



# Community Beautification Program Strategic Plan 2026-2035



**Cornell Cooperative Extension  
Tompkins County**

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# Executive Summary

The Cornell Cooperative Extension of Tompkins County (CCETC) Community Beautification program cares for 28 planting sites in Ithaca and disburses thousands of dollars each year to surrounding municipalities for their beautification projects. At nearly every work session, staff and volunteers in the Community Beautification program are thanked by community members for their efforts. It is one of the most recognized programs at CCETC, thanks to our vibrant gardens, colorful vehicles, and dedicated staff and volunteers.

The previous Strategic Plan for the CCETC Community Beautification program ended in 2020 and had a larger focus, encompassing wayfinding, signage, and public art as well as Community Beautification. The Strategic Plan this year focuses solely on the CCETC Community Beautification program, its mission, background, and goals. The Tompkins County Tourism Program has a Strategic Plan that acts as a companion to this document and covers the other aspects of the previous strategic plan. This Strategic Plan has a ten-year time frame, with a planned evaluation after five years.

The Community Beautification program started as a committee with members from CCETC, the City of Ithaca, and other interested community members. It is now housed within CCETC with the majority of its funding coming from the Strategic Tourism Planning Board (STPB). STPB accepts budget requests for projects and programs that enhance the experience of visitors and residents of Tompkins County. These proposals are funded with the Hotel Room Occupancy Tax. Community Beautification uses this funding, alongside donations, in-kind volunteer hours, and New York State fringe benefits for staff, to enhance the economic vitality of our county by creating a more beautiful and welcoming environment to all visitors and residents.

To create this new strategic plan, we have sought input from businesses, municipalities, CCETC staff and leadership, tourism program stakeholders, and community members. By engaging the larger the community, we aim to build a program that touches all aspects of Tompkins County and feels open to everyone. A focus of this strategic plan is to demonstrate how the Community Beautification Program aims to harmonize with the objectives of CCE Statewide and CCE Tompkins County.

This process uncovered six goals of short, medium, and long timeframes.

***Short-term goals:***

- ◊ Create a garden trail linking our plantings on a map with educational information.
- ◊ Enhance the climate resilience of all our plantings through climate smart gardening techniques, using applied research approaches to share lessons learned by this program with a broader audience.

***Medium-term goals:***

- ◊ Install interpretive signage in gardens with foot traffic to expand our educational outreach.
- ◊ Aid communities outside of our current worksites, through consultation and education, to establish and rehabilitate garden spaces.

***Long-term goals:***

- ◊ Assess all Beautification planting sites for needs, major problems, potential redesigns, and future feasibility.
- ◊ Leverage our staff's knowledge and skills to create a workforce development program to address the local need for gardening professionals.

Beautification creates communities that have higher economic vitality, better physical and mental health, and are more resilient to climate change. In this CCETC Community Beautification Strategic Plan we lay out how our program meets those objectives and what our future goals are so we can better serve our community.



Staff member planting canna in garden beds on the The Commons

# Introduction

***Mission- The mission of the Cornell Cooperative Extension Tompkins County Community Beautification Program is to increase the aesthetic visual quality of Tompkins County natural landscapes and use these gardens as conduits for research and education. We work with our partners to pursue economic vitality, ecological sustainability, and social well-being, enhancing the quality of life for residents and visitors.***

***Vision- The visual landscape of Tompkins County will be a reflection of its vibrant and caring communities: welcoming, colorful, diverse, artistic, inclusive and engaging.***

## History of the Program

### *Adopt-A-Planter*

The initial seeds for the Community Beautification Program were sown in 1995 by staff from Cornell Cooperative Extension Tompkins County (CCETC) in conjunction with community members interested in improving the plantings on the Ithaca Commons and surrounding streets. This group formed the initial Beautification Committee in the City of Ithaca.

The first beautification initiative in the City of Ithaca was an Adopt-A-Planter program for local business owners, with the goal of adding annual and perennial flowers to the existing shrub and tree plantings on the Ithaca Commons. That volunteer led effort grew into the Community Beautification program. The program started caring for garden sites around the city and helped businesses on the Commons through the Business Planter initiative. With the renovation of the commons and decrease in budget during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Business Planter program has ceased but the Community Beautification Program kept caring for the garden sites and expanded its reach outside of Ithaca through education and outreach.

### *Youth Horticulture Apprentice Program*

In 1999 the Youth Horticulture Apprentice Program (YHAP) was established with funding by the Youth Employment Service. This program was led by educator and plantsman Lee Ginenthal; one of the goals of the program was to provide horticultural job training for teens. The youth were paid a stipend to help plant and maintain the flower plantings on the Commons. YHAP provided maintenance and horticultural training for youth on the Ithaca Commons until 2002. At this time the YHAP program relocated to the new Ithaca Children's Garden in Cass Park.

### *Founding of the Community Beautification Program*

In 2001 the Beautification Committee collaborated with the Chamber of Commerce to develop a county-wide beautification program with the goal of improving the aesthetic quality of Tompkins County's rural and urban landscapes with plantings of flowers, shrubs and trees, outdoor sculpture, murals and banners. The room tax provided funding for a half-time program coordinator, whose responsibilities included training and coordinating volunteers to work in the City of Ithaca, ordering plants, tools and other supplies, and

managing a matching beautification grants program for the rural communities of Tompkins County.

In 2002 the Tompkins County Hotel Room Occupancy Tax rate was increased from 3% to 5% in order to generate a greater number of tourism-enhancing programs in Tompkins County. The Beautification Committee advocated for a beautification program with secure funding that could expand efforts beyond the Ithaca Commons. The program would also need staff members so it could expand its reach as well as providing educational and training opportunities for youth and adults. That Fall the first Tompkins County Community Beautification Coordinator was hired at CCETC. In the first year of the program the Beautification Coordinator trained the first group of volunteers

Based on the success of the program in the first two years, funding from the room tax was gradually increased to hire more staff and purchase a watering vehicle. A map of the current (2025) sites can be found in [Appendix A](#) on page 23.

### ***Rural Matching Grants Program***

Beautification funding is available each year for a wide variety of beautification projects in the rural communities. Matching grants are awarded to municipalities, schools and other groups that want to implement beautification projects in their communities. Typically grant funds are used to purchase plants and materials and the matching portion is fulfilled by the value of the volunteer labor. Rural beautification projects have included landscape plantings, tree and shrub plantings, flower planters, banners, park renovation and interpretive signage for historical sites.



