

**To the Mayor and Members of the City Council****May 5, 2020**

Page 1 of 2

SUBJECT: PROPOSED AGREEMENT WITH BRIT FOR MANAGEMENT OF BOTANIC GARDEN

In January 2020, the City Council received a briefing on the terms of a proposed agreement with the Botanical Research Institute of Texas (BRIT) to manage the Fort Worth Botanic Garden. The May 19 City Council agenda will contain an M&C authorizing the agreement for a 20-year term. The M&C also amends the existing GROW Program agreement with BRIT (joint membership, education, volunteers) to cover certain administrative activities due to the early transition of two Botanic Garden staff to BRIT employment.

The benefits of the proposed management agreement include: opportunity for significant growth, funding from broader sources, enhanced educational programs, professional fundraising and membership staff, cultivated donor base, and management of private funds. Accordingly, the agreement includes the following goals:

- Increase in Botanic Garden attendance
- At least 10% of attendance at the Botanic Garden is with free or reduced price admission not counting attendance through membership programs
- Increase in non-City funding
- Increase in participation in education, events and volunteer programs at the Botanic Garden

The BRIT agreement is based on the agreement with the Zoo Association and includes the following terms:

- City retains ownership of public land, permanent structures, infrastructure, and public art
- City transfers City vehicles and equipment to BRIT
- City pays annual management fee of \$3.35 million, with inflation increases dependent on reduced percentage of operational funds over time
- City pays for utility relocation associated with improvements
- City maintains proposed commitment of \$17+ million in debt funds (adjusted for inflation) over 12 years for deferred facility maintenance and enhanced visitor experience
 - Capital investment of \$4.3 million in 2020 (tax notes approved April 7, 2020, M&C 20-0214)
 - Remaining \$13 million split between 2022 and 2026 bond programs
- BRIT may adjust admission and membership fees over time in line with inflation, ensuring at least 10% of non-member admissions are free or reduced rate
- BRIT may charge for parking for special events or in the future when parking is inadequate for Garden visitors and other arrangements must be funded; any expansion of parking on Garden property requires approval of City Council
- BRIT obtains City and state permits; building permit fees waived up to \$50,000 per project
- BRIT obtains annual third party audit, provides annual financial report, provides semi-annual report on progress toward goals for first three years, and follows state law on procurement
- City employees within 5 years of retirement may remain as City employees assigned to BRIT, so as not to lose retirement benefits
- BRIT accommodates City employee tenure in providing paid leave and waives probationary period
- BRIT assumes obligations of the agreement on the later of October 1, 2020, or ninety (90) days after both: (1) the end of disaster declarations made by the City of Fort Worth, Tarrant County, Texas, and the State of Texas related to COVID-19; and (2) the Botanic Garden begins charging admission fees

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Page 2 of 2

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Member households surpassed 3,000 just before the one-year merged membership anniversary and COVID-19. Admission was the primary point of membership sales followed by events. Over 450 members attended three free Butterflies in the Garden opportunities with \$4,300 known membership sales directly related. At least \$27,000 in membership sales came directly from admissions, and the member renewal rate was at 50% at the start of the year.

Based on registration, 3,100 Fort Worth residents participated in GROW education programming from October 2019 through March 2020. Top zip codes include: 76104, 76119, 76116, 76137 and 76134. In that six months, GROW education served over 8,578 individuals and provided 215 onsite/outreach programs before the COVID-19 suspension. Other program highlights include:

- Butterflies in the Garden programming had 2,402 individuals registered to attend. Only 697 actually attended due to the COVID-19 suspension.
- Spring Break Family Camp in the Garden hosted 50 individuals this year, up from 44 individuals its pilot year in 2019.
- Community Education offered 56 programs with 685 total participants from October to March 2020.
- GROW has 915 active volunteers who provided 12,025 service hours from October to March 2020.
- GROW Education's online resources made available in response to COVID-19 had 5,153 viewers through Facebook videos/educational content and Zoom classes.

Admissions

Admission fees to the Garden began on July 19, 2019 and were suspended due to COVID-19 on March 14, 2020. During that time:

- 93,977 people visited the Garden, with 8,334 member visits and 2,314 reciprocal member visits
- The Garden received \$798,373 in general admission fees, and annual revenue of \$1,486,425 was projected at the time of closure based on actuals to date (fees are \$12 for adults, \$10 for seniors, \$6 for children over five, and \$0 for children five and under)
- As seen with the Nature Center, average monthly admissions started at 50% of projections for the first four months and increased to 79% by March before the closure.

Trends suggest continued improvement in reaching admission targets after normal operations resume if improvements to marketing, displays and exhibits continue. Use of accessibility options was increasing as the public's knowledge of them was growing.

If you have any questions about the GROW Program or admissions, please contact Bob Byers, Botanic Garden Superintendent, at 817-253-4094. For questions about the management agreement, please contact Dana Burghdoff, Assistant City Manager, at 682-432-4554.

David Cooke
City Manager