



DOCUMENT 3 OF 3 • THE PLAN

The Business Plan

How Boulder Botanical Gardens would be owned, run, built and paid for: a public-land, nonprofit-operated garden that balances its budget at the base case and returns an estimated \$13–31 million a year to Boulder’s economy.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Public land, nonprofit garden, phased build

Boulder Botanical Gardens would turn the 7.8-acre Justice Center site at 1777 6th St into a public botanical garden, owned by the City and run by a nonprofit, built in three phases over about ten years.

\$78–114M

Capital, in three phases

\$8.5M

Stabilized operating budget

200–300K

Visits a year once built

\$150K

The first ask: nonprofit, feasibility study, site talks

- **What gets built:** a Main Building with a butterfly roof, the Super Bloom Event Hall and Outdoor Cafe, a glass Conservatory, a Greenhouse Dome, a Live Music Lawn and stage, and the Alpine, Meadow & Wetland Sculpture Garden around a pond. A 1.7-acre creek buffer stays wild.
- **How it gets paid for:** roughly half public money (land, a local ballot measure, state and federal grants) and half private (a capital campaign led by a few large gifts), the path that built the Cheyenne and Fort Collins gardens.

Every figure in this plan is a planning assumption, to be tested by a feasibility study and a professional cost estimate.

ORGANIZATION

Who owns it and who runs it

ROLE	WHO
Owner	City of Boulder, which acquires the site from Boulder County by purchase, swap or transfer
Operator	Friends of Boulder Botanical Gardens, a Colorado 501(c)(3), under a 25–50-year operating agreement
Board	9–15 members covering horticulture, finance, real estate, philanthropy, education and the arts, plus a City liaison
Precedents	Denver Botanic Gardens on City and County of Denver land; Gardens on Spring Creek, City-owned with a Friends nonprofit; Cheyenne Botanic Gardens, City-run with a Friends group

Mission

A public garden where the canyon meets the city: celebrating the plants, pollinators and landscapes of the Front Range, open to everyone, and joined to the Boulder Creek Path.

Programs

Year-round horticulture and education, a summer concert series, private events in Super Bloom, and five signature festivals: Fall Fairies, Wizards & Dragons; the Winter Festival of Lights; the Spring Pollinator Pageant; the Spring Parade of Puppets; and the Summer Lavender & Poppy Festival.

Access and neighbors

Bike-first access: a goal of at least 30% of visitors arriving by bike on the Creek Path (Boulder residents already make 18% of all trips by bike or scooter), supported by a bike-in discount, event-day bike valet, timed entry and event shuttles, with no new parking structure. Concerts end by 9:30 p.m. on weeknights and 10 p.m. on weekends, with sound monitored at the nearest homes and kept within Boulder's residential limits.

University partnership

The garden complements CU Boulder's collections rather than duplicating them. CU's EBIO Research Greenhouse (6,000+ living plants, two public tours a year) and Herbarium COLO (about 320,000 specimens) serve researchers; the garden serves the public. The plan budgets for a joint program: a shared display and propagation lab in the dome, reference specimens filed in COLO, outdoor research plots, a rotating herbarium exhibit, and CU interns and capstone teams. It does not include a research herbarium or a research-grade greenhouse.

MARKET

Where Boulder fits among its peers

GARDEN	MODEL	SIZE OF OPERATION	WHAT IT SHOWS
Denver Botanic Gardens	Nonprofit on city land	1.43M visitors, 55,503 member households, \$38.6M operating revenue (2023)	Events and rentals (21%) and SCFD (17%) are its largest revenue lines
Gardens on Spring Creek, Fort Collins	City-owned, Friends nonprofit	18 acres, about 70,000 visitors	A voter-approved measure funded phase one
Red Butte Garden, Salt Lake City	University-run, state arboretum	250,000+ visitors; \$10.5M budget (2021)	Concerts supplied 51% of revenue (FY2019–20)
Olbrich Botanical Gardens, Madison	City and nonprofit Society	372,314 visitors (2025 study); Society revenue \$3.67M (2024)	\$20.1M a year in local economic activity
Betty Ford Alpine Gardens, Vail	Nonprofit, free admission	100,000+ visitors; \$1.81M revenue (FY2025)	Donations carry a free-admission garden
Cheyenne Botanic Gardens	City-run, Friends group	Free admission; \$20M+ conservatory expansion (2017)	Two local sales tax votes paid about \$16M; Friends raised \$2M

Boulder draws city and county residents, Denver-metro day trips and visitors headed to Boulder Canyon. The planning assumption is 200,000–300,000 visits a year once fully built, between Fort Collins and Denver.

