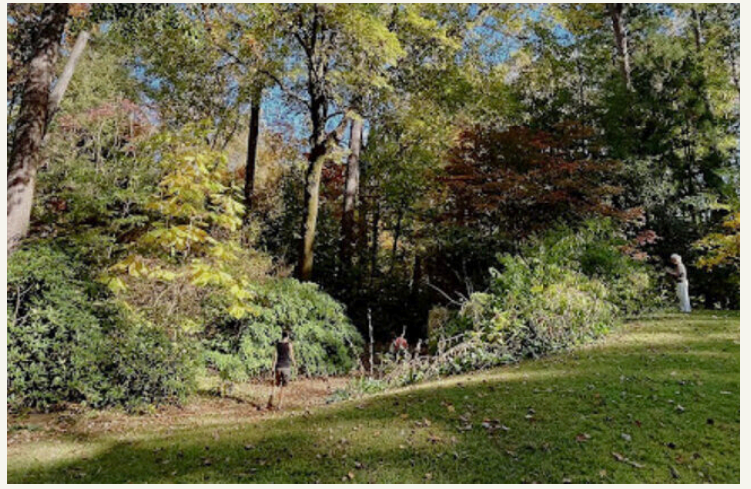




WOODLANDS



GARDEN



Woodlands Garden

Volunteer Engagement and Access Project

When the Morse Family gifted their wooded estate to the community in 2002, they envisioned a welcoming haven where visitors could experience native plants and wildlife, deepen their appreciation for nature, and cultivate a desire to preserve the natural world.

Today, Woodlands Garden honors that vision as a tranquil green space within the bustling Decatur community, free and open to the public from dawn until dusk. Sustaining this commitment requires both thoughtful stewardship of the Garden's native landscape and the infrastructure to support safe, accessible public use.

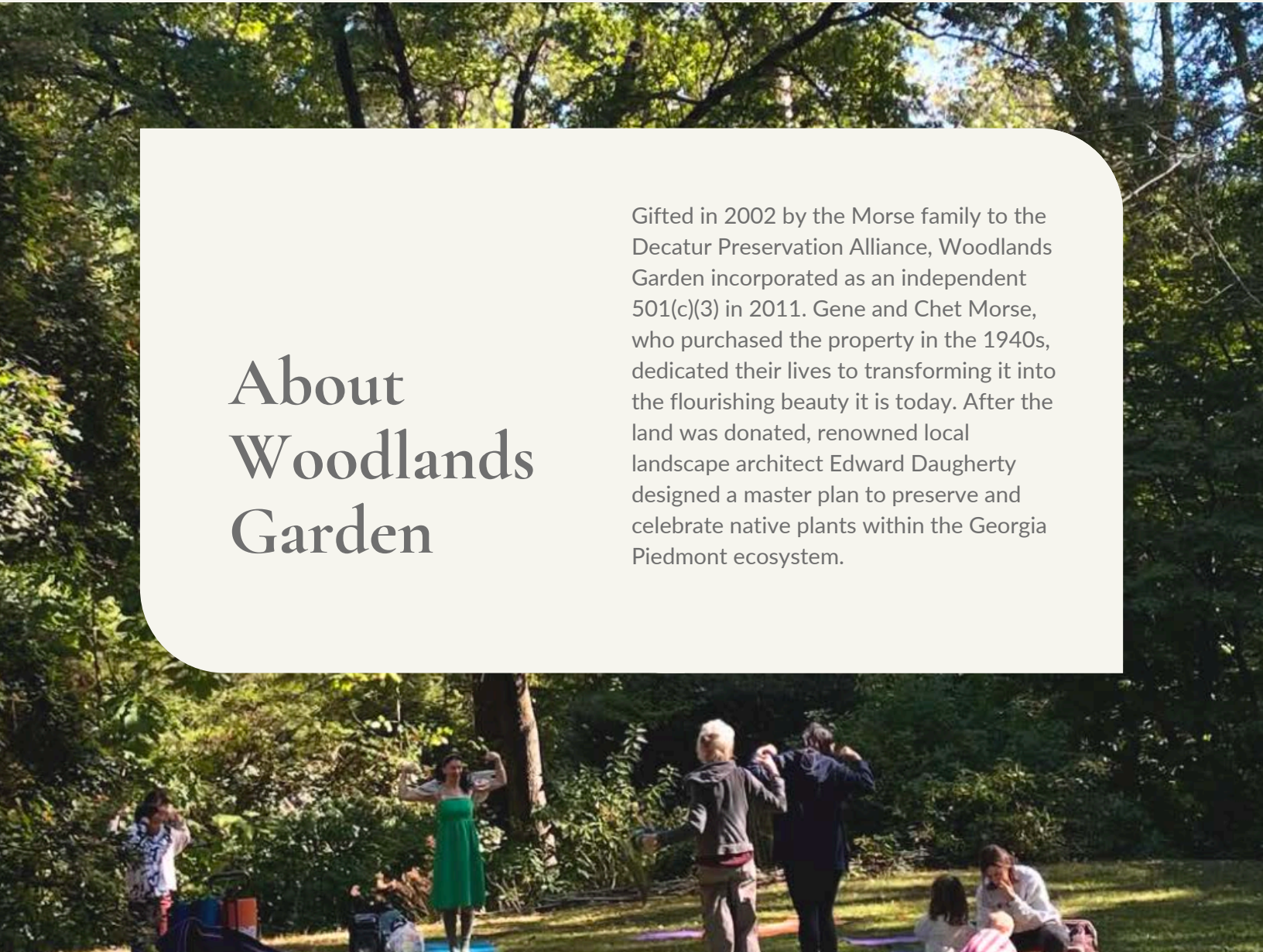
In 2015, Woodlands established a phased capital plan to support its transition from a private estate into a fully functioning public garden. Over the years, we have incrementally executed a series of infrastructure and accessibility improvements, completing each project while maintaining strong financial standing. Now, we approach the final installment of these initiatives: constructing a Volunteer Workspace that will enhance horticultural operations, safely store equipment, expand accessible volunteer opportunities, and support hands-on learning.

