



Kubota Garden Master Plan Update
Workshop Sessions
Summary

May 7-9, 2018

These workshops were held at Mt. Baker Rowing and Sailing Center on May 7-9, 2018, and kicked off the “discovery” phase of the Master Plan Update. They were attended by key representatives from the Client Team, Kubota Garden Foundation (KGF) and Seattle Parks and Recreation (SPR) and invited guests from a wide range of regional botanic gardens and garden-related fields. The objective of these workshops was to highlight owner and operator issues, questions, concerns, garden improvements, and long-range goals. Additional discovery phase open houses for the public will in the Garden on June 17 and June 23 from 10 am to 2 pm.

Session One: Circulation and Accessibility

This session focused on three key elements: accessibility to and through the garden, overall circulation through the garden, and access points to the garden. Any proposed changes to the circulation system must be seen through the lens of why Fujitaro Kubota originally selected this site: its topography and water. Currently, the garden is accessed through a variety of entry points which will soon be closed off when the ornamental wall is completed. The main gate, positioned at the eastern high point of the property, will then be one of two formal access points into the garden. Docents have noted that, given the topography of the site, elderly people can make it down to the lower portion of the garden but then need assistance getting back up the hill to the main gate. A potential third formal access point to the garden, a docent-activated keyed entry gate from the property north of the Stroll Garden, would allow for pre-arranged docent-led tours with wheelchair accessibility to much of the lower garden. Other issues discussed included path surface treatments (gravel or paved), more seating, access to the natural areas, any new garden development meeting current accessibility requirements, and correcting existing deficiencies in accessibility.

Session Two: Events, Programs, and Scheduling

Discussion centered on the tours and event spaces to understand what the key issues are in improving the visitor experience. The need for amenities, particularly restrooms, was clear from the start. Restrooms and parking are key limiting factors in expanding beyond the current level of visitation and events. Will Kubota be an event-based garden or a visitor-experienced garden? From a staff viewpoint, maintaining the quality and condition of the lawn areas for events is paramount to the visitor experience. Information shared by the Portland Japanese Garden regarding maintenance, memberships and admission was insightful. The garden does have photo-seasonality (fall color, spring color; wedding and graduation photos, Mother’s Day).

Session Three: Security

It is 'Security' not 'Surveillance'. There has been limited vandalism within the garden, particularly after the fencing was installed on 51st. With the forthcoming completion of the wall, entry will be limited to two points from the parking area. Issues with the parking lot led to an in-depth discussion of security cameras in the parking area to help with break-ins. Also noted that parks' standards call for remote-operated automatic locks for restroom facilities to allow for off-site closure of the building for maintenance safety purposes

Session Four: The Site

The Mapes Creek Natural Areas provide the counterpoint to the more formal areas of the Garden. The Natural Areas have received a tremendous amount of restoration work through the Green Seattle Partnership. The focus has been on invasive plant removal and replanting with habitat-supporting plants. The Natural Areas provide the green backdrop from many of the Garden's viewpoints. A wildlife survey will be carried out at the end of May to determine the current resident and migratory bird species using the natural areas as well as a roster of wildlife that would potentially use such an area.

Session Five: Sustainability, Vegetation & Wildlife

Kubota Garden is a living organism that has a unique cultural and landscape history not found anywhere in the Pacific Northwest. Yet as a living organism parts of it are collapsing, such as the Bigleaf maples, and affecting portions of the Garden. The preservation of the Garden should seek to find balance of visitor safety, historic plant materials, and designed spaces. Where will the Garden's canopy and understory be 20, 50, 100 years from now? How can the master plan guide succession plantings that fulfill the Kubota vision? The Natural Areas will continue to be improved into a functional wildlife habitat and provide the green backdrop for the Garden. Understanding the current and future staffing needs will be addressed as part of the master plan.

Session Six: The Garden

Understanding the major experiential components of the Garden is critical in order to maintain and build upon the Kubota Garden vision. The Core Area is the gem of the property and has a rich history that offers many interpretive opportunities. The 1990 Plan preserved the Core Area while expanding into new areas of the property. Some of these expansions have been built (terrace overlook, the wall, the parking lot, while some have not. Some areas of the garden were penciled in for future development that has not occurred, such as the tea House and the Memorial garden. Another pass and discussion of all the plan elements needs to occur as part of this Master Plan update. This could be handled by KGF in collaboration with SPR. Another key issue raised in this session was maintenance and maintenance priorities. There will be a follow-up with garden staff to understand the maintenance calendar.

Session Seven: The Garden, Partners, & Stakeholders

The core mission of the Kubota Garden initially was to open the garden to the community as a place of gathering. It is called 'the People's Garden' and is in the middle of the most ethnically and economically diverse zip code in Seattle. The Garden wants to be as inclusive as possible and continue to serve as a neighborhood gathering space. Identifying partnerships and stakeholders is fundamental to the continued growth of Kubota Garden. Resolving the future partnership ideal will be key: is it status quo, joint partnership, or KGF operated/city owned? Examine what is needed to financially sustain the Garden and the Garden's mission in terms of admission, maintenance expectations, and visitor amenities.

Session Eight: The Visitor Center Building Program

The 1990 Master Plan sited several buildings based on uses generated through public meetings. The resulting plan for the visitor center was conceptual. It focused on the idea that this was Kubota Garden, not Kubota Building Garden – the buildings are subservient to the Garden spaces. The Welcome Center-Visitor Center would house various visitor amenities as well as possible KGF offices and a multi-purpose room. Input from the Portland Japanese Garden raised two interesting points: 1) They have no rental venue and focus on mission. Only able to focus on mission events because admission pays for it. 2) Each space must further the mission of the Garden to get funding. The concept of the Visitor Center as a cluster of smaller buildings around a courtyard, that can be built over time, helps the buildings fit snugly into the garden's landscape.

Session Nine: Admission

This session focused on the pluses and minuses of Admission. It centered on three main issues: 1) What visitor amenities are needed to activate an admission process? 2) What are the neighborhood impacts of admission? 3) If admissions are charged, a higher level of maintenance (and increased staffing) would be required as visitor expectations would be higher. Discussion focused on the neighborhood impacts, such as offering free days, reduced fee days as well as the type of visitor amenities (restrooms, café, visitor center, secure parking).