who has demonstrated exceptional service to the Society over many years. Rick served as a Trustee for 10 years, 2011-2021, 6 of which were spent as the Society's Secretary. He also volunteers as a Garden Guide and in the gardens. When Rick rotated off the Board last year, he stayed on his various Committee assignments and has graciously agreed to return to the Board this year. He will be working closely with Dix Leeson as he takes on the new role of Chairperson of the Development Committee. We are very grateful for all that Rick has contributed to the Society and we look forward to continue working with him.

#### **Adjourn Business Meeting**      Lisa McDonough

President Lisa McDonough requested a motion to adjourn the 181<sup>st</sup> Annual Meeting of the Worcester County Horticultural Society. The motion was moved by Mike Machnowski and seconded by John Lee.

#### **Speaker – W. Gary Smith**

Following the business meeting, W. Gary Smith, recipient of the Alice Milton Award for Excellence in Horticulture Design, gave a lecture.