Volunteer watering with grant-funded cart

### ***Continued Growth***

After more than 20 years of planting in the often harsh environment of public garden sites, staff have accumulated valuable information on the best plants for challenging public sites, in both sunny and shady locations. Each year new plant varieties are trialed in public planting sites in Ithaca while continuing to plant many of the staunch champions that have proven themselves.

One of the biggest challenges for public beautification is providing enough water for plants to flourish. Roadside planting areas tend to be hotter and drier than typical garden sites. Annuals are great for continuous bloom throughout the summer but with shallow roots they need very consistent watering to flourish. In order to increase the sustainability and reduce watering of planting sites, the program has been incorporating a greater number of perennial plants. These plants also expand the season of the gardens by bringing fall, winter, and spring interest to gardens.

## Current State and Challenges

The current work timeline for the Community Beautification season can be found in [Appendix B](#) on page 24. Since the last strategic plan ended in 2020, the Community Beautification Program has undergone numerous changes. The dramatic decrease in room tax during the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic led to a significantly smaller budget for the program in 2020 and 2021. The Business Planting Program was stopped and the Rural Grant Program was paused and not reinstated until 2023 at half its normal level. In 2022 additional funding was granted to replace one of the program's vehicles. It was decided to buy an electric pick-up truck to decrease the carbon footprint of the program, the Lightning has become a great ambassador causing people to stop and talk to staff while they work at garden sites.

Funding in 2024 was increased to make up for the shortfall during the pandemic which allowed the Rural Grants to return to their pre-pandemic level, staffing to increase, more perennial plants to be bought, and staff to be more effective in their work. Staff can stay ahead of tasks and have been able to work in each planting site longer and more often.

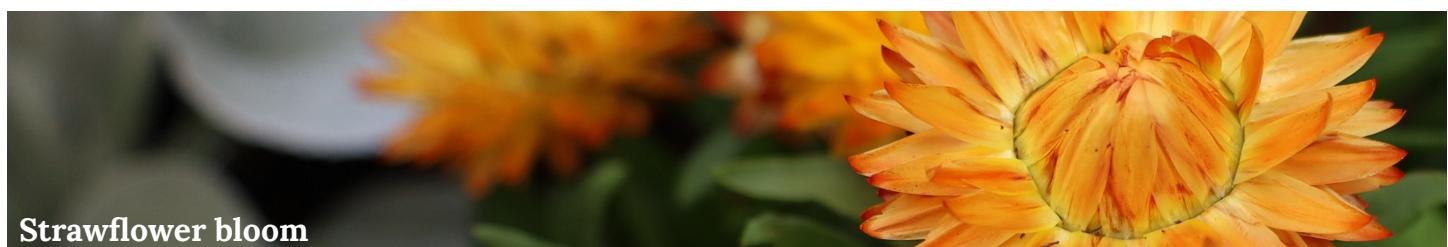
### ***Collaborations***

Community Beautification is not the only organization that works to beautify Ithaca. We work in conjunction with the City of Ithaca and the Downtown Ithaca Alliance (DIA), especially on sites in the downtown core. We work together to care for plantings in overlapping jurisdictions.

Community Beautification's main area of overlap with DIA occurs on the Commons. Community Beautification plants the containers and certain in-ground beds on the Commons and West State/Cayuga Street with annuals each year. DIA has been responsible for watering those plantings to ensure their success. Communication between Community Beautification and DIA is essential and both groups strive for open communication and support each other as needs arise.

Community Beautification also works with the Town of Ithaca to maintain the gardens at Ithaca Town Hall. This property was cared for by a volunteer but taken over by Community Beautification after the volunteer passed away. Beautification work at Town Hall requires communication with Town of Ithaca DPW staff. The main contact there is the Parks Superintendent who helps the program by providing compost and mulch for the Town Hall planting and additional spaces.

The City Parks and Forestry Department does an excellent job caring for the trees and grass in Ithaca. The City Forester helps Community Beautification in numerous ways each year. However, neither the City Forester nor the Forestry Technician have time to maintain garden spaces in the city. Community Beautification has helped on occasion to weed these gardens but cannot do so reliably as a long-term maintenance plan. One improvement to



Strawflower bloom

the situation would be if the City of Ithaca had a city gardener. The position could mobilize a new set of volunteers, similar to how the City Forester works with Citizen Pruners, and could be another partner Community Beautification can support and work with to ensure all plantings in Ithaca are well-cared for.

### ***Challenges***

Vandalism, theft, and car damage are continuing challenges for Community Beautification's public plantings. The number of events varies each year but it is assumed planters, signs, and plants will be damaged at some point. Car damage happens often in gardens at intersections when drivers go up on the curb and into the plantings.

To mitigate this issue, staff grow extra plants to be able to replace stolen or damaged ones. In years without much damage to plants the program can donate extra stock to community groups with gardens and spread their reach into new areas. When possible, signage is affixed to poles or planters directly so they cannot be easily ripped up or taken. The City Forester installs signs in more permanent ways when able. Signs not affixed in this way are removed during the winter to protect them from weather and theft. New interpretive signs will have plexiglass covers which can be replaced after weathering, graffiti, or scuffing without reprinting the sign. Planters are more difficult to protect, however as most are wood they can be fixed when broken without a large cost. The non-wood planters are removed or replaced by the city or DIA when they are damaged.

Another challenge staff can encounter are people camping in gardens and the refuse left behind by people hanging out in the plantings. Staff work with the social support systems in Ithaca to get people sleeping in the gardens access to resources and enable them to find safer places to live. Some gardens near where people congregate can collect garbage including dangerous items such as needles. Community Beautification staff are some of the most present CCETC staff in the community. CCETC provides additional trainings to staff such as using naloxone or handling needles to prepare them for these potential situations.



