



Laurel Hill

2025 Year End Sustainability Report



Valley View Green, Summer 2025

Sustainability Squad Members

Alicia Applegate, Horticulturist
Ryan Bird, Assistant Superintendent
Jennifer Butler, Operations Coordinator
Jo Cosgrove, Horticulturist
Tasha Dugan, Funeral Home Manager, Funeral Director
Tish Frost, Family Service Representative
Aaron Greenberg, Arboretum Manager
Debra Myers, Manager of Membership & Annual Fund
Scott Pashman, Director of Strategic Marketing
Eric Stern, Information Technology Director
Alison Whitam, Horticulturist

Overview

The year was marked with both challenges and opportunities for expanding our culture of sustainability at Laurel Hill. Challenges included staff turnover in the Administration and Development departments, making tracking utility use and promoting green programs more difficult. However, Laurel Hill staff, with guidance from the Sustainability Squad, accomplished much to advance sustainability throughout the organization.

In the landscape, hundreds of new trees and shrubs were planted along with thousands of perennials and bulbs, adding diversity to the ecosystem and beauty to the grounds. Of particular note is the Chapel Garden Renovation Phase III, which in addition to adding new crypt and niche inventory, applied several sustainable techniques in its construction including stormwater management, reuse of materials recycled onsite, and dense understory plantings. While we continue to work on ways to track water usage and optimize fuel economy in our fleet, we have increased the amount of recycled materials captured while reducing trash and are staying current on trends for products that can help us waste less. Finally, engagement in and education about sustainability continued to grow with increased interest in green burial, and successful programming, both new and repeated, related to nature and the environment as part of Laurel Hill's public program calendar.

The following report documents the progress Laurel Hill made in accomplishing its 2025 sustainability goals in the areas of land conservation, energy/waste/water management, and engagement/communications/programming, and concludes with focus areas and goals for 2026.



Arboretum team sorting Easter bulbs to recycle soil and bulbs for fall planting

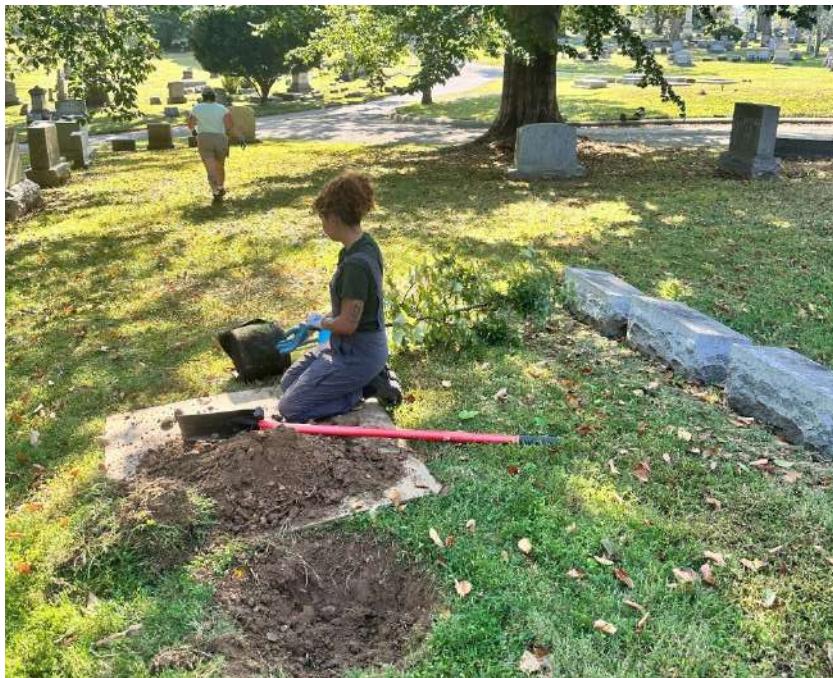
2025 Sustainability Goals

Land Conservation

- **Plant 200 trees and 400 shrubs.**

In 2025, 181 trees and 562 shrubs were planted.

