Conceptual Overview of the Piet Oudolf Garden on Belle Isle

“I am coming to Detroit to make a garden.” “This is the most natural location for one of my public gardens.” – Piet Oudolf, today’s foremost designer of public gardens

Piet Oudolf’s public gardens transform people and places and he has committed to creating one of his transformative, living pieces of art in Detroit on Belle Isle, a favorite and meaningful gathering place for Detroiter residents of Southeast Michigan and visitors to the region.

Piet Oudolf has changed the way we create and interact with public gardens. His gardens, designed for year-round enjoyment, use an inspired and environmentally conscious mix of native and other hearty perennial plants. Each garden is unique and created to be location and site specific yet each touches people on both a personal and collective level. His public gardens in the United States include Chicago’s Lurie Garden that attracts 10 million visitors a year and New York City’s High Line that has become one of the most acclaimed and visited garden/green projects in the world today. The landscape architect for the Delaware Botanic Gardens, where Oudolf created a meadow garden, said if they could attract Piet Oudolf to Delaware they would have “people coming to see it who don’t even know what Delaware is.”

We fell in love with Piet’s work and he has fallen in love with Detroit. In fact, the way we attracted him to come was by sending him a love letter from Detroit to his home in The Netherlands. We asked if he would consider a design commission for one of his highly regarded and sought-after public gardens on Detroit’s Belle Isle. Belle Isle is a beautiful and unique nearly 1,000-acre island park designed in part by Frederick Law Olmsted that sits in the International waters of the Detroit River between Canada and the United States. With your help, Detroit will have one of his very best public gardens in the world.

Project Overview:
Oudolf has created a master design for a 2.6-acre garden to be installed in front of the Nancy Brown Peace Carillon on Belle Isle. The total project will be approximately $4.2 million: $150,000 for design; $2 million for garden installation and $2 million for the endowment to perpetually maintain the garden. Plants for a late summer 2020 installation have been ordered and are being grown specifically for this garden site. We continue to raise funds for ongoing garden maintenance and future education programming.

We have a robust and growing following in Detroit and the region and a talented core team leading the project. To date the largest audience for a single showing of the documentary film about Piet Oudolf was the sold-out show on January 4, 2018 at the DIA in Detroit. More than 900 people have volunteered to help plant the garden and others are helping us put together educational programs that will support the garden, explore career pathways in the green industry and help to spread this style of garden to Detroit neighborhoods too.
Oudolf Garden Detroit is an all-volunteer group.

This is the most natural location for one of my public gardens – Piet Oudolf
Who is Piet Oudolf?
Piet Oudolf, who is based in the Netherlands, is the number one public garden designer in the world today. He is the genius behind the Lurie Garden in Chicago and the High Line in New York. He is also a best-selling author of nine books and is recognized for his plant knowledge and artistry and for creating compelling gardens that are open year-round.

How big will this garden be?
The overall garden will be approximately 2.6 acres including garden beds, pathways, grassy areas and wetlands. It will be accessible to those with limited mobility and can accommodate strollers and wheelchairs.

Where will it be located?
The garden will be in the cultural heart of the island. It will be installed on the green turf in front of the Nancy Brown Peace Carillon on Belle Isle, the park whose design was first envisioned by Frederick Law Olmsted, Sr. The site is anchored by the Anna Scripps Whitcomb Conservatory to the east; the Remick Band Shell to the west; and the US and Canadian peace monument to the north with the picnic area across the road.

How much will it cost?
The overall total for the garden including its design, plants, installation and perpetual maintenance will be approximately $4.2 million. Oudolf will only design and install public gardens if there is an endowment to cover yearly maintenance costs, estimated to be around $80,000 per year based on expert input from others who manage Oudolf gardens.

How will this garden impact Belle Isle, Detroit and the region?
Oudolf’s public gardens are artistic masterpieces that have a big cultural, environmental and economic impact. His gardens draw visitors from near and far and have a green halo effect in the areas fortunate enough to have one. For instance, his Lurie Garden in Chicago’s Millennium Park attracts 10 million visitors a year. In Millennium the average visitor is between 35-64 in age and spends $122.50 per person per day on food, beverage, and merchandise when in the Grant Park complex. The park contributes $257 million of annual indirect economic impact to Chicago and $6 million in annual sales tax revenue for the city. Though smaller in scale compared to some other projects, this garden will have an outsized effect in terms of engagement and economic return.

