



**Memorandum To:** The Honorable Caroline Simmons, Mayor  
The City of Stamford, Connecticut  
**From:** Bartlett Arboretum Association, Inc.  
**Date:** January 10, 2023  
**Re:** FY 2023-2024 Operating Budget Request

Dear Mayor Simmons,

Thank you for the opportunity to request operating funds in support of the Bartlett Arboretum & Gardens. We respectfully request funding of \$334,000 to support and maintain this unique City-owned Park property. This request represents current level funding.

The property, recently accredited by ArbNet (an international arboretum accreditation and networking program) is a tremendous asset owned by the City of Stamford and operated free-of-charge by the Bartlett Arboretum Association, Inc. for the benefit of Stamford residents and neighbors.

In April of 2022, we installed a car counter to obtain more accurate information regarding the number of Arboretum visitors. Prior to its installation, the Arboretum estimated annual visitation at just under 60,000. The counter revealed that annual attendance is actually closer to **100,000** – many visitors arrive during the early morning hours to walk their dogs and a large number take advantage of extended daylight during the summer months.

Assets maintained and managed by the Bartlett Arboretum include:

- Historic 1880s Homestead building
- Silver Educational Center
- Greenhouse
- Maintenance Building
- 93 Acres of habitat (91 acres owned by the City) and 2.5 miles of trails
- 90.8 percent tree canopy on 93 acres of land in proximity to the reservoir, providing significant annual environmental value for CO<sub>2</sub> storage, ozone, and carbon monoxide removal, as well as stormwater capture and filtration. In addition to these “soft” values, the estimated asset value of our tree collection is at least \$5 million, as confirmed by F. A. Bartlett Tree Expert Company inventory using USDA statistics.

### **Bartlett Arboretum & Gardens Mission:**

*To cultivate and develop a diverse collection of trees, gardens, and plants for all to explore, enjoy and study; and to provide through education and stewardship, a greener, healthier, more beautiful environment.*

We accomplish this by:

- Linking all visitors from our surrounding communities to the natural world, through our grounds, exhibits, and programming.
- Building a community that welcomes and respects the diversity of all visitors, staff, volunteers, donors, and advocates creating an inclusive environment.
- Providing comprehensive environmental, horticulture and plant science educational programs for children and adults of all ages and abilities.
- Preserving the historical significance of the Bartlett Arboretum for current and future generations.
- Creating opportunities for inspiration, recreation, enjoyment, and exploration of the natural world for all who visit.
- Maintaining plant collections that celebrate biodiversity and reflect the ecology and character of our region.
- Promoting conservation and principles of sustainable landscape management.

### **Vision:**

*To be a nationally recognized center of living collection expertise, education, stewardship, exhibition, and horticultural best practices.*

### **Program History and Description:**

In 1965, Dr. Francis A. Bartlett's Stamford home, research facility, and associated collection of specimen woody plants covering some 64 acres, was purchased by the State of Connecticut under the Federal Open Spaces Program. At this time, the property was designated the Connecticut State Arboretum. The acquisition of this land by the State and the subsequent development of the Bartlett Arboretum was spearheaded by a local group of community volunteers. This group of citizens, who initially banded together to preserve what Dr. Bartlett had created, formed the nucleus of what is now the Bartlett Arboretum Association.

In 2002, the title to the land was transferred to the City of Stamford with the Bartlett Arboretum Association responsible for all managerial and operational oversight of the property. An additional 27 acres of adjacent City property was added to the Bartlett's existing property.

Today, nestled among the historic landscape of Southwestern New England, the Bartlett Arboretum & Gardens is a natural preserve like no other in this region. The property features 93

acres of irreplaceable open space highlighting the best of what Connecticut's native landscape has to offer: magnificent award-winning Champion trees, charming gardens, wildflower meadows, red maple wetlands and boardwalks, woodland walking trails, diverse wildlife, and native habitats. A wonderful getaway from the hustle and bustle of daily life, we serve as a leading recreational and educational resource for area residents and visitors of all ages. From weekend gardeners to budding young botanists, the Bartlett offers a place to relax, learn, and unplug.

In addition to providing a sanctuary for visitors, the Arboretum offers a wide variety of programs. This past year alone, we conducted 507 programs.

- Our education staff provides STEAM-based botanical education for all Stamford public and many private school students, including our signature second grade Plant Life Cycle Program. We also host several student interns from West Hill and other local high schools.
- Through a special grant from the federal Institute of Museum & Library Services, our education staff is currently working with the Waterside Schools to develop new STEAM-based programming for pre-K through 5<sup>th</sup> grade classes.
- Bartlett educators also provide special program services for Apples, the Stamford pre-school program, and after-school programming at Inspirica as well as local schools. Outside the school year, the Arboretum offers nature-based summer camps. This past year, 280 children attended our camp program, several by way of scholarships provided by Arboretum donors.
- Last year, the Arboretum's GrowMobile outreach program provided 70 programs at eight off-site locations reaching over 1,000 participants of all ages and abilities. This included the development and maintenance of six community gardens.
- In partnership with the UConn Extension Master Gardener Program, the Arboretum serves as a site for training up to 30 interns per year. Many of the graduates of this program assist our education staff by teaching adult classes, providing docent tours, and maintaining our gardens.
- As part of its **workforce development program**, the Arboretum hosts courses and workshops for professional landscapers and arborists working to obtain State certification. Our staff also works with Abilis to provide volunteer opportunities for their clients.
- As both a fundraiser and educational event, the Arboretum holds a plant sale each May, providing residents with a source of native plants and advice on how to plan and improve their gardens for the benefit of our local environment.

- In addition to the above, the Arboretum hosts several community events. Our Arbor Earth Day event, held in April each year, attracts over 1,500 visitors and our Honey Harvest Festival and the Arboretum's Sunday Summer Concert series each attracted over 2,000 attendees this past year.

### **Operational Challenges & Planned Accomplishments for FY23/24:**

The biggest operational challenge facing the Arboretum is the condition of its aging and energy inefficient greenhouse. In fact, safety concerns have closed the facility to the public and, as such, it is no longer available to support elements of many of our plant science programs. We plan to address this through an aggressive capital campaign as described in the narrative outlining our FY 23/24 Proposed Operating Budget.

The state of the economy and increasing inflation has influenced our operational costs and may present fundraising challenges depending on its impact on our members and donor base.

Despite these challenges, we plan to achieve the following in FY 23/24:

- Complete the capital campaign and begin construction related to the development of the horticulture/greenhouse project;
- Extend the hours of the Arboretum's Summer Camp program to accommodate the needs of working parents;
- Continue boardwalk, bridge, and trail improvements with private and City capital funding;
- Expand partnerships with community organizations to increase workforce development opportunities for those most in need.

Support from the City of Stamford allows us to manage the City's assets effectively and provide residents with the opportunity to gain an appreciation of the natural world and their role as stewards of our environment. Maintaining and preserving this property provides immeasurable benefits to the health of the residents of the City of Stamford and beyond, including a critical role in ensuring a clean water supply and air quality.

We ask you and the City of Stamford to endorse our initiatives by maintaining our current level of funding. We are at a milestone in the history of this valuable City asset and your support will help us to grow and sustain our community's environment and health.

We are excited to engage with you and your administration to serve the people of Stamford. Thank you for your consideration of our request.