OPERATIONS

A stabilized year balances its budget

Events, festivals and memberships carry about half the budget, as they do at Denver Botanic Gardens.

REVENUE LINE	DRIVER	REVENUE
Admissions	120,000 paid visits × \$14 net	\$1.7M
Festivals	Festival of Lights 60,000 × \$22, plus three smaller festivals	\$1.6M
Annual fund, sponsors, SCFD	Donors, sponsors, Tier III grant	\$1.4M
City operating support	Site upkeep and utilities	\$1.2M
Super Bloom rentals	80 events × \$12,000	\$1.0M
Membership	6,000 households × \$90	\$0.5M
Concert series (net)	10–14 shows	\$0.4M
Cafe and shop (net)	Concession share	\$0.4M
Education programs	Classes, camps, field trips	\$0.3M
Total		\$8.5M

Expenses balance at about \$8.5M: a staff of 50–60 full-time equivalents (about \$4.5M), horticulture and grounds (\$1.5M), conservatory and dome energy (\$0.8M), event costs (\$1.0M), and marketing and administration (\$0.7M).

Revenue across visitor scenarios

Total revenue runs from about \$7.5M to \$9.5M across the visitor range. Super Bloom rentals are held steady at \$1.0M, because bookings depend on the hall’s calendar and price, not on daily visitor traffic.

	LOW	BASE	HIGH
Visits a year	200,000	250,000	300,000
Earned revenue from visitors	\$3.9M	\$4.9M	\$5.9M
Super Bloom rentals	\$1.0M	\$1.0M	\$1.0M
City support, annual fund, sponsors, SCFD	\$2.6M	\$2.6M	\$2.6M
Total revenue	\$7.5M	\$8.5M	\$9.5M
Against about \$8.5M in expenses	–\$1.0M	Balanced	+\$1.0M

Super Bloom rentals: the upside

The plan's 80 events a year is only one or two a week, so evening rentals are the biggest lever for growing revenue. Each additional 10 events adds about \$120,000.

EVENTS A YEAR	AT \$12,000 EACH	CHANGE FROM PLAN
80 (plan)	\$0.96M	—
120	\$1.44M	+\$0.48M
150	\$1.80M	+\$0.84M

For scale: events and rentals are Denver Botanic Gardens' largest single revenue line, at 21% of the total. At 150 events, the base case earns a surplus of about \$0.8M, and even the conservative 200,000-visit case nearly balances.

Concerts, festivals and the Festival of Lights compete for the same evenings and staff, and the \$12,000 average is a planning assumption. The feasibility study should test event counts and pricing against local Boulder venues.

CAPITAL

Built in three phases, so the gardens open first

The first estimate is \$78–114 million in 2026 dollars.

PHASE	YEARS	WHAT GETS BUILT	ESTIMATE
1	3–5	Demolition, gardens, pond, lawn and stage, paths, parking loop, temporary visitor kiosk	\$24–39M
2	5–7	The Main Building with its butterfly roof	\$20–26M
3	7–10	Conservatory, Greenhouse Dome, Super Bloom and the Outdoor Cafe	\$34–49M

Ranges assume new construction at typical Front Range costs for public buildings and glass houses, including soft costs. They exclude buying the land and any reuse of the Justice Center.

