

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2004 and 2005 the Town of Chatham (“Town”) acquired two parcels of land located near the geographical center of the community. Subsequently named the Rolf E. Sylvan Gardens Conservation Area (“Sylvan Gardens”), these parcels contain 9.4 acres of undeveloped land and six hundred feet of freshwater pond shore. Sylvan Gardens was added to the Town’s conservation lands because it serves the Town and its people as plant and animal habitat, as a protected portion of the watersheds of White Pond and Black Pond, as a unique collection of horticultural plants, as a historic landscape containing remnants of Sylvan Nursery and the land uses that preceded it, and as a serene, attractive, and varied setting for passive recreation.

In 2010 the Town contracted with Environmental Landscape Consultants, LLC (“ELC”) to develop a management plan (“Plan”) for Sylvan Gardens. Having once been a private home with gardens and a commercial plant nursery, the site had received minimal care over the last several decades. There are issues with access and public parking; trails and passive recreation; **invasive plant** and vegetation **management**; and conservation protection and **restoration**—including protection of endangered species. (*Please note*: words in bold type are defined in Appendix A: Glossary.) ELC was contracted to provide technical assistance in addressing these issues.

Along with ELC’s extensive work on development of technical information for the Plan, ELC’s consultant team worked with Town Conservation staff and a Work Group of volunteers from the community. During a series of meetings the consultant team presented design and management ideas and other technical information to the staff and Work Group for their review and for selection of recommended options. The planning process also included three public meetings to present recommended design and management plans and to receive public feedback.

The principal elements of the Plan are a set of Goals and Principles, a Vegetation Management Plan, a Five Year Restoration Plan, an Access and Parking Conceptual Plan, a Recreation Plan, and Recommendations for Establishing a “Friends-of” Organization.

The recommendations of the Plan are based on goals identified or affirmed as part of the planning process. Based on these goals, the Plan addresses the protection and enhancement of the ecological, recreational, and aesthetic benefits that Sylvan Gardens provides the community; the safety, accessibility, sense of welcome, and educational benefits it offers visitors; and the creation of a non-profit “friends” organization that will support the ongoing management and restoration of Sylvan Gardens.

The Plan also identifies eleven principles for planning, design, and management that will support the realization of these goals.

One of the principle features of Sylvan Gardens is its diverse collection of plant species, including invasive plants, ornamental plants and **native** plants. As part of the Vegetation Management Plan, a detailed plant survey was developed by ELC staff working in conjunction with botanists from the New England Wildflower Society. The survey identified 110 native species, 77 non-native species—including a variety of species planted as ornamental landscape plants—and 24 invasive or aggressive species.

Invasive and aggressive plant species pose a significant risk to the native plants, to ornamental plant species, and to unique specimen plants found at Sylvan Gardens, thereby adversely affecting both the conservation value and the recreational value of the site. A key conclusion is that management of invasive plants is a critical part of the restoration plan. Both general approaches to invasive plant management and specific suggestions for management of key invasive species are included in the Plan.

A site the size and diversity of Sylvan Gardens is not easy to manage. To aid in developing management and restoration plans, the site is divided into “zones” with key features that make them unique. Nine distinct Vegetation Zones are identified, mapped and described. Both the Vegetation Management Plan and the Five Year Restoration Plan use the zones as the basis for developing vegetation management and restoration goals, guidelines, and recommendations.

For each zone, the Vegetation Management Plan provides a vision for its management and restoration; identifies its potential based on its existing flora, on referenced plant communities found on Cape Cod, on scenic and recreational value, and on what could be achieved with a realistic level of effort and resources; and provides recommendations for management of specific invasive plants and ornamental plants found in that zone. Additional recommendations for each zone specify how that area’s value to the community could be enhanced through restoration of native **plant communities**.

The Five Year Restoration Plan provides yearly and seasonal tasks for the Town and the community to carry out the first phase of management, restoration and development in line with the goals and principles. Timing and details for implementation of some of the specific zone recommendations considered key management and restoration tasks is also included in the five year timeline.

The Access and Parking Conceptual Plan proposes a coordinated system of parking, trails, and overlooks that will provide public access that is safe, legal, **accessible** based on the standards set by the Americans with Disabilities Act (**ADA**), and consistent with Sylvan Gardens’ character.

To determine the locations of parking and trails, the consultants developed two sets of design alternatives for parking and access, each of which was evaluated based on environmental impact, maintainability, security, visitors’ experience of the landscape, impact on neighbors, permitting requirements, existing rights to potential access routes, and cost. No alternative scored highest on all criteria, so the final selection weighed each alternative’s advantages against its drawbacks.

The recommended conceptual access plan, identified as “Access Alternative 1,” locates three non-accessible parking spaces on Parcel 4 and one accessible parking space on Old Main Street at the foot of Emily’s Way. It connects the two parking areas via a sidewalk on Old Main Street and provides pedestrian access to two accessible pond overlooks via accessible trails on Emily’s Way and within Parcel 5A1.

The Recreation Plan complements the Access and Parking Conceptual Plan by proposing secondary accessible trails that will extend access to a broader range of plants and landscapes and by providing locations and standards for landscape elements to make Sylvan Gardens safe, welcoming, and educational for all visitors and to protect vulnerable plants and habitat from misuse. It also recommends signs and unobtrusive barriers to protect habitat, visitors, and neighbors; interpretive and directional signage to help visitors navigate and understand the landscape; bike racks at trailheads; seating along trails and at overlooks; and the removal of unsafe stone stair treads.

The Recommendations for Establishing a “Friends-Of” Organization offer guidance for the establishment of a non-profit group to raise funds for implementation, publicize Sylvan Gardens to the Chatham community, build connections with schools and nonprofits, and organize volunteers for vegetation management and site maintenance.