



U.S. National Arboretum
Master Plan

Introduction

The U.S. National Arboretum was established in 1927 by an act of Congress and opened to the public in 1959. During the intervening years the Arboretum has developed not only a fine research program in ornamental horticulture but also outstanding plant exhibits. Consequently, more and more people are visiting the Arboretum. The Arboretum is, therefore, faced with the growing challenges of properly handling these visitors while providing educational opportunities. The last master plan for the Arboretum was updated in 1989 from a plan prepared in 1984 by Kidde Consultants, Inc. In 1996, the Arboretum adopted a new strategic plan to prepare the institution for the next century. The following U.S. National Arboretum Master Plan report responds to the goals articulated in the Strategic Plan. Goals have been given form on the site, and a map has been created to guide the future development of the Arboretum over the next 20 years.

This has been created by the combined effort of the Arboretum staff and its consultants. The planning has also benefited from input from the Friends of the National Arboretum, the National Capital Area Federation of Garden Clubs, Arboretum neighbors, and various governmental planning agencies including the District of Columbia and the Agricultural Research Service.

This plan has been prepared in accordance With the Master Plan Guidelines provided by the National Capitol Planning Commission.

Summary of Recommendations

Recommendations for the Arboretum as a Scientific Institution

The U.S. National Arboretum's research goals are to expand research programs on the site including programs in systematic research, germplasm preservation and utilization, plant development, and research on horticultural issues. This has implications for improving the growing and research facilities that presently exist. Therefore, it is recommended that the Arboretum do the following:

- Renovate the greenhouse complex to provide state of the art facilities to serve the research and horticultural needs of the Arboretum.
- Modernize the Administration Building to support research reference collections (i.e., library, herbarium, and plant documentation) and construct a new wing to house laboratories.
- Build a new maintenance building to provide for the increased maintenance requirements that will come from additional Arboretum development.
- Enlarge the area devoted to research plots to 35 acres and increase the area devoted to collections of plants for the preservation of genetic diversity.
- Develop an efficient composting and staging facility.

Recommendations for Serving the Community

There are three main goals to accomplish in relation to visitors with the master plan: to attract more people, to make sure they feel welcome and want to return, and to enhance the educational opportunities that the Arboretum has to offer. Goals will be approached using sound environmental land management practices which serve as a model for the visiting public. Therefore it is recommended that the Arboretum implement the following:

- Build a new main entrance on Bladensburg Road that is worthy of a major public institution. The corollary to this is to close all the other entrances to the public. This entrance should be as attractive as the rest of the Arboretum experience.
- Construct parking areas to handle approximately 1,000 vehicles with easy access to the new visitor center.

- Build a visitor center to serve as the gateway to the site and provide facilities to educate the public about the world of plants. This building should be welcoming with gracious visitor facilities including restrooms, food service, a gift shop and event spaces. It will provide an orientation to the site and to the Arboretum's programs and serve as a clear starting point for a tour of the grounds. Finally, it will contain classrooms and educational support facilities.
- Build a garden about the Origin of Cultivated Plants to introduce the public to the origin and evolution of economically important plants.
- Create a core pedestrian precinct around the ellipse linking the Visitor Center, Azalea Collections, Herb Garden, Bonsai and Penjing Museum, Fern Valley, and the Capitol Columns supplemented with new displays.
- Create a perennial display within the core to further enhance the core and provide popular appeal.
- Create an area which engages families and educates and enchants the next generation of Arboretum supporters.
- Simplify the circulation to create a series of loops for visitors to tour the grounds. A tram service will provide access to the gardens and collections in lieu of personal vehicles. In addition the development of a pedestrian path system will provide handicapped access as well as a safer and more pleasant experience for walkers.
- Provide a network of educational and visitor facilities across the site including interpretive centers, restrooms, limited satellite parking and places to get on and off the tram.
- Renovate and modernize existing infrastructure (i.e., roads, trails, storm water management system, irrigation systems, and physical plant, etc.).
- Create a comprehensive introduction of the USNA on the www which includes a virtual tour of the USNA as well as useful horticultural information to internet users.

It is vitally important that appropriate staffing levels are planned and obtained commensurate with the implementation of these recommendations. Staffing increases will be required to take on the additional maintenance required by constructing new facilities and developing new exhibits. Additional staffing will also be required to better serve visitors and to bring the garden exhibits alive and maximize their educational potential.