- 54% of trees and 50% of shrubs planted were native.
- Thanks to a grant from the Hardy Plant Society Mid-Atlantic Chapter, 11 beech trees in danger of decline from beech leaf disease were underplanted with 11 native trees as eventual replacements.



*Underplanting an ailing European beech (*Fagus sylvatica*) with a native Red Maple (*Acer rubrum*)*

- **Propose an educational native bee habitat installation to replace the apiary next to Nature's Sanctuary.**

Some progress was made in exploring the concept of creating a “dead hedge” as an artistic installation that would also support habitat for native wildlife including native pollinators. Research into this project has stalled but may be reconsidered in 2026, along with other potential proposals for sustainable reuse of the former apiary area next to Nature’s Sanctuary.

- **Continue to promote and expand the Legacy Tree Program in partnership with the Development and Strategic Marketing teams.**

The development team worked on identifying and testing opportunities in digital and print communications to promote the Legacy Tree Program, including Calls To Action in Laurel Hill e-newsletters alongside the Species of the Month highlight, arboretum content in social media, and a planned flyer highlighting the Treekeeper program. A new brochure is also being developed to promote the program. One existing tree in Nature's Sanctuary was adopted for \$10,000 this year.

- **Collaborate with the Strategic Marketing team on the feasibility of establishing tree burial and grave gardens as a source of revenue.**

We are actively exploring the development of “tree burial” lots as interest continues to grow. In the two years that Bala Green has been available, six of 10 feature lots with trees have been sold. We also began design for a new green cremation burial area near the Chapel that will feature hundreds of lots associated with trees – some under existing mature trees, and some available as “features” having trees or shrubs planted over them.

The horticulture team is also in the process of developing more abundant and complex grave gardens as a source of revenue. Five new lot gardens were installed on endowed plots in 2025. These serve as examples of what is possible for future families looking to add plantings to their lots while also converting turf into pollinator friendly perennial gardens. In her position as horticulturist overseeing gardens and plantings on lots, Alison Whitam is developing a proposal for a sales program to offer families planting packages when they purchase their lots. Additionally, she has sent 4 lot proposals to interested families which so far have resulted in 1 new planting of native shrubs and groundcover.



Bisler Lot planted in Fall 2025 with new trees, shrubs and perennial bed.

- **Continue to collect moisture retention data on urns and newly planted trees that have received specialized amendments and dressings. Report findings EOY 2025.**

While no new data was collected in 2025, based on the data collected in the 2024 urn experiment, all active cemetery urns have been switched to a specialty blend of soil and top dressed with pea gravel. This combination has proved to be excellent at moisture retention as it reduced the watering schedule to once per week even in periods of extended drought. In 2024 urns were watered at least twice per week. This has meant both a reduction in water and fuel usage. Additionally, results of 2024 moisture retention experiments have led to increased use of leaf mulch in garden beds and around trees, reducing the need for watering.

- **Continue to work toward achieving Level III arboretum status.**

With all other qualifications for Level III Arboretum status met, Laurel Hill's only remaining hurdle to overcome is to have research partnerships that result in published works. Multiple research partnerships are underway, including with Temple Center for Biodiversity and PennVet, along with continuing research on biodiversity with PHD candidate Heather Kostick and a Cornell study of hybrid oaks. All of these projects are associated with important research that should be published in the near future.



Nina Bassuk and Joan Gruttadauro from Cornell Urban Forestry Lab measuring hybrid oaks at Laurel Hill West.

SUSTAINABILITY HIGHLIGHT: Chapel of Peace

Phase III of the Chapel of Peace Project has transformed over 5,000 square feet of lawn into a garden that is not only beautiful but also creates habitat for native wildlife.