### ***Current Staff Roles***

- ◊ **Horticulture Team Lead:** The Team Lead supports the Coordinator in long term planning, strategy, partnerships, budgeting and other administrative support. They also are the main contact for the Tourism Board and present budget and program updates. The Team Lead also helps connect Community Beautification to other programs within CCE Tompkins and Tompkins County at large to empower community outreach.
- ◊ **Community Beautification Coordinator:** The Coordinator is responsible for planning daily, weekly, and long term tasks and goals for the program, manages communication with volunteers, community partners, suppliers, and makes arrangements for greenhouse growing. The Coordinator also assists with budgeting and tracking of program spending and administers the Rural Grant program.

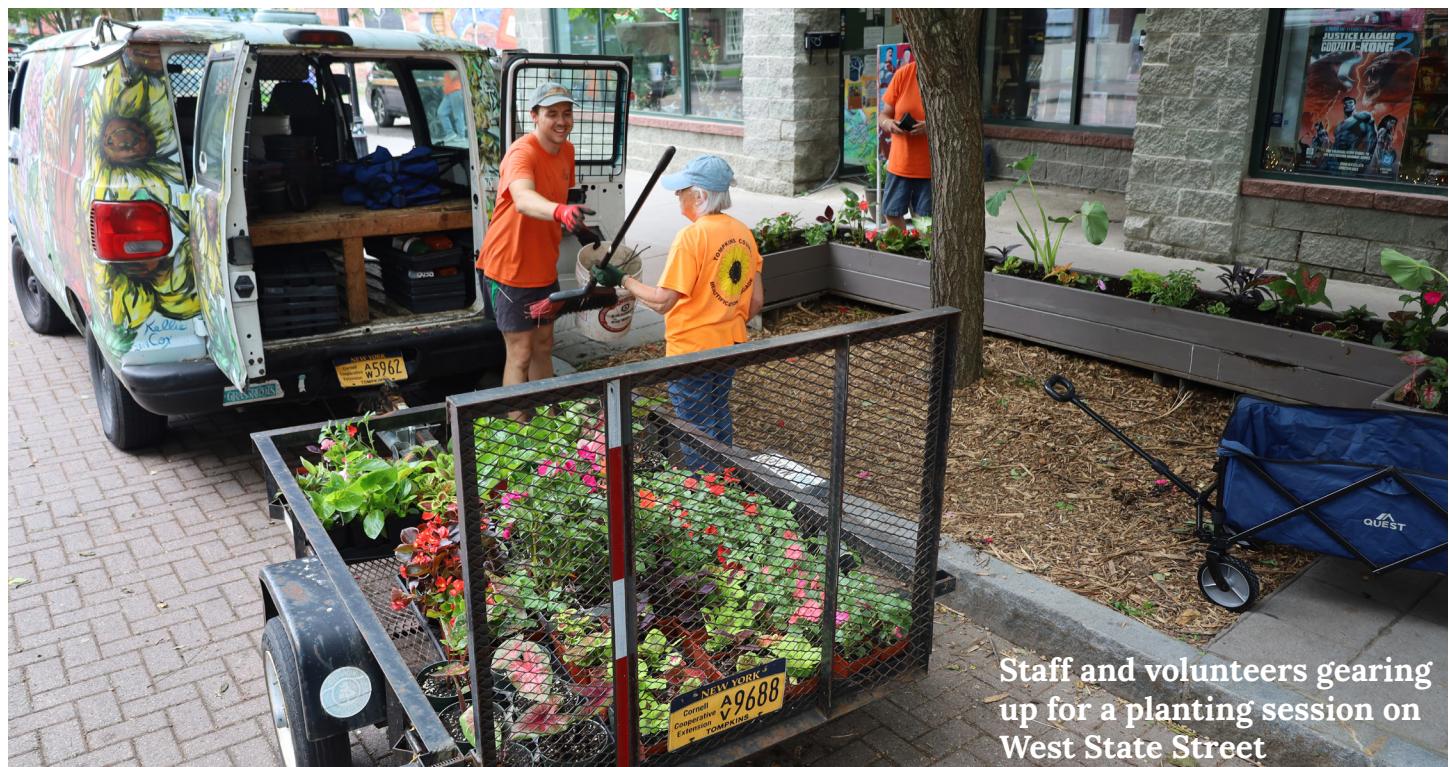
- ❖ **Senior Beautification Assistant:** The Senior Assistant helps the Coordinator with planning (both daily tasks and long term goals) and will supervise staff and volunteers in the Coordinator's stead.
- ❖ **Beautification Assistant:** Assistants carry out daily tasks under the direction of the Coordinator and Senior Assistant. They do support and supervise volunteers and work independently.

## Goals and Methodology of Strategic Plan

It was determined by the Tompkins County Strategic Tourism Planning Board (STPB) and CCETC to create a new strategic plan now that the previous document had expired. This new plan will focus only on the Community Beautification Program and act as a companion document to the [STPB strategic plan](#). It was also decided to make a ten year plan, 2026-2035, with a check-in at five years, 2030, to see if substantial changes need to be made.

Three members of the CCETC Agriculture and Horticulture Issue Area Program Work Team agreed to form a subcommittee to create this strategic plan. They were joined by additional CCETC staff including the Executive Director, Agriculture and Horticulture Issue Leader, and the Horticulture Team Leader. They received significant input from the STPB prior to the committee forming.

The subcommittee looked at the past strategic plan and the current CCETC strategic plan. They created a list of community partners to interview and gain insight into how people view the Community Beautification Program and what support they would like from the program. The interviews were conversational and questions were open-ended to enable people to speak freely. The questions asked can be found in [Appendix C](#) on page 26.



# Community Beautification Program

## Importance of Beautification

In Elaine Scarry's book On Beauty and Being Just (1999) she describes a friend's response to her writings on beauty and justice. He says they can not be equated " 'Except of course,...analogically, by what they share: balance and the weighing of both sides.' "( p. 94). Scarry goes on to explore this statement and states

One answer is this: in periods when a human community is too young to have yet had time to create justice, as well as in periods when justice has been taken away, beautiful things (which do not rely on us to create them but come on their own and have never been absent from a human community) hold steadily visible the manifest good of equality and balance.( p. 94)

Beauty can be seen as trivial, especially in times of strife but having a beautiful environment can create a better sense of home and belonging (Bourlessas 2025). Grace Azula with Village at Ithaca said "Beautification as a general term can seem frivolous but it's not, it supports community and invests in community by making it feel like a place taken care of."

