



CENTRAL  
GARDENS  
*of* NORTH IOWA  
STRATEGIC PLAN 2021-2023

CENTRAL  
GARDENS  
*of* NORTH IOWA

# STRATEGIC PLAN 2021-2023

A Brief History of Central Gardens: Central Gardens of North Iowa, Inc. was established on 2.75 acres of ground in the heart of Clear Lake in 2000. It houses 22 themed gardens and is visited by an estimated 18,000 visitors annually. Its gates are open from May 1–October 31 from dawn to dusk. As the only free public garden space in a 90-mile radius of Clear Lake, it provides an oasis of beauty and serenity for all who enter, as well as hosting over 40 annual events, most offered to the community free of charge. IRS 501 © 3 designation was received in 2006. The grounds are maintained almost entirely by a cadre of over 100 volunteers who also plan and host events. Central Gardens is governed by a 15-member board of directors that meets monthly from April through November and conducts business via e-votes during the off season. More information about Central Gardens of North Iowa, Inc., can be found at [www.centralgardensnorthiowa.com](http://www.centralgardensnorthiowa.com). This strategic plan contains action steps organized around each of four strategic goals, and is not intended as a business plan. Committee chairs are responsible for overseeing progress towards the actions and the board of directors receives quarterly reports regarding that progress.

## MISSION STATEMENT:

It is the mission of Central Gardens of North Iowa, Inc. to provide a public, intergenerational garden environment that is welcoming, beautiful, calm, educational, recreational, and fun.

## SIX COMMITMENTS:

We are committed to: (1) promoting horticultural and environmental stewardship; (2) building the infrastructure through creating a modern garden while honoring our heritage and original design principles; (3) enhancing learning opportunities for members and guests; (4) being inviting to all; (5) being responsible stewards of our resources; and (6) achieving excellence in all that we do.

## STRATEGIC GOALS:

We will achieve our six commitments through:

- (1) Beautifying the Grounds
- (2) Providing Creative Events and Programming
- (3) Practicing Rigorous Stewardship of All Our Resources and Ensuring Financial Stability
- (4) Increasing Engagement with Our Various Publics Through Strategic Marketing, Communication, and Outreach

## ACTIONS:

The four strategic goals will be accomplished by achieving the actions specified under each goal.



# STRATEGIC GOAL 1: *Beautify the Grounds*

## ACTIONS:

1. Reorganize Design Committee into two distinct sub-committees:
  - a. Horticulture Committee responsible for overseeing all horticultural aspects of Central Gardens.
  - b. Facilities and Equipment responsible for overseeing all building, hardscape and associated infrastructure.  
(These two sub-committees would each have a Chair and the combined Design Committee would be under the leadership of a Facilitator).
2. Refurbish/Enhance 2-3 gardens each year for each of the next six years.
3. Complete the remaining original and additional added components of the Upgrade 2020 project by no later than summer 2021.  
New additions to the Upgrade 2020 include:
  - a. Relocate existing Mulch/Topsoil storage to a less visible location and convert the vacated area to a new Council Ring and expanded Cutting Garden.
  - b. Add a Flagpole to the new Hero's Walk area.
  - c. Expand the drip irrigation system to further conserve water and demands on volunteers.
  - d. Increase the opportunities for shade in the Gardens by installing a Shade Sail in the Council Ring, Retractable Awnings at the Pavilion and Workshop, and the planting of additional trees in critical areas.
  - e. Add additional tables and chairs to satisfy increasing demands for the Gardens as a sack-lunch destination as well as an area to enjoy coffee and snacks while reading.
  - f. Transfer the successful Picnic and Performances from the Naturalist Terrace to the South Entrance Gazebo. This relocation will require additional pavers at the Gazebo, an enhanced sound system, and landscaping. This change will provide expanded seating options and convenient access for those who have difficulty with mobility.
  - g. Establish a roof replacement fund.
  - h. Add additional features to the Kids Discovery Gardens, including a new entrance arch to mimic the Moon Gate, topiary shrubs to define the eastern boundary of the Garden, expand the Garden with new limestone edging along the southern border with the Activity lawn, and additional landscaping opportunities.
4. Improve the lighting in the Gardens by:
  - a. Lighting the limestone (west) wall of the Nature Education Pavilion in 2020.
  - b. Installing dramatic lighting on the ash trees adjacent to the Moon Gate, at the Reunion Terrace Locust and under the 3 Bridges.
  - c. Adding seasonal lighting displays in each year
  - d. Lighting and landscaping the signage wall in the Southwest corner and the new sign at the Northwest corner of the Gardens in 2021.
  - e. Adding a significant piece of art work or aesthetic interest into the Gardens every 5-10 years.
5. Add full time equivalent (40 hours/week) horticulturalist/maintenance employee(s) to oversee the grounds beginning in 2021. This could be a shared position with the City of Clear Lake.
6. Create an active binder for each of the themed Gardens that would include a narrative of that Garden, map(s) of plant and hardscape elements, and running history of all ascensions and removals by 2021.
7. Erect physical signage for each garden by the end of the 2022 season.
8. Purchase a mulching mower, two landscape wagons and additional hand power tools via a grant or operating funds.