- **Variety of plants** - Over 3,000 herbaceous plants and 100 trees and shrubs were added to a previously underutilized space. The variety of plant life not only creates aesthetic interest throughout the seasons but can also provide nectar sources for pollinating insects throughout most of the year. One plant to highlight is the Avondale blue aster or *Sympphyotrichum cordifolium 'Avondale'*. This plant is native to a wide range of eastern to central North America and is a host plant for numerous butterfly and moth species. It is also an extremely beneficial late season pollen source for insects since it blooms in early to mid-fall.
- **Thinking ahead** - The garden is centered around a beautiful large red oak tree, *Quercus rubra*. We are keeping a closer eye on this tree because a large limb recently fell. We are also monitoring the tree for bacterial leaf scorch, an infection that has become increasingly concerning for red oaks. Although the rest of the tree seems to be in good health, thinking toward the future, we planted a white oak, *Quercus alba*, near it. This oak species is more resilient to bacterial leaf scorch and to the effects of climate change. We plan to continue the legacy of this mighty oak because of its role as a keystone species in the environment.



- **Stormwater mitigation** - Throughout the garden is a meandering path made of permeable pavement to help mitigate the impact of storm water. Permeable material allows the water to slowly penetrate the paving instead of running off and potentially causing flooding or erosion. The project was also built with an underwater stormwater catchment basin.



- **Resourcing from the grounds**

- With construction of the Chapel I and II projects and renovations to the nearby Reflection Garden, we shifted our practices of regularly replacing the hardwood mulch to instead using leaves from our property. While having great moisture retention qualities, leaf mulch is also very beneficial to the soil ecosystem by adding nutrients as the leaves break down. It also creates a habitat for insects that need to overwinter in leaf litter. Another benefit to using leaf mulch is that it is

collected from the grounds, reducing our need to purchase mulch. Other ways we reuse the materials found on the property are by sourcing rocks dug up from burials and using them as focal points in the chapel garden to create a dynamic landscape. We also use sticks collected after storms to edge around garden beds, creating a naturalistic aesthetic.

- **Lasting impression** - Showcasing these different practices and plant choices not only creates a peaceful environment but can inspire those who visit to take some of those practices into their own gardens. Visitors can readily experience the impact of our ecological practices by witnessing the flurry of insects and animals that depend on our gardens.

Energy, Waste and Water

- **Develop protocols and assign responsibility for consistent utility bill data entry and continue to maximize use of Energy Star Portfolio Manager for monitoring all energy, waste and water usage.**

Due to a staff change in the Administration Department this year, updates to Energy Star were not completed. The department plans to review the utility bills, update all data and stay current with the entries in 2026. Going forward, this responsibility has been reassigned to a new staff member within the department who will be trained on tracking the data.

Waste disposal has been tracked for both cemeteries and data through early November indicates that the number of pick-ups and tonnage is down by 57% at Laurel Hill West, likely due to more efficient recycling practices. However, at Laurel Hill East, the number of pick-ups remained steady at 5, while tonnage increased in 2025 by 14%, likely a result of a significant clean out of old/broken equipment at the Gatehouse and Maintenance facility.

- 2024 LHW (AJ Blosenski, 9 pick-ups): 39.36 tons
- 2024 LHE (Tri-State Waste, 5 pick-ups): 10.39 tons
- 2025 (As of 11/4) LHW (AJ Blosenski, 5 pick-ups): 22.6 tons (down 57%)
- 2025 (As of 11/4) LHE (Tri-State Waste, 5 pick-ups): 11.82 tons (up 14%)

- **Keep current on trends and innovative products that can save energy, waste, and water.**

- Two Green Hopper Front Bulk Trucks were purchased from Global Industrial at the beginning of 2025 for both Laurel Hill East and West to improve cardboard collection. Both are being utilized regularly and have helped with Rabbit Recycling's collections.
- Stihl electric blowers and Landworks electric augers are utilized frequently by both Operations and Arboretum teams.
- Our Operations Department recycled 1.9702 tons of metal from old equipment and projects. They also recycled a dump truck full of old tires.
- Lumber from large foundation projects, such as the Wolk mausoleum, has been saved and repurposed for smaller foundation forms and other projects.

