



New England
Botanic Garden
AT TOWER HILL

Worcester County Horticultural Society
182nd Annual Meeting
June 15, 2023
Minutes

The 182nd Annual Meeting of the Worcester County Horticultural Society was called to order by President Lisa McDonough at 4:05pm on Thursday, June 15, 2023. She shared a land acknowledgement recognizing the nearly 200 acres of New England Botanic Garden as being the ancestral homeland of the Hassanamisco Nipmuc Band.

President McDonough introduced Secretary Matt Mattus who shared that 73 members submitted their votes during registration which fulfills the quorum of 60 members. Present during the actual meeting were 50 members in person and 25 on the Zoom. Secretary Mattus made the following motions:

1. To waive the reading of the 181st Worcester County Horticultural Society Annual Meeting minutes. Dr. James Karadimos seconded. Of the submitted votes to waive the reading of the 181st Worcester County Horticultural Society Annual Meeting minutes, there were 65 in favor, 1 opposed, 7 abstain. Motion carries.
2. To approve the minutes of the 181st Worcester County Horticultural Society Annual Meeting. Vice President Kent dur Russell seconded. Of the submitted votes to approve the minutes of the 181st Worcester County Horticultural Society Annual Meeting, there were 65 in favor, 0 opposed, 8 abstain. Motion carries.

President McDonough introduced Treasurer Michael Machnowski. Treasurer Machnowski shared that Fiscal Year 2023 (April 1, 2022-March 31, 2023) was very successful for the Garden. This year's budget was the highest ever at roughly \$7 million and thanks to outstanding revenue results from private events and education, along with impressive revenue results from admissions and membership, the overall revenue came out ahead of budget by about \$55,000. It is also important to note that FY2023 did not include covid relief or stimulus funds, so our increase over FY2022 was 26% or about \$1.5 million. In regard to expenses, the Garden has been facing persistent high inflation over the past three years. 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 while also managing costs wherever possible. Going forward, we will continue to navigate this challenge and hopefully see some easing to the inflationary pressures.

With regards to the balance sheet, at the end of the 2023 Fiscal Year we were in a very strong position. Total net assets for the Garden sat at roughly \$52M, with no debt. \$24M of the balance sheet is fixed assets and \$25.3M is the endowment. The year over year change in Total Assets saw a \$1.05M decrease, a little more than -2% due to the difficult year the stock market had in 2022. However, looking at a 3 year annualized return for the portfolio there is a 12.7% increase per year. Treasurer Machnowski concluded his report by recognizing FY2023 as a "transition to a new normal" and we have entered FY2024 in a strong financial position.

President McDonough gave a brief report which expressed her gratitude to the members, the staff, the Board, and CEO Grace Elton for another exceptional year.

President McDonough introduced Vice President Rick Leif who serves as the Chairperson of the Development Committee. Vice President Leif reported that we ended FY2023 with the most member households ever at 11,210 and the revenue was \$1,020,609 over \$891,310 in FY2022. Members spent nearly \$800,000 on classes, special events, and at the Garden Shop and brought 77,000 visitors with them in FY2023. 34% of our members have “gone green” by transitioning to a digital membership. Our overall giving in FY2023 brought in over \$2.5 million from more than 1700 gifts.

Vice President Leif shared an update on the *Growing Boldly* campaign. To date, \$28,791,335 has been contributed from generous donors in support of capital improvements, operating, and endowment. This includes:

- Expanded parking which allows more people to visit, particularly for Night Lights, the Orchid Exhibition, and Summer Events.
- Improved accessibility with new walkways in the Entry Garden, Cottage Garden, Pliny’s Allée, and the Ramble.
- The Ramble, the centerpiece of the campaign, which is busy with youth programming and delighting visitors of all ages.
- A generous \$1.5 million challenge matching gift to build the endowment from the McDonough Foundation which was fully earned.

Vice President Leif concluded his report by sharing information about the new Perennial Circle. The Perennial Circle recognizes those who have included the Garden in their estate plans. There are 61 people in the Circle, including 12 people who joined in the past year. A monthly e-newsletter is sent to people who are 50+ that features donor stories, tips on planned giving, and associated tax benefits. The Perennial Path, located on the east side of the Lawn Garden, honors members of the Circle.

President McDonough introduced CEO Grace Elton. Ms. Elton shared that we had an extraordinary year and have not only returned to our pre-pandemic admissions numbers, but we ended the fiscal year with the highest visitation in the Garden’s history thanks to our enhanced facilities and expanded gardens and programs. She expressed her gratitude to the members for supporting the many facets of our mission and allowing us to be a leader in the region.

Looking at the numbers, in FY2023 we welcomed 213,726 people to the Garden. 108,856 of those visitors came as general visitors during the day and 72,114 came for Night Lights. We have almost tripled our admissions from just 10 years ago when we had 63,000 total visitors in 2013. 14,860 youth and adults attended a class, 6,412 joined us for other special events, and 11,484 attended a private rental event. Our original 50-year master plan anticipated that we would see 150,000 visitors by 2035. We actually surpassed that number back in 2019, 16 years early. Our growth is outstanding and interest in all that we have to offer is greater than ever before. We now have the support of over 11,000 members and we couldn’t operate our garden without our wonderful volunteers. 250 dedicated volunteers donated 7,572 hours of valuable help in all aspects of our operations.