## **STRATEGIC GOAL 2:** *Provide Creative Events and Programming*

1. Support the Arts through:
  - (a) Offering a Performing Arts production at least once every three years, exploring various types of performing arts, beginning in 2022.
  - (b) Offering a Visual Arts event at least once every three years that would appeal to people of all ages, beginning in 2021 with a Plein Air (painting event).
  - (c) Incorporating the arts in Fresh on Friday's youth activities, collaborating with at least two different entities and involving at least two different types of arts.
2. Support Education annually through:
  - (a) Including an educational component in each garden-sponsored event. At a minimum, provide an education component at the Plant Sale, Fresh on Fridays' activities, the Cultural Celebration, and the Preservation Celebration.
  - (b) Providing a 3-to-4 session Garden Lecture Series in collaboration with ISU Extension.
  - (c) Providing at least 12 educational postings on social media.
  - (d) Providing learning and experiential opportunities for youth with a focus on the areas of food, plants, gardening, pollinators and environment during Fresh on Fridays, collaborating with at least three other organizations to provide these diverse learning opportunities (for example, Healthy Harvest of North Iowa, Lime Creek Nature Center, etc.).
  - (e) Providing interactive learning and gardening opportunities for youth in grades three and up through the Growing Green Gardeners programs. (Bugs and Blooms will involve youth in grades 3-5 and Harvest-Unite-Gather-Share (HUGS) will involve youth in grades 6 and up).
  - (f) Organizing and holding a one day all youth Farmers' Market organized by youth in the Gardens.
  - (g) Holding a ticketed Botanical Mixology class at least once throughout the summer with the intended audience being those persons 21 years of age and older.
  - (h) Offering one short-term exhibit at least once every two years in the Gardens.
3. Promote Diversity and Inclusion by:
  - (a) Offering one event per year that celebrates the contributions of ethnic culture to North Iowa. In 2021 a Garden Fiesta will celebrate the Latino culture.
  - (b) Promoting an intergenerational event/program, coordinating with at least one area assisted living facility or nursing home.
4. Provide Recreational Opportunities by:
  - (a) Offering Movement in the Gardens classes on six consecutive Saturdays during the summer, providing a variety of movement activities, such as yoga, aerobics, barre classes, and tai chi.
  - (b) Promoting Golf Croquet in the Gardens as an organized activity for individuals and families, with equipment provided, beginning in 2021.
  - (c) Constructing and setting up a corn hole (garden-themed) board that will be available for visitors to play at the Activity Lawn whenever the garden is open.
  - (d) Collaborating with the Clear Lake library to offer a Silent Book Club.
  - (e) Hosting a community drum circle, free to the public and for all ages, beginning in 2021.
  - (f) Organizing a pumpkin carving event beginning in October of 2022.
5. Provide CGNI's hallmark annual events, upholding our tradition of continuity of excellence by annually:
  - (a) Hosting the Plant Sale and Gardening Fair in May. This offers opportunities for participants of all ages to learn about gardening and purchase donated plants and other garden-related items, as well as items available from area vendors.
  - (b) Offering Fresh on Fridays programming during the months of June, July, and August where volunteers create bouquets from the garden that are available for purchase through a designated donation amount. The Gardens will provide refreshments, a space for visitors to socialize, and educational activities in the BEE Happy Discovery garden for children and adults. We will partner with at least three other entities to provide exposure for other community organizations.
  - (c) Hosting the Summer Garden Party, our annual fundraiser, in June. Components of this event will include an auction, food, and music. The public is invited and admission will be charged.
  - (d) Offering Picnics and Performances each Sunday evening for 8 weeks, beginning in July of each year. These hour-long free concerts or other performances feature local talent. Attendees are encouraged to bring their own lawn chair, beverage, and picnic.
  - (e) Offering a free Preservation Celebration in September to educate and equip the greater north Iowa community to preserve its culture, environment, and food.