Deb Molenhoff, Ithaca's City Manager, said "Beautification helped with the major effort to revitalize the West State Street corridor. Placemaking is an important concept and taking care of public spaces helps in these areas." In the 2025 Tompkins County Community Health Survey "A clean environment" was ranked third most important factors that create a healthy community, above important resources like public transportation, good schools, mental health supports, and more. The only two choices that scored higher were "Affordable healthcare" and "Affordable and safe housing." Health, home, and pride of place were what a majority of Tompkins County residents wanted in their community. Lisa Nicholas, Ithaca's Director of Planning and Development, said "Community Beautification has a huge impact on the way the city looks and how welcoming it is."

The Downtown Plan, created by the City of Ithaca Department of Planning and Development and adopted by the Common Council and Downtown Ithaca Alliance in 2024, states how important green areas are to Ithaca,

The Commons shows the City's commitment to providing green space in high-density areas. This heavily used pedestrian mall features a collection of large-scale trees and well-maintained planting beds and planters filled with colorful annuals and native plants. The Commons also includes amenities that engage residents and visitors of all ages. As Downtown continues to densify, we must preserve our existing green spaces and make efforts to create new ones when possible. Green spaces are a benefit to our health and help us achieve our environmental goals.

In the later section on aligning with CCETC goals we will expand on how Community Beautification's work increases climate resilience and positively impacts the physical and mental health of those around the garden sites. One just has to hear the excitement

when people see the Flower Van or the earnest thanks our staff and volunteers get from community members to understand how valued their work is. Community Beautification is arguably the most prominent CCETC program and its work spreading beauty reflects positively on CCETC as a whole. We are working to make it clearer that Community Beautification is a CCETC program, in the past the link has not always been obvious. We have already added CCETC branding onto vehicles and signs and will continue to incorporate CCETC logos on new materials. Community Beautification has also been included in CCETC outreach materials and presentations to work at showing the relationship from both sides.

## Volunteers

The Community Beautification Program would not be able to maintain even half our sites without our volunteers. Each year hundreds of hours are contributed by volunteers, either working alongside staff or autonomously. Jeanne Grace, the Ithaca City Forester, said “Community Beautification is an important program, the public gardening aspect and beautifying public spaces with volunteers (since most of the work is done through them) leads to community engagement in other areas.” Our biggest volunteer day is in early spring when we repot all the tropical plants. Each week during the season there are one to three volunteer sessions with varying attendance mostly due to weather.

This voluntary labor makes it possible to plant and maintain many areas in the City of Ithaca with a small number of paid staff. In return, volunteers experience hands-on learning, and gain experience in seed sowing and transplanting, bulb planting, container gardening, garden design, and plant maintenance. Studies support the mental and physical benefits of gardening, especially in public places or with others (Anders et al. 2023; Bustamante et al. 2022). Having ample opportunities in a relaxed atmosphere (volunteers do not have RSVP to most workdays nor do they have to come a minimum number of times) allows our volunteers to learn new skills and engage with people around a shared interest while being physically active.



Volunteer with flowers for planting

## Community Partners

Community Beautification extends outside the city of Ithaca through its Rural Grants program. Municipalities apply for a 1:1 matching grant for beautification projects and receive funds after the project has been completed. These are usually gardening projects, but anything beautification related is allowed, such as new signs or banners. Almost every municipality in Tompkins County has received a Rural Grant at least once.

The program will continue to offer this assistance but is looking to expand its impact outside of the city of Ithaca and into new neighborhoods in Ithaca. Putting in new garden

spaces that the Community Beautification Program maintains is not an achievable goal without a huge increase in staff, materials, and infrastructure. Instead, the plan is to become a resource for municipalities and other community groups who are putting in gardens or revitalizing existing green spaces. The staff has a wide pool of knowledge of garden design, planting, and long-term maintenance and can act as consultants when these projects are being completed. The volunteer corps can also be called on for one-off work days if needed to install a new planting. This allows community partners to connect with the Community Beautification program for help but maintaining ownership of the space as the long-term stewards. This also prevents staff from being stretched too thin to properly care for new gardens.

This new model of offering expertise for new garden spaces will allow the program to work with new community partners. The current Rural Grants program is limited to municipalities outside of Ithaca. Helping with new community plantings allows the program to work with non-profits and groups in Ithaca. These collaborations could be school gardens, a planting at a community center, joining with IthacaMurals on events, and more. The community engagement opportunities greatly increase with this new model.

## Community Beautification Program Alignment with the CCETC Mission

***The CCETC Mission Statement- Cornell Cooperative Extension puts knowledge to work in pursuit of economic vitality, ecological sustainability and social well-being. We bring local experience and research based solutions together, helping New York State families and communities thrive in our rapidly changing world.***

### *Education and Research*

Education is the impetus for the Extension system and thus a main tenet for any CCETC program. Some of Community Beautification's public plantings have QR codes that direct interested people to a website with a map of the garden, plant list, and fact sheets on many of the plants in the garden. Staff present to community groups and through CCETC's Horticulture Education Series on gardening topics a few times a year.



Volunteer weeding near garden map sign

Since plantings attract a lot of attention from passersby they create excellent opportunities for education. Cynthia Cave-Gaetani, CCETC Executive Director, said as a CCE program "Beautification should have educational components. From incorporating gardens as communication mechanisms to workforce development meeting the needs of our community." We plan to increase the educational outreach of the program by increasing gardens with online information about them, creating interpretive signs in garden spaces as well, and having staff develop and deliver more programs to the public and other Extension staff.

Community Beautification sites have been used as research sites by graduate students in the past. The gardens are in unique areas that experience higher heat and water stress which makes them interesting models for research into gardening in a warming world and how the built environment affects plantings. Our team will work to expand our relationships with researchers at all institutions who are studying these issues.

Another example of outreach staff currently do, but can expand, are educational presentations. Advertising the ability for staff to present to different garden-minded community groups would enable us to increase our educational reach.

### ***Workforce Development***

A longer term goal for increasing racial equity in the program is creating a workforce development program. There is anecdotal data that Tompkins County needs more garden professionals. This is a field that does not require a specific degree and workers in the gardening field do not reflect the diversity of the county. Landscaping, gardening, and nursery work can be a viable career path with good earning potential. Meek Adams from Southside Community Center liked the idea of the program and thought if done well could lead to financial independence.