Sustainability was a major focus in FY2023. Guided by our strategic plan, we were able to invest in green technology, changing our fleet of utility vehicles and power tools used to maintain the garden from gas powered to battery powered equipment. This dedication to green technology has earned us recognition as the first botanic garden in the country to earn Green Zone Certification by the American Green Zone Alliance. We are also installing solar panels on our barn to power the new electric fleet and have installed electric vehicle charging stations in our parking lot.

At the beginning of FY2023 we officially opened the Ramble, dedicated by the McDonough Family. We have had so much fun programming this space to teach families and school groups about the natural world. Our education team has also offered many fun and interesting programs and exhibitions such as Uprooted, Gnomevember, the Orchid exhibition, Pride Celebration, Diwali Lights, and Music in Bloom.

We have completed major renovations in the Nadeau Garden of Inspiration, Wildlife Garden, Wildlife Refuge Pond, Winter Garden, Entry Path, Secret Garden, and the Court: A Garden Within Reach. We have also opened the Climate Garden that will demonstrate plant-based solutions to climate change at a homeowner's scale.

We have expanded our off-site programs, engaging more of our community with our mission. In our horticulture outreach programs, we are creating planting opportunities in giant planters when there are no tree wells with our Planters for People Program in Worcester's Main South neighborhood. We are also planting hundreds of trees in environmental justice neighborhoods this year with our "Get a Tree, Plant a Tree Program." Our educational outreach programs include both on- and off-site programs that bring community groups to the Garden and bring our programs off the hill. Our newest program, Growing Greener, engages 5th and 6th grade students in an environmental justice and climate change curriculum, empowering students to take climate action at a young age.

Ms. Elton concluded her report by recognizing the Garden's greatest asset, the staff. She acknowledged the senior staff as well as all other staff members present at the meeting. Ms. Elton also shared the exciting news that Board of Trustees member Martha Pappas dedicated the pavilion in the Ramble to her dear friend and long-time WCHS Trustee, Barbara Morse, who passed away in January. Barbara was a vibrant, dedicated woman who served our institution for over a decade. She was essential in helping to guide our future direction as part of the planning groups for the Master Plan and Strategic Plan, she served on many committees, and gave her leadership to the CEO search committee that brought Grace Elton to the Garden. The Barbara Morse Pavilion will be a spot where school groups can gather, where celebrations will be held, and where visitors can enjoy their lunch in the sunshine. It will be a permanent reminder that we were all so lucky to have known Barbara and that her influence on this garden and the people she touched will remain.

President McDonough introduced Vice President Kent dur Russell who serves as the chairperson of the Governance Committee. Mr. dur Russell made the following motion:

- To nominate Samantha McDonald and Susan Palatucci for second 3-year terms as trustees.
- To nominate Greg Brown, Ashlyn Donohue, James Karadimos, Jean Poteete, Gayle Weiss, and Shirley Williams for a first 3-year term as trustees.
- To nominate Matthew Mattus and Lisa McDonough for a 1-year term in order to continue serving as officers.
- To nominate the following individuals as officers of the Society: President, Kent dur Russell; Treasurer, Michael Macknowski; Assistant Treasurer, Emily Wood; Secretary, Richard Leif; and Vice Presidents Catherine Colinvau, Matthew Mattus, and Lisa McDonough.
- To nominate the following individuals to new terms on the Governance Committee: Ashlyn Donohue and Gayle Weiss for three years.

Vice President Leif seconded the motion. Of the submitted votes, there were 65 in favor, 0 opposed, 8 abstain. Motion carries.

President McDonough honored the retiring trustees: Matthew Beaton, M Howard Jacobson, Alfred D. "Dix" Leeson, Jr., Michael Pagano, Martha Pappas, and Stephen Pitcher and expressed gratitude for their

years of dedication to the Worcester County Horticultural Society and New England Botanic Garden at Tower Hill. CEO Ms. Elton then honored President McDonough as outgoing president of the Society.

New England Botanic Garden at Tower Hill conferred the following awards:

Volunteer of the Year – Eileen Clark and Kathleen Devericks

Community Greening:

1. Best Food Security Project – North High School in Worcester for their student-grown garden that donates fresh produce to the Worcester Free Fridges Project.
2. Best Sustainable Public Green Space - Rest. Stop. Ranch. in Topsfield MA in recognition of creating an accessible garden open to all, free of charge, and being a Certified Wildlife Habitat.
3. Best Municipally Sponsored Project - Town of Millbury Armory Village Revitalization Project in recognition of positive low impact development that improves stormwater management with rain gardens.

The Worcester County Horticultural Society conferred the following awards:

The Cary Award, named in honor of Shrewsbury plantsman Ed Cary, is presented to an individual who has demonstrated excellence in horticulture as either a faculty member, landscape practitioner, plant breeder, nursery professional, horticulture researcher, or in another related role. This year's recipient is Wayne Mezitt. Wayne has been involved with the Cary Award since its inception in the mid-90's. Members of the Cary Award committee shared that Wayne had supported them throughout their careers. He is a true plantsman who has spent a lifetime committed to the field of horticulture.

The Silver Medal, the Society's highest honor, is presented to a person or affiliate who has demonstrated exceptional service to the Worcester County Horticultural Society over many years. This year, the Board of Trustees honored Barbara Morse, posthumously. Barbara was a dedicated supporter of the Garden for many years and served on the board of trustees for over a decade. Barbara was a leader, a visionary, and a true friend to the garden through our recent extraordinary growth.

President Lisa McDonough adjourned the business portion of the meeting at 5:18pm. Wayne Mezitt gave a presentation on the history of the Cary Award. The meeting concluded at 5:37pm.