## **STRATEGIC GOAL 3:** *Practice Wise Stewardship of All Our Resources and Ensure Financial Stability*

### **ACTIONS:**

1. Continue to grow Central Gardens' endowments every year as financial conditions permit by:
  - a. Sending any donation directing excess funds to an endowment at yearend with consideration given to the following year needs, as recommended by the finance committee.
  - b. Sending any donation directing one-half of any donation over \$1000, not specified for a particular use, to an endowment as recommended by the finance committee.
  - c. Sending any donation specifically designated for the permanent endowment to the Community Foundation of Northeast Iowa for deposit in the Central Gardens permanent endowment account in a timely manner.
2. Increase projected net revenue of major events (Plant Sale, Fresh on Fridays, Summer Garden Party, and Picnics and Performances by at least 10% annually.
3. Rebuild rental business lost by Covid-19 by identifying target rental groups.
4. Increase donations, honoraria and memorials made by individuals and corporations by at least 10 percent by marketing and promoting donor options.
5. Increase corporate memberships by 50% in 2021. Continue to grow the memberships by 10% in each of the following 2 years.
6. Increase individual and family memberships by 20% in 2021 and by 10% in 2022 and in 2023.
7. Conduct a brick campaign each year that targets a specific audience with a developed theme. Increase net revenue from brick and paver sales by at least 10% annually in 2021, 2022 and 2023.
8. Identify ways to make the financial statements more user friendly for board members of various backgrounds; add graphics as appropriate.
9. Add more depth and specificity to the monthly financial reports as determined by the Finance Committee annually.
10. Better integrate committee chairs into the budget process.
11. Promote CGNI as a recipient of estate planning efforts with appropriate audiences and by marketing and publicizing estate planning and giving options by newsletter, website, and social media.
12. Raise funds through grants of \$10,000 in 2021, \$15,000 in 2022 and \$20,000 in 2023.
13. Establish a "Reserve for Replacement" initially funded in 2020 with \$10,000 from Upgrade 2020 funds, and add at least \$2,400 each following year.
14. Develop and maintain a liquidity reserve of 75% of the annual budgeted operating expenses using an average of the prior 3 years results to ensure available funds for day to day operations in challenging financial environments.

## **STRATEGIC GOAL 4:** *Increase Engagement with Our Various publics Through Strategic Marketing, Communication, and Outreach*

### **ACTIONS:**

1. At a minimum use conventional media weekly and social media at least three times per week during the gates open season and periodically during the off season to publicize Central Gardens' news, promotions (e.g. a special brick sales campaign), special features (e.g. scavenger hunts materials), book library, and rental opportunities to a wide audience. Conventional media includes local regional newspapers, press releases, standard TV and radio outlets, and the "What's Growing On" Central Gardens newsletter. Social media includes Facebook (including Clear Lake Moms, Clear Lakers, and other groups), Instagram, Trip Advisor, and the weekly posts of the Clear Lake and Mason City Chambers of Commerce emails).
2. Increase individual membership numbers by 20% to a total of 153 for 2021, distributed as follows: Lily:57; Daisy:65; Tulip:18; Lilac:10; and Rose 3.
3. Increase corporate membership numbers by 50% to a total of 30 for 2021, distributed as follows: Planter: 17; Caretaker: 8; Gardener: 3; and Designer: 2
4. Target photographers as a new demographic of corporate members, and develop a photography policy that provides specific guidance regarding respectful use of the Gardens as a photography venue in 2021.
5. Promote memberships, volunteer opportunities, and events through a new donation kiosk to be placed near the main South entrance in the spring of 2021.
6. Intentionally recruit persons of diverse demographic backgrounds to positions on the board of directors, committees, and volunteer cadres.
7. Support current volunteers in 2021 by (a) confirming current volunteer participation for 2021 as garden adopters, Down 'N Dirty cadre, events planners , and membership committee members; (b) increasing the numbers of new volunteers to the Gardens by 20% each year for the next three years; (c) providing appropriate information and guidance consistent with best practice in horticulture and events planning; (d) keeping up-to-date records of volunteer contact information; (e) recruiting gatekeepers; and (f) establishing a volunteer position of "Coordinator of Volunteers" whose responsibility it is to facilitate (a)-(e).
8. Develop robust collaborative partnerships with other non-profit organizations in north Iowa, adding one new partnership per year for the next three years. Target group for 2021: Master Gardeners.
9. Annually evaluate the content and structure of the new website developed in early 2021 and make recommendations for improvements as needed. Post videos of at least five events that have occurred at the Gardens in 2021 as a marketing strategy.
10. Continue to explore the installation of physical plant identification signs by adding them in one additional designated garden in 2021 in addition to the Plant of the Year garden, while also posting information in strategic sites in the Gardens that promote the use of free plant identification apps. Evaluate the durability of the physical signs in October of 2021.
11. Host at least two "Get to Know the Gardens" socials, one for Des Moines summer residents, and the other for summer residents from Black Hawk county, at which membership in the Gardens is promoted in 2021.
12. Increase the professional credibility of the Gardens by securing designation as an official monarch butterfly way station in 2021 and an All-American Selection Demonstration Garden by 2022.
13. Promote CGNI as a recipient of estate planning efforts and legacy donations with appropriate audiences and by marketing and publicizing estate planning and giving options by newsletter, website, and social media.
14. Host a community-wide celebration in the spring of 2021 celebrating the improvements to the grounds made possible by the Capital Campaign.