The Volunteer Engagement and Access Project represents the capstone investment in our long-term vision: ensuring Woodlands Garden's continued vitality as an urban sanctuary where the community can experience, learn from, and steward Georgia's native landscape.



About Woodlands Garden

Gifted in 2002 by the Morse family to the Decatur Preservation Alliance, Woodlands Garden incorporated as an independent 501(c)(3) in 2011. Gene and Chet Morse, who purchased the property in the 1940s, dedicated their lives to transforming it into the flourishing beauty it is today. After the land was donated, renowned local landscape architect Edward Daugherty designed a master plan to preserve and celebrate native plants within the Georgia Piedmont ecosystem.





Each year, Woodlands attracts 5,000+ visitors of all ages and backgrounds.



We serve 700+ students in outdoor classroom activities aligned with Georgia Learning Standards, hosting Atlanta Public Schools, Scout Troops, nature-based preschools, students with special needs, and homeschool groups.



More than 215 active volunteers contribute 3,000+ service hours each year, representing Master Gardeners, neighboring residents, corporate groups, seniors, adults with developmental disabilities, young professionals, college students, YMCA teens, and Scout Troops.



Woodlands offers specialized horticulture and urban planning internships, providing advanced, hands-on training in specialized areas of practice.



Active ecological stewardship removes invasive plants so delicate native wildflowers, like trillium, can thrive.



More than 30 tree species tower overhead, including 100-year-old white oaks and magnificent tulip poplars.



Woodlands features over 90 camellia varieties and is featured on the American Camellia Trail Gardens list and Georgia's Camellia Trail list.



Woodlands collaborates with ecological and community organizations, including Birds Georgia, Trees Atlanta, the Georgia Native Plant Society, UGA Master Gardeners, Atlanta Botanical Garden, Fernbank Museum, Skyland Trail, and L'Arche Atlanta.

"It doesn't matter how old you are. Come here and be embraced. There is a real sense of community that comes out of Woodlands. That's why we have 20–30 people show up to volunteer every week. It's really fun!"

–Beth Shorthouse, Woodlands volunteer and certified Master Gardener





From Private Estate to Public Garden

Over the past decade, thanks to the generosity of our donor community, Woodlands has invested \$1.75 million in its planned transition from a family property into a fully functioning public resource. Leadership made expenditures only as secure funding was in place, reflecting disciplined stewardship of donor resources and long-term fiscal stability. Each completed phase has improved accessibility, safety, environmental stewardship, and educational outreach.





Projects Completed to Date



Acquisition of the adjacent corner lot provided safe vehicular access from the Garden's entrances at Scott Boulevard and Clairemont Avenue, expanded parking with ADA-accessible spaces, and enabled school bus access to open the Garden for field trips. The garden entrance was expertly designed by landscape architect Steve Sanchez and features sun-loving Piedmont native plantings.



Construction of a school bus-friendly thoroughfare connecting Scott Boulevard to Clairemont Avenue improved safety and accessibility for students and other large groups.



Remodeling the Visitor Center equipped the original Morse family home with ADA access and upgraded restroom facilities.



Implementation of comprehensive stormwater management improvements addressed impermeable surfaces throughout the Garden



Construction of a hardscape, ADA-accessible path connected the Visitor Center and parking lot to the heart of the Garden, enabling visitors of all mobility levels to enjoy the wooded landscape.