[Gardening can] get people that are disenfranchised... get more black and brown people back to the land. There is a very very poor relationship between black people and farming, how do we reclaim that relationship? Black people cultivate the land, that history is not our entire story, how do you reframe the story so it is not negative and not just black people putting in flowers.



Staff tending to fountain planting

## **Current Alignment with the CCETC Strategic Plan**

The 2021-2026 CCETC Strategic Plan has four goals: economic vitality, climate change, social determinants of health, and racial equity. The Community Beautification program does work well within three of the four goals already but there is room to expand in work in all categories.

### ***Economic Vitality***

Community Beautification was started as a way to make the Ithaca downtown corridor more inviting to residents and tourists. The plantings are concentrated in business areas where most residents and tourists visit frequently. Creating a more appealing space has shown to increase patronization of businesses (Ma et al. 2023). Rural Grants allow other municipalities to revitalize their downtowns as well, expanding the economic impact of the program throughout the county.

### ***Climate Change***

Most of the Community Beautification plantings are in spaces that would otherwise be

pavement without the program caring for them. Switching hardscape to green space reduces run-off and local temperature (Wu et al. 2025). Any decrease in pavement therefore helps mitigate the heat island effect and flooding, both major issues in Ithaca that are worsening due to climate change (Silvis and Nicholas 2025).

These gardens also act as examples of how to garden in hotter, drier, less hospitable conditions. Community Beautification is transitioning many garden spaces to perennial plants, which require less water, and native plants, which are better adapted to our area. As the climate crisis worsens, knowing how to plant resilient gardens will become more important (Bradley 2024). The plantings also demonstrate how to add native plants even in difficult, urban spaces. Both Caleb Thomas and Dorothy Lovelace from Ithaca Murals were excited to see the incorporation of native plants and called the practice unique in urban gardens. Planting natives creates pockets of habitat for wildlife who could otherwise be extirpated from urban areas (DeCandido 2004).

### ***Social Determinants of Health***

Humans evolved in natural environments but now the majority of us live in urban spaces (Mierzejewska et al. 2023). Green spaces have physical benefits for people who live near them such as improved air quality and noise reduction (Kaplan Minz et al. 2021). Even small forms of nature such as street trees or intersection parks (like our “Triangle” parks) provide such benefits.

Beyond the physical aspects, access to nature provides mental and psychological benefits as well. Access to green spaces and nature views lower stress and increase mental well-being (Bustamante et al, 2022; Kaplan Minz et al. 2021; Mierzejewska et al. 2023). Being able to see nature from a window can increase wellbeing (Kaplan Minz et al. 2021). Ulrich (1984) studied how fast people recovered from surgeries and found those with a nature view had speedier recoveries. The evidence of positive health impacts from simply being around nature are so high in Japan the concept of “forest bathing” is accepted as medicine within the medical community (Kamioka 2015). Studies show increasing access to green spaces, no matter how small, improve wellbeing for residents and therefore it is recommended by researchers to require green infrastructure especially in high density and lower-resourced areas (Anders et al. 2023).

All the plantings Community Beautification cares for are small spaces, but research shows these small spaces can have large impacts on the mental and physical health of people who live and work around them.

## **Future Better Alignment with the CCETC Strategic Plan**

### ***Racial Equity***

Community Beautification needs to expand its work with the fourth goal of CCETC, racial equity. Many of the garden spaces are in heavily trafficked and resourced areas, not in the BIPOC neighborhoods of Ithaca. Research shows this is a common phenomenon, less resourced areas have less green space or shade (Anders et al. 2023) The model of working with community groups to help put in and make maintenance plans for new gardens would allow Community Beautification to expand into these neighborhoods and bring new green spaces to residents.

# Strategic Plan Goals

***Short Term Goals: already in progress or will be started soon and can be accomplished within 5 years***

Goal	Action	Orgs Involved	Intermediate Steps	Additional Resources
Garden Trail	Create a trail connecting different plantings in downtown that can be self-guided or incorporated into the Ithaca Mural guided tours.	◊ CCETC ◊ Ithaca Murals ◊ Coalition for the Arts	Work with Ithaca Murals to identify which gardens would be best incorporated into their tours.	
Climate Change Resilience	Ensure plantings are able to withstand the more erratic weather climate change will bring including higher temperatures, heavier rain events, and longer droughts.	◊ CCETC ◊ Cornell professors	◊ Plant more perennials ◊ Assess annual plants lists and existing perennials to make sure all are hardy enough for new weather patterns ◊ Find research opportunities to share lessons learned with broader audience	Additional funding to be able to buy perennial plants (in place of annuals)



**Medium Term Goals: have not been started but can be accomplished within 5 years**

Goal	Action	Orgs Involved	Intermediate Steps	Additional Resources
Interpretive Signage	Install interpretive signage in gardens that are commonly walked through.	◊ CCETC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◊ Assess which gardens would most benefit from interpretive signage</li> <li>◊ Come up with different topics to connect to the gardens (such as pollinators or flood mitigation),</li> <li>◊ Create signs using interpretive design</li> <li>◊ Connect gardens with signage on a map for people to do a self-guided tour</li> </ul>	Additional funding for staff to create signage and funding to print and install signs
Expanding Reach	Move beyond the Rural Grants program in our support of municipalities outside the city of Ithaca and into new Ithaca neighborhoods by providing consultation and education on new and existing public garden spaces and mobilizing our volunteers to help with larger projects.	◊ CCETC ◊ Municipal governments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◊ Build relationships with municipal governments and other public organizations such as libraries, community centers, and schools around the county. Encouraging volunteers to work with groups outside of the traditional Community Beautification sites.</li> </ul>	

**Long Term Goals: has not been started and will take more than 5 years to fully establish**

Goal	Action	Orgs Involved	Intermediate Steps	Additional Resources
Assessment of Sites	Researching all sites Community Beautification has cared for and assessing their needs, major problems, potential redesigns, and future feasibility.	◊ CCETC ◊ STPB ◊ City of Ithaca	◊ Gather historical data on sites ◊ Speak with city representatives about current sites and potential spots for new gardens	New sites would be contingent on the city hiring a City Gardener
Workforce Development	Workforce Development Create a curriculum and recruit community members to learn how to properly care for public plantings. After the months-long program graduates will be equipped to work in a variety of horticulture positions.	◊ CCETC ◊ Other potential partners	◊ Hire a Workforce Development Coordinator ◊ Design a curriculum for the program ◊ Recruit people into the program ◊ Run the first year, make necessary changes for it to run smoother for future years ◊ Track how graduates fare in the workforce and change program as necessary to better prepare them.	◊ Additional funding for a new staff position that would persist for at least two years to plan and implement program ◊ Classroom space from a partner organization for teaching weeks, as space at CCETC can be limited