FUNDRAISING

A \$110 million campaign, half public and half private

Sources of capital

SOURCE	TARGET
Land (County to City transfer)	In kind
Local ballot measure	\$30-40M
State and federal grants	\$8-12M
Private campaign	\$60M
of which endowment	\$10M

Private gift table

GIFT SIZE	GIFTS	TOTAL
\$15M lead gift	1	\$15.0M
\$7.5M	2	\$15.0M
\$3M	4	\$12.0M
\$1M	8	\$8.0M
\$500K	11	\$5.5M
\$100K	30	\$3.0M
Under \$100K	Hundreds	\$1.5M
Total		\$60.0M

About 80% of private dollars come from fewer than 30 donors; expect to ask three to four prospects for every top-level gift. The Gardens' name, the BBG logo, the butterfly roof and the name Super Bloom stay as they are; donors are recognized on the Conservatory, the Dome, the Live Music Lawn, the sculpture garden, rooms, the cafe, the bike entrance, benches, trees and pavers.

GRANTS

The strongest grant fits

GRANT	WHO APPLIES	SIZE	FIT
GOCO Community Impact	City, with nonprofit partner	\$100K–\$2M; up to \$5M for a few large projects	Lawn, gardens, paths, creek access. Cycle 2 concept due Jan 21, 2027
GOCO Land Acquisition	City or County	Generally up to \$3M	If the City buys the site
Land and Water Conservation Fund	Public agencies	Varies	Outdoor areas only
Colorado Community Revitalization tax credits	Project owner	Up to \$3M or 25% of eligible costs	Cultural gathering space near downtown
Congressionally Directed Spending	City or nonprofit	FY2026 garden examples \$350K–\$850K	One defined piece, such as the creek buffer
IMLS Museums for America	The Gardens, once operating	\$5K–\$350K	Education, collections, exhibits
Gates Family Foundation	Nonprofit	\$10K–\$150K	Strong once 30% of the budget is secured
SCFD Tier III	Nonprofit, once eligible	Up to \$40K operating	Botany is an eligible discipline

GETTING STARTED

The first 12 months

WHEN	WHAT
Months 0–3	Form Friends of Boulder Botanical Gardens, file for 501(c)(3), recruit a founding board, use a fiscal sponsor until the IRS ruling
Months 0–6	Meet City Council, Parks & Recreation and the County Commissioners about the site; collect letters of support
Months 3–6	Raise \$150,000 in seed gifts for a feasibility study and a professional cost estimate
Months 6–12	Run the feasibility study; host a pilot Lavender & Poppy pop-up; launch a founders' circle and mailing list
Month 12	Decide on ballot-measure timing and set the quiet-phase campaign goal

Risks

- **The site is not yet available.** The County decides whether and when the Justice Center moves; Document 2 offers relocation concepts.
- **Capital cost runs high.** The glass houses are the costliest parts; phasing lets the gardens open first.
- **Public funding needs a vote.** Cheyenne and Fort Collins both relied on voter-approved measures.
- **Energy for the glass houses** in a cold climate; design for high efficiency from the start.
- **Traffic and noise concerns** from neighbors; answer them early with the bike-first access plan, an early concert curfew and a neighbor hotline.
- **SCFD** expires in 2030 unless voters renew it; budget it as upside, not core.

Want to help? Sponsors, neighbors, gardeners and local businesses are welcome. ·
BoulderBotanicalGardens.org · Contact & press: LetsGrowTheBoulderBG@gmail.com

SOURCES

1. Denver Botanic Gardens 2023 Annual Report; Form 990 data via Impala and ProPublica.
2. The Gardens on Spring Creek: Wikipedia; Friends of the Gardens on Spring Creek (Colorado Gives).
3. Red Butte Garden: University of Utah executive director profile, 2021; APGA, 2025. Olbrich: 2025 economic study; Olbrich Botanical Society Form 990. Betty Ford Alpine Gardens: Form 990 via ProPublica.
4. CU EBIO Research Greenhouse: CU Boulder Today, 2018. Herbarium COLO: COLO collection profile.
5. Cheyenne Botanic Gardens expansion: Wyoming Tribune Eagle.
6. GOCO FY27 grants webinar; CPW Land and Water Conservation Fund; NASAA on Colorado Community Revitalization tax credits; APGA on congressionally directed spending; IMLS Museums for America; Gates Family Foundation capital grants; Boulder County Cultural Council 2025 grant guidelines; SCFD.
7. All operating, capital and fundraising figures: Boulder Botanical Gardens Business, Fundraising & Grants Plan, October 16, 2026 (planning assumptions).