- The reclamation center has been maintained, and the screened dirt is reused for grading and seeding of fresh burials.
- **Continue to improve data collection methods for accurately monitoring and itemizing gas/diesel consumption at both cemeteries. Continue to optimize fuel usage data collection at Laurel Hill East.**

Gas usage at Laurel Hill West is now monitored by department on a quarterly basis, and use by our mowing contractor is reported to the Administration department for billing. A new diesel tank is now in use at Laurel Hill West, and diesel use can be tracked by gallons delivered throughout the year. Our mowing contractor does not use diesel; diesel is used almost exclusively by the Operations department.

Gas at Laurel Hill East is now monitored and recorded by LHE Operations staff and use by our mowing contractor is reported to the Administration department quarterly for billing. Diesel use can be tracked by gallons delivered throughout the year.

	1 - Facilities	2 - Arbor	3 - Operations	5- Friel	8-Funeral	9- Fam Serv	TOTAL LH	TOTAL LH+FRIEL
TOTAL gal 2025 (as of 12/2)	113.1	352.2	1577.7	2070.6	170.4	98.5	2311.9	4382.5
PROJECTED gal 2025	126.3	373	1703	2318.4	184	104.4	2490.7	4809.1
TOTAL gal 2024	360.6	418.1	2507.4	2553.2	321.8	171.3	3779.2	6332.4
% +/1 2025 to 2024	-65%	-11%	-32%	-9%	-43%	-39%	-34%	-24%

Gas usage is down at Laurel Hill West compared to 2024.

- **Consider optimal specifications, fuel economy and sustainability on any future fleet purchases.**

For 2025, fleet purchases were sized to meet the operational needs of the organization. For instance, a new smaller F150 truck was purchased to replace the F350 which was overpowered for its purpose. The F350 was redeployed to where it could be used more efficiently for hauling large equipment. New gas-powered gators and toros were also purchased for the needs of general operations. The Sustainability Squad hopes to collaborate more closely with staff in ordering fleet vehicles in the future to help ensure we are selecting vehicles to maximize fuel economy and other sustainability measures.

- **Establish seasonal maintenance schedule for all fleet assets and equipment.**

An outline has been created for a seasonal vehicle and equipment maintenance schedule. Our new in-house mechanic is working closely with the assistant superintendent to review this outline and determine the best way to accomplish maintenance goals and keep records of maintenance activities. A full seasonal maintenance plan is set to be in place by the beginning of 2026.

- **Develop and establish a plan with Rabbit Recycling to conduct a variety of specific material disposal/recycling drives. Achieve a recycled material overall goal for 2025 of 9,000 pounds.**

Multiple charity drives have been underway this holiday season, including a food drive and a coat/clothing drive. Contributions for the clothing drive have come from the Fall Fun Day attendee collection bin and from bins placed in prominent locations at the Funeral Home and in the Friends of Laurel Hill gift shop. Ten coats, along with food, pet food and supplies and other goods were collected and donated.

Rabbit Recycling Zero Waste In A Bucket		LAUREL HILL CEMETARY		MATERIALS DATA 2025					
LAUREL HILL EAST- YEAR TO DATE [OCT 31st 2025]									
GLASS COLOR	GLASS CLEAR	#2/4PE SOFT PLASTICS	#1,2,3,4,5,6 HARD PLASTICS	CARD BOARD	PAPER	ALUM.	STEEL	MISC BATTERIES, ETC	
16 LBS	27 LBS	70 LBS	108 LBS	1260 LBS	124 LBS	16 LBS	32 LBS	146 LBS	
LAUREL HILL WEST- YEAR TO DATE [OCT 31st 2025]									
GLASS COLOR	GLASS CLEAR	#2/4PE SOFT PLASTICS	#1,2,3,4,5,6 HARD PLASTICS	CARD BOARD	PAPER	ALUM.	STEEL	MISC BATTERIES, ETC	
102 LBS	61 LBS	348 LBS	389 LBS	4532 LBS	512 LBS	102 LBS	61 LBS	557 LBS	
BOTH LOCATIONS- YEAR TO DATE [OCT 31st 2025]									
GLASS COLOR	GLASS CLEAR	#2/4PE SOFT PLASTICS	#1,2,3,4,5,6 HARD PLASTICS	CARD BOARD	PAPER	ALUM.	STEEL	MISC BATTERIES, ETC	
119 LBS	88 LBS	418 LBS	497 LBS	5792 LBS	636 LBS	119 LBS	93 LBS	703 LBS	