## Demonstrating Climate Smart Gardening Options

The Community Beautification Programs aims to make gardens that are educational spaces. Our staff has decades of experience in a variety of gardening methods and educational outreach. Bringing those two veins of expertise together will make places of learning out of the gardens. A major sphere to focus educational efforts on is gardening in a warming world. The Community Beautification Programs gardens reside in artificially warmer and dryer spots since they are surrounded by hardscape. The team has learned how to effectively mix annuals and perennials in these harsh spaces while minimizing the need for water. Essentially, their garden beds are harbingers for what gardening can become in our area as climate change worsens. Sharing this information can help other gardeners prepare for new growing conditions.

This knowledge can be shared in a variety of ways including leveraging CCETC and CCE statewide's outreach and communication arms to spread awareness of what Community Beautification is doing and what lessons they have learned. Our team can help to communicate through interpretive signs in our gardens and giving public presentations, both of these will be discussed further in the next section.

## Education Through Gardens

We can expand that signage from informational to interpretive. For example, in the past few years, staff have increased the usage of native plants in garden designs. This is a delicate process since many of our area's native species cannot thrive in such a built up environment. However, through research, experience, and experimentation the team has found which native plants can grow amidst the salt, pollution, and adverse climate conditions. Creating signage and places for our staff to share this knowledge will provide a valuable resource to the community and align with CCE goals of education. Once there is signage in our plantings, we can create a map and route for people to do a self-guided tour of the garden spaces. Connecting the gardens to larger concepts such as climate change, pollinators, water management, and others give passersby an immersive educational experience.



Volunteers during greenhouse session



Bumblebee visiting a coneflower

We can further expand our educational impact by working with art trails by Coalition for the Arts and Ithaca Murals to incorporate the gardens as part of their walks and maps. Ithaca Murals is excited to work on this project and include gardens on their guided tours. Having self-guided and guided options for people to visit and learn more about the public plantings allows the gardens to transform into classrooms.

We can expand working with researchers to study the garden sites. Researchers can use the sites as research plots and learn from our team's accumulated knowledge from decades of growing gardens in non-ideal conditions.

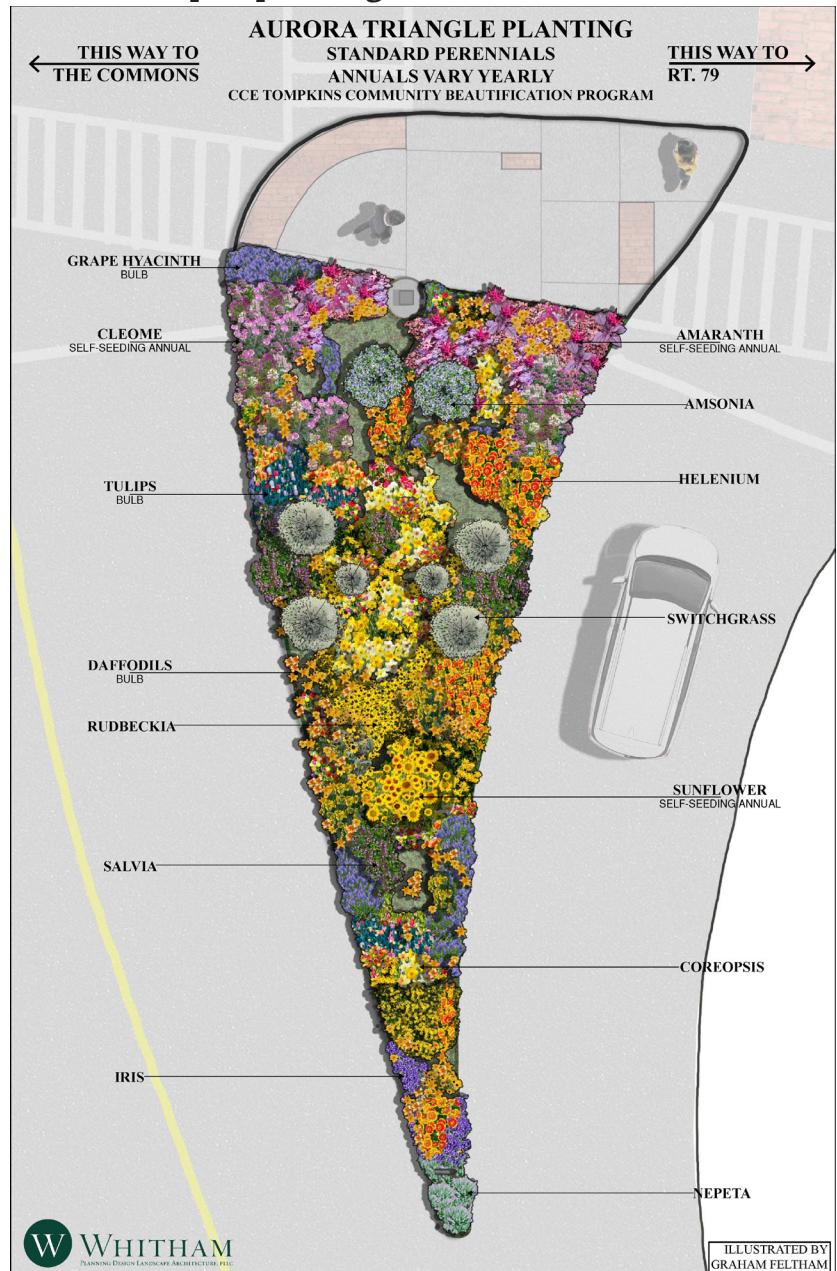
### *Planting Site Assessment*

All of the Community Beautification sites are within the city of Ithaca, mostly in the downtown corridor. When the sites were established this area was seen as serving the majority of residents and tourists, however, now the program is seen as Ithaca or Downtown focused. Creating new gardens would necessitate a major ramp up of staff, hours, vehicles, and equipment which is not a long-term goal for CCETC and Community Beautification. However, we do plan to look at all the current and historic planting sites the program has managed. For each site we will assess their history, issues, future direction, and if they are still an appropriate site for the program. Depending on the outcome of the site assessment, and contingent on the city creating a Gardener position, Community Beautification could be able to take on new garden spaces in the city.

