

Planting a Future for our Community

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Plants build community. Members of Green Bay Botanical Garden, a local 501(c)(3), understand that. For 27 years, the Garden has connected people with plants by providing year-round educational and recreational experiences for everyone in an environment that engages, inspires, and refreshes. 25 years ago, this space was an undeveloped area with limitless potential. Nearly 25 years before that, it was an idea in the minds of a few passionate plant people. Now the Garden has grown to 25.5 developed acres with more than 6,200 members and an operating budget of over 4 million dollars, and is well on track to welcome 200,000 guests in the current fiscal year. So, how can we plan for the Garden's best possible future?

During the past two years, the Garden's leadership team has been working with Envision Greater Green Bay to anticipate changes, both internal and external, that will affect the Garden in the next few decades and to craft a plausible future that successfully moves the organization forward.

Seeds of Change

The Garden's Foresight journey started when current President and CEO, Susan Garot, attended a Strategic Foresight workshop. These workshops, led by [Garry Golden](#) on behalf of Envision, introduce attendees to scanning for signals of change, creating domain maps of impact areas to their organization, and then using these signals to imagine and create stories about the four *plausible* futures for their organization. Will it be a future of: Decline and collapse? The baseline continued? Discipline and constraint? Or transformation?

After attending this workshop and considering the Garden offering a program of four-year-old kindergarten like that of fellow nonprofit Bay Beach Wildlife Sanctuary, Garot and the Garden's board of directors decided to consider other alternatives. They decided to further use the talents of Envision Greater Green Bay as consultants. Our hope was to use strategic foresight to craft the future of the Garden as it opened its most ambitious construction project yet – the *Carol & Bruce Bell Children's Garden*.

Bringing in the Team

Throughout the fall and winter of 2022-23, Envision consultants led members of the Garden's board and executive leadership team through seven sessions. These sessions focused on framing, scanning, and forecasting the current Garden organization. The exercises introduced everyone to the lessons Garot had previously learned, but with emphasis on the Garden as a nonprofit organization with input from board and staff together – two key groups that often do not have the time to strategize in the same room. Encouraged by our Envision consultants, we recognized the need to *make* the time and *take* the time to think *together* about the Garden's future.

After learning to scan for signals, and using the online tool Diigo to organize information found from scanning, the leadership team created a domain map that recognized the main efforts that would drive the Garden's future: *Maximize human capital; Ensure sustainable funding; Integrate technology advances; Evolve with community characteristics; and Adjust to environmental influences*. Board and staff members then broke into smaller teams that continued to scan for particular *subtopics* within these larger themes. Eventually they categorized their findings in two ways: How likely is this to occur? What impact would it have on the organization if it did occur? Considering the discoveries of each small team, the overall team then crafted four *plausible* futures for the Garden.

Facing our Four Futures

- **Baseline/Continuation Future:** Continue to do what the Garden has been doing. Consider the signals of change we found through futuring to be long-range issues that do not affect the current trajectory of the organization.
- **Disciplined/Constrained Future:** Make modest adjustments to what the Garden is currently doing based on resources and staff investments we're able to make with current capacities while realizing that the signals we have found are showing that change is just over the horizon. These changes will grow the Garden to a new and higher plateau.
- **Decline/Collapse Future:** Imagine that the Garden makes the wrong decision with the next President and CEO after Garot retires. The Garden does not maintain the relationships it has built over the years, leading to a decline in resources and staff that eventually causes the Garden to diminish in community relations and stature.
- **Transformed Future:** The Garden enacts proactive steps to take advantage of the signals and drivers that have been identified throughout the consulting work. The Garden team then implements changes to become leaders in public gardening, setting us on an upward trajectory.

After discussing these futures, the Garden team agreed to concentrate on the disciplined/constrained future to grow the Garden to a new level through the opening of the *Bell Children's Garden*.

Implementing the Continuous Feedback Loop

As discussed through our time with the Envision Greater Green Bay team, the futuring process is a continuous feedback loop that is monitored through our scanning for signals. These signals drive the changes within the domain map topics and feed into the story of the four futures.

Therefore, the board and leadership teams continue to scan for signals of change within their Domain Map topics, and leadership staff members share the most impactful signals on these topics at monthly board meetings. This exercise keeps board members up to date on what's specifically impacting the organization and how the Garden can eventually grow from the disciplined/constrained future into the transformed future. As more opportunities arise, this will help us to be more proactive.

Recently I also completed the Strategic Foresight workshop that Garot (now a Board member of Envision Greater Green Bay) had attended – the one that set the Garden on this journey. The project that ultimately came out of my workshop experience was a plan to take the Garden *into* the

community through projects focused on growing healthy food and increasing local pollinator habitat. We believe that, by expanding beyond our *physical* boundaries, the Garden can impact more of our community and not only connect people with plants, but help solve some of our current and predicted problems with plants.

The Garden is working toward a bright future because of our partnership with Envision. We encourage your organization to embark on your own Strategic Foresight voyage in 2024!