How did Detroit attract Piet Oudolf?
Impressed by his work and believing it to be a great fit for Belle Isle and the city, the Garden Club of Michigan (GCM) mailed Piet Oudolf a “love letter from Detroit” in late 2016. In early April 2017 he came to Detroit for the first time and identified the Belle Isle site for his first Detroit garden. GCM raised the money for the design commission and worked with the DNR and the Belle Isle Conservancy (BIC) to secure the garden site. As the project moved into the installation phase, the fiscal sponsorship of Oudolf Garden Detroit has transferred from GCM to the Belle Isle Conservancy during the installation phase. The Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan is serving as the fiscal sponsor for the garden’s endowment fund, which has already been established. Oudolf Garden Detroit is in the process of becoming its own 501(c)(3) since there is so much interest in adding Oudolf inspired community and educational outreach components that go beyond the garden site and Belle Isle.

How is the Michigan DNR involved with the garden?
Since the Michigan DNR currently runs Belle Isle as a state park, we went through a public approval process for the proposed garden. Understanding what a world-class attraction a Piet Oudolf garden would be, then Michigan DNR Director Keith Creagh told Piet in April 2017, “We want you on Belle Isle.” We have a signed
agreement with the DNR for this garden to be designed, installed and maintained on this site as long as funding is secured. Beginning in 2019, there will be no Belle Isle Grand Prix grandstand erected on the site. The site has been secured and is ready for garden installation.

What is the time frame for the garden’s installation?
In 2019, we focused on raising the money for the garden endowment, constructing the garden and preparing for the first planting. Detroit River flooding on Belle Isle in the summer of 2019 delayed construction into late winter, spring and early summer of 2020. We hope to plant the garden in late summer or early fall of 2020.

What kind of plants will be used?
Piet favors regional natives as well as other hardy, well-behaved perennials, grasses and bulbs. He is a renowned plantsman and former nursery owner and does not use invasive plants. Oudolf plantings are all about harmony, spontaneity, sustainability and durability year after year. Piet is renowned as a leader of the “Dutch wave” style of plant-centric, naturalistic perennial gardening. His gardens attract numerous birds, insects, butterflies and pollinators (and people too).

How will the garden be maintained?
Oudolf and his friend Roy Diblik believe in sustainable gardening practices emphasizing ‘right plant, right place’ and healthy soil. An annual garden cut-down is accomplished with a large mulching mower that in turn provides living mulch on the garden beds. This is done in late winter just before the first signs of spring growth, and allows for our garden to be open and exciting year-round. His public gardens have a paid head gardener or head horticulturist who oversees the maintenance along with part time help and volunteers. Oudolf visits all his public gardens regularly to check in and make any needed adjustments.

What community engagement and volunteer opportunities will be associated with the garden?
To succeed, this garden project needs volunteers as well as feedback and engagement with the community. There will be events, workshops and planting opportunities associated with Oudolf Garden Detroit. Please visit our website at oudolfgardendetroit.org and fill in the Volunteer form.

How can I donate to the garden and is my donation tax deductible?
You can donate online at oudolfgardendetroit.org. To donate via check to the garden endowment, please write a check to the Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan or CFSEM, with the memo line reading Oudolf Garden Detroit Endowment. The check can be mailed to Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan, 333 W. Fort St., Suite 2010, Detroit, MI 48226. The Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization.

How do I stay updated about the garden?
We are happy to add you to our information list—fill out the newsletter form on the website oudolfgardendetroit.org and follow us on Facebook and Instagram @OudolfGardenDetroit.

My business works in the green industry. How can I get involved?
Please share your interest or ideas with us via our website or email us at info@oudolfgardendetroit.org.
What is Oudolf Garden Detroit?

Oudolf Garden Detroit is an all-volunteer group dedicated to placing and maintaining a Piet Oudolf designed garden on Belle Isle in Detroit and bringing his approach to garden design and maintenance to the broader community. It is currently organized as a Michigan Nonprofit Corporation and is in the process of becoming a 501(c)(3). The Belle Isle Conservancy is serving as our fiscal sponsor for the installation phase, and we have established an endowment fund at the Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan to maintain the garden in perpetuity.

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| Jean Hudson | Heather Saunders |
| Mary Beth Kuderik |

**Ways to support Oudolf Garden Detroit**

**Online:** oudolfgardendetroit.org

**By Mail:**

| Plant the Garden: To Contribute to the Installation | Keep the Garden Growing: To Contribute to the Endowment |
| Make checks payable to “BIC/Oudolf Garden Detroit” | Make checks payable to “Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan” with memo line reading “Oudolf Garden Detroit Fund” |

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**Gifting Other Assets:**

Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan (CFSEM) can also accept one-time gifts or gifts over the course of several years. CFSEM can accept a wide variety of gifts, including:

| Cash, by check or online donation | Securities traded on major exchanges | Mutual fund shares | Closely held business interests |
| Fully paid life insurance policies and Retirement plan assets | Real estate | Patent interests and other qualified intellectual properties | Interests in limited liability companies |

If you have any questions about donations, please call Duncan Campbell at 313-432-0297 or email him at duncan@oudolfgardendetroit.org. Your donations are tax deductible.
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