### *Serving All of Tompkins County*

Expanding gardens sites would require an exponential increase in staff, volunteers, equipment, and coordination. As that increase is not feasible even within the timeline of this plan, instead, the program strives to be a part of more communities by becoming a resource. We will work to help municipalities and organizations with public plantings to create new garden spaces and rehabilitate existing ones. Our staff has a wealth of knowledge to share on planning a garden, especially in difficult to manage areas such as roadsides or sites without water. Through the Rural Grants program this type of consultation does happen, but we aim to expand it to other projects not just ones funded by Rural Grants. Building relationships with people in the communities outside of the city of Ithaca and in new parts of the city will allow people to know about this service. This mentoring will expand our educational outreach as well.

### **Garden map of planting sites**



On occasion the staff and volunteers have helped on larger projects in non-Community Beautification sites. These opportunities have come about due to relationships with staff and people in other groups, such as the City Forester or the Lansing Center Trail. These projects expand our program's reach into new communities and allow staff and volunteers to help rehabilitate or install gardens without the burden of the long-term upkeep falling on our program. Expanding these "one off" work sessions are a path to build relationships in new communities which would be helpful if the program is ever able to expand the number of planting sites it maintains.

Implementing and expanding these initiatives will give the Community Beautification program a wider reach into communities in and outside of Ithaca. We hope to shed the perspective that we are only focused on the Ithaca downtown corridor and are viewed instead as a resource for anyone in Tompkins County.

### *Workforce Development*

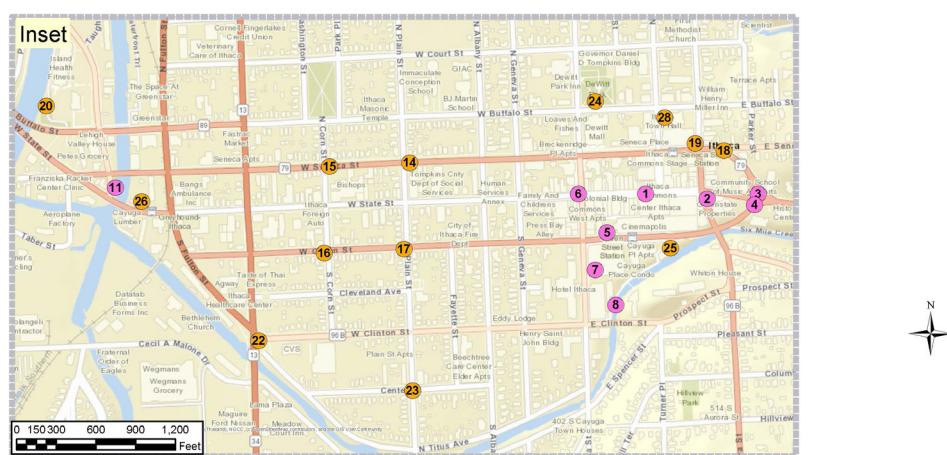
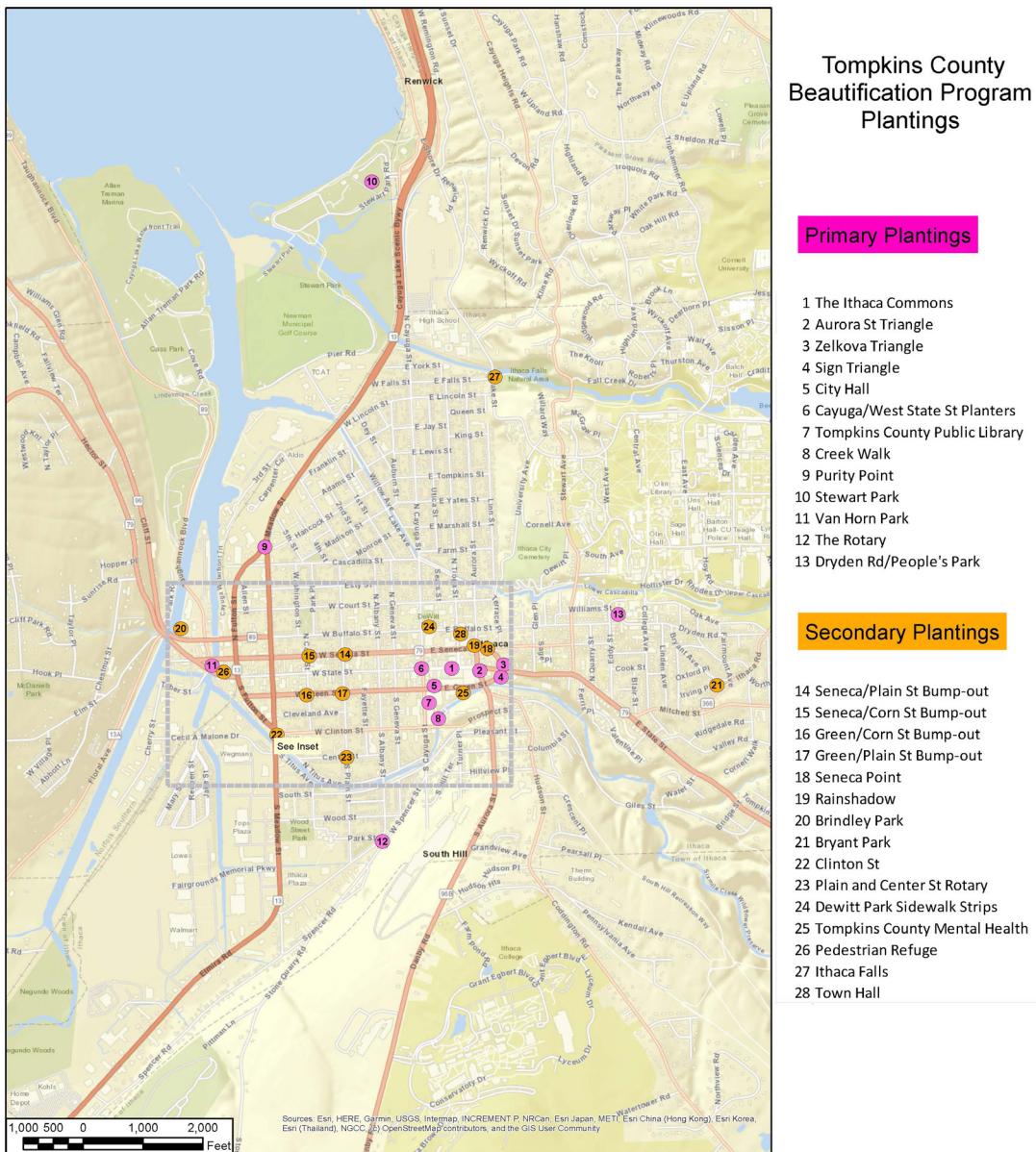
To better serve all members of our county, we plan to create a workforce development program for gardening. This season-long program would leverage our staff's wealth of knowledge to design an apprenticeship that begins with classroom instruction and then moves to hands-on learning. Paying all those in the workforce development program makes it equitable and achievable to people from lower-resourced backgrounds and would enable them to break into a flexible and profitable field with a lot of job growth potential. Increasing the labor force of gardeners in turn would lead to better cared for green spaces.