TOTAL FOR 2025 as of 10/31: 8,465 pounds

PROJECTED TOTAL FOR 2025 as of 12/31: ~10,158 pounds

- **Submit proposal for an employee “free store” to exchange belongings they no longer need with coworkers.**

A Free Store Subcommittee was formed and has begun the process of investigating the feasibility of establishing “free store” exchange for Laurel Hill staff, including exploring exchanges on Teams, where items could be stored for exchange onsite. This goal will continue to be explored in 2026.

- **Establish responsibilities and methods for providing baseline to improve the efficiency of our water usage.**

This has not been completed and will be moved to goals for 2026.

- **Begin to develop a strategy to implement energy audits on Laurel Hill buildings in 2025.**

This has not been completed and will be moved to goals for 2026.

Engagement, Communication, and Programming

- **With Strategic Marketing team, design a visitor engagement guide to the Arboretum, inclusive of green burial areas.**

The process of creating a visitor’s guide to the arboretum was started but not completed. This will continue into next year.

- **Continue to encourage visitors to use iNaturalist to document their nature encounters at both cemeteries. Partner with local organizations to promote City Nature Challenge.**

In 2025, iNaturalist was used in several programs, including a Bioblitz program with St. James School where our horticulture staff created classroom-based lessons about watersheds, erosion and the importance of biodiversity in ecosystems for twenty students. The program culminated with a final field trip to perform an iNaturalist Bioblitz on the cemetery grounds. Students worked in small groups along Laurel Hill’s hillside project and used iNaturalist to identify and photograph specimens and learn about the local ecosystem, while also contributing to citizen science biodiversity monitoring.

It was challenging to grow an audience in 2025 for the City Nature Challenge. Plans are underway for 2026 to promote more targeted social media campaigns to encourage visitors to make species observations at Laurel Hill during the OBSERVE portion of the challenge. The Development department and horticulture staff are collaborating to host one public event during the IDENTIFY portion of City Nature Challenge in partnership

with naturalists and scientists from other local organizations such as the Academy of Natural Sciences and the Philly City Nature Challenge core team.

- **Continue the “species of the month” section in Laurel Hill’s monthly e-newsletter.**

Species of the Month features have been included in each month’s e-newsletter in 2025 and have been highlighted in Friends of Laurel Hill monthly e-blasts as well.

- **Repeat and grow engagement in the successful therapeutic horticulture program, Great Backyard Bird Count and other programs that relate to our culture of sustainability in 2025.**

- All therapeutic horticulture program sold out or nearly sold out – there are plans to repeat these in 2026.
- All seasonal arboretum tours sold out or nearly sold out – successful spring and fall tours will be repeated in 2026.



Backyard Bird Count at Laurel Hill East

Additional 2025 Accomplishments

Land Conservation

- **Perennials Planted** – 2,847 perennials planted in 2025, of which 1,302 (46%) were Native herbaceous plants sourced from neonicotinoid-free nurseries (these totals exclude large capital projects such as Chapel Phase III mentioned above).
- **Collaboration with PennVet**
 - In 2025 Laurel Hill became a partner in the PennVet "Accessing Urban Nature Initiative." The goal of the project is to help urban

communities reconnect with nature through equitable access to local science and experiential learning opportunities in biodiversity, climate and human/animal relationships and health through leveraging data collected via camera traps in urban ecosystems. Laurel Hill is host to two wildlife cameras at its east property that is collecting data for the larger project while also helping us to understand how wildlife is using our premises, so that we can better manage our landscape as valuable urban habitat.

- **Invasive species removal is ongoing in accordance with the Arboretum's maintenance plan**

Invasive woody vines and weed trees were manually or chemically removed from plantings, trees, and from peripheral areas in both