Installation of a cohesive wayfinding and navigation system introduced directional and accessibility signage, self-guided tours, and interpretive and botanical identification markers. The welcome signage, now clearly visible to passing vehicles, signals that the Garden is open to the public, contributing to an uptick in visitors.

"Woodlands is very in tune to the needs of the community and volunteers...Each project they pursue feels like a logical next step to support our community of nature lovers."

–Pat Godbee, Woodlands volunteer and certified Master Gardener

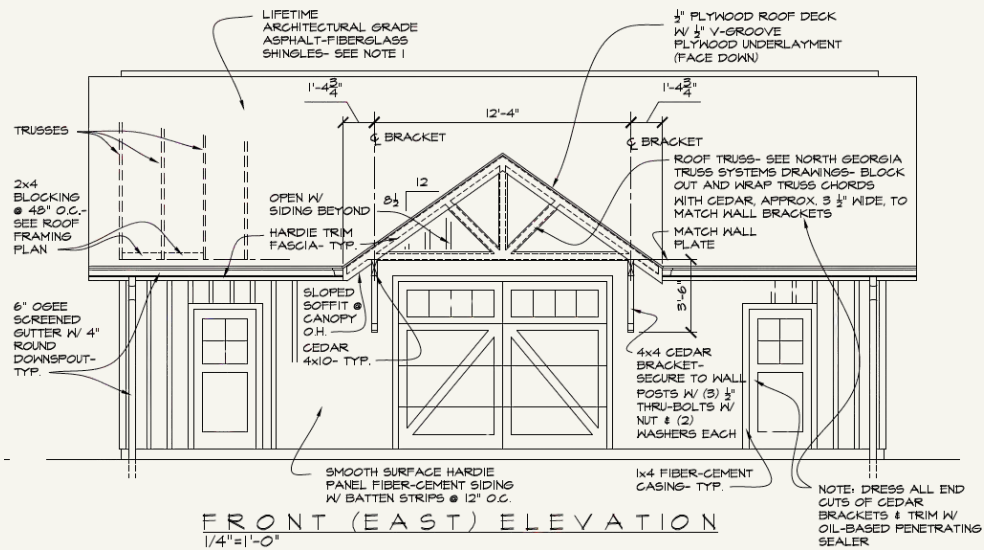
The Garden Volunteer Engagement & Access Project

Designed for the people who care for Woodlands Garden every day, the proposed Volunteer Engagement and Access Project brings our long-term vision of a fully functioning public garden to fruition through the construction of a dedicated horticultural workspace within the Garden.

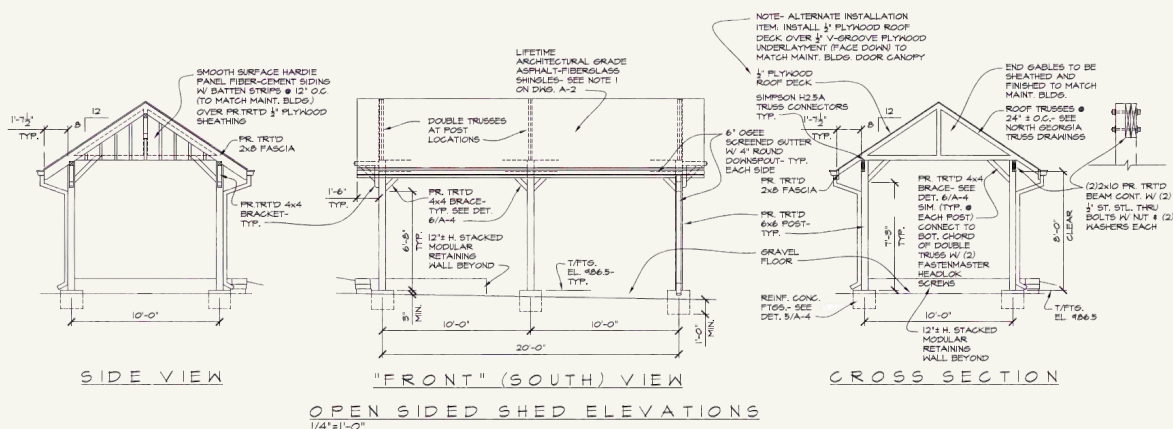
Today, the volunteers who are so critical to horticultural operations lack a dedicated home base. Essential equipment is housed in the Visitor Center garage—far from primary planting areas. The Visitor Center functions simultaneously as a welcome center, staff office, storage facility, and volunteer hub. While previous capital investments focused on expanding access and enhancing the visitor experience, this final installment strengthens Woodlands' core mission: stewarding the landscape itself.

Woodlands offers free public entry and volunteer activities at various experience levels, resulting in significant daily use and horticultural demand. As accessibility expands and visitation increases, garden infrastructure must also improve to continue maintaining the native ecosystem at the highest standard. The newly constructed Volunteer Workspace will establish the operational base required to support ongoing garden stewardship, volunteer participation, and hands-on environmental learning.

A secure, enclosed shed to safely store tools, gardening supplies, and maintenance vehicles.



An adjacent open-air, covered pavilion with easy access to materials and shade from summer's heat, where volunteers can gather, work, and learn together.



**Complete blueprints
available upon request.**

Projected Outcomes

Expand and diversify volunteer engagement:

The Volunteer Workspace will provide a dedicated home base for seasoned gardeners to gather, work, and learn together in a setting designed to support the full scope of Garden operations. In addition, the expanded space will accommodate seated and table-based tasks, making hands-on participation more accessible to seniors, individuals with disabilities, and community members seeking less physically demanding roles.

Improve safety and operational capacity:

The enclosed structure will provide secure storage for tools, fertilizers, and treatments, keeping sensitive materials out of public areas. Relocating equipment from its current location in the Visitor Center will improve access to planting zones and reduce wear on primary, ADA-accessible visitor paths. Dedicated garage space within the Garden will also enable Woodlands to acquire and house electric utility vehicles to support efficient work. Finally, the open-air structure will provide a shaded working area, a feature volunteers have requested for the hot summer months.

Strengthen horticultural training and professional development:

The workspace will serve as a training ground for interns and emerging professionals in horticulture and urban ecology. By providing a sophisticated space for horticulture operations and supply management, the initiative will elevate daily efficiency standards and reinforce Woodlands' role as a knowledge center and professional learning environment.

Repurpose the Visitor Center garage for programming:

Moving storage out of the Visitor Center will free the garage for conversion into a flexible classroom and program area equipped with botanical illustrations and AV capabilities. The Project Budget includes a light renovation to prepare the garage for active use, including painting, securing electrical infrastructure, installing an interior door and shelving, and adding tables and seating. The transformation expands Woodlands' capacity to serve school and community groups.

Enhance the visitor experience:

By creating a dedicated volunteer hub separate from administrative and visitor spaces, the project introduces clearer functional separation across the grounds. Volunteers gain a purpose-built workspace, and staff will experience fewer operational disruptions. Visitors will encounter a more hospitable, uncluttered environment where operational infrastructure is discreetly housed, allowing the natural beauty of the wooded landscape to remain the focal point.

Budget

Expense	Cost
Construction, Maintenance & Storage Building	\$189,000
Construction, Open-Air Covered Workspace	\$11,000
Native Evergreen Screening & Landscape Buffer Plantings	\$5,000
Volunteer Support Equipment & Accessible Utility Vehicles	\$13,000
Conversion of Visitor Center Garage to Education Center	\$20,000
Feasibility & Campaign Costs	\$22,000
Total	\$260,000

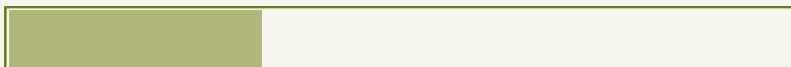
Project Funding

Thanks to disciplined governance and the generosity of annual donors, Woodlands Garden has built a healthy reserve fund. In keeping with our responsibility to steward donor investments for community benefit, our Board of Directors voted to allocate a portion of our reserves to the Volunteer Engagement and Access Project.

With early support from 100% of the Board of Directors, members of the Morse Family, and community donors, the project is approximately one-third funded. We now invite broader philanthropic partnership to help realize the next chapter in Woodlands' growth.

\$50,000	Woodlands Garden Reserve Fund
\$34,500	Individual Giving
\$84,500	Total

Progress toward goal



32.5%



Timeline

Fall 2025

Design development and contractor selection (complete)

Winter 2025

Permitting (complete)

Spring 2026

Site preparation and groundbreaking

Late Spring

Construction of the enclosed storage shed and open-air structure

Summer 2026

Interim progress review to assess timeline, budget, and compliance

Early Fall 2026

Construction wrap-up, inspections, and site clean-up

Fall 2026

Relocation of garden supplies to storage structure; Visitor Center garage renovation

Winter 2026

Project completion and transition to active use by volunteers, interns, and staff



The Volunteer Engagement & Access Project brings Woodlands Garden's long-term vision of preservation and access to completion. Investment in the initiative will finalize this carefully planned transformation, ensuring the Garden's continued vitality as a community-centric urban sanctuary.

To learn more about the initiative or support our fundraising efforts, we invite you to contact
Kate McAlpin, Executive Director,
at 404-373-2222 or kate@woodlandsgarden.org.

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