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# Appendix A: Map of Beautification Sites



# Appendix B: Timeline

## January

- ◊ Contracts received from the Tourism Board and sent to Executive Director for signature
- ◊ Budget work- allocate amounts for materials, supplies, etc.
- ◊ Establish start dates for seasonal staff
- ◊ Planning for seed starting, plantings, and pansy orders. Have a general idea of what plants go where
- ◊ Order seeds for winter sowing and next season's needs
- ◊ Order Caladium/Elephant Ears
- ◊ Update website and manual as applicable
- ◊ Organize files as needed
- ◊ Send out Rural Beautification Grant application to municipalities

## February

- ◊ Inventory supplies- seeds, pots, fertilizer, order any additional things as needed.
- ◊ Hiring need new staff if needed
- ◊ Update website with photos and new information, and new forms
- ◊ Miscellaneous tasks as needed
- ◊ Order shirts and hats for staff and volunteers

## March

- ◊ Update forms for upcoming year, post on website
- ◊ Prepare volunteer recruiting flyers, posts on social media, etc.
- ◊ Beautification Training- typically occurs mid-late march, two evening sessions. May be virtual or in-person. If virtual, set up zoom meetings. If in person, reserve room, laptop, projector, etc.
- ◊ Prepare a presentation for Beautification Training
- ◊ Follow-up with CU Greenhouse about access, keys, etc
- ◊ Program Assistants move back to higher hours as available
- ◊ Get van, truck, and trailer inspected/serviced
- ◊ Obtain permits to drive on the commons for both van and truck

## April

- ◊ Choose Rural Grant recipients
- ◊ Seasonal staff begins
- ◊ First Saturday in April- big greenhouse session. Pot up canna, caladium, elephant ears.
- ◊ Seed additional annuals in the greenhouse
- ◊ Check with Commons about when water will be turned on
- ◊ Second week of April (weather dependent): plant pansies on commons/west state street with volunteers.
- ◊ Spring cleanup of selected sites
- ◊ Transplant seedlings in the greenhouse as needed

## **May**

- ◊ Transplant seedlings in greenhouse as needed
- ◊ Begin planting sites/containers as plants come out of the greenhouse
- ◊ Greenhouse must be emptied by May 31
- ◊ Spring cleanup continues
- ◊ Purchase plants as needed

## **June**

- ◊ Huge planting push all month.
- ◊ Commons/West State containers
- ◊ In ground site planting
- ◊ Try to complete all major plantings with volunteers by the end of June
- ◊ Purchase additional plants as needed.

## **July/August**

- ◊ Continued site maintenance and watering

## **September**

- ◊ Plan volunteer appreciation event
- ◊ Have all staff complete mandatory trainings
- ◊ Consider which bulbs to order for following spring
- ◊ Start planning volunteer appreciation event

## **October**

- ◊ Purchase volunteer gifts and gather photos for appreciation event
- ◊ Late October pull canna from containers and prepare for drying
- ◊ Buy wood shavings for canna packing
- ◊ Order winter greens, winterberry stems, and other “fluff” as needed
- ◊ Clean up all gardens, begin cutting back annuals, mulching sites
- ◊ Bulb planting starts
- ◊ Volunteer appreciation event
- ◊ Rural Beautification recipients’ final report due for reimbursement

## **November**

- ◊ Pack up tropical bulbs for storage
- ◊ Arrange for winter greens pick up or delivery
- ◊ Continue/complete end of season site cut-back and mulching, bulb planting, etc.
- ◊ Arrange for delivery of winterberry stems
- ◊ Put greens in containers on commons, west state, library, etc.
- ◊ Be sure pansies for spring are ordered
- ◊ Annual reporting for statewide CCE
- ◊ Seasonal staff leaves end of November
- ◊ Send “end of season” email to volunteers

## **December**

- ◊ Pay out Rural Grant Reimbursements
- ◊ Program Assistants go on reduced hours
- ◊ Update website, organize photos, finish up any outdoor tasks as weather permits

# Appendix C: Interview Agenda

- ◊ Introduction of the program
  - Mission statement and vision of program
  - History of program
  - Goals and methodology of strategic planning process
- ◊ Community Beautification Program community impact
  - Why beautification matters – research data
  - Fitting Community Beautification within CCE Tompkins
    - Climate Change
    - Economic Justice
    - Racial Equity
    - Social Determinants of Health
  - Role of volunteers and community partners
- ◊ Overarching Strategic Plan Goals, Strategies and Actions
  1. Attractive, welcoming entrances and primary travel corridors.
  2. Gardens as educational spaces.
    - a. Showing climate smart options
    - b. Interpretive signage
    - c. Part of larger “trail” or gardens and art
  3. Serving all parts of Tompkins County in some capacity.
  4. Utilize Community Beautification staff’s knowledge to teach others
    - a. Workforce Development Program
    - b. Presentations to other groups
    - c. Aid groups putting in new gardens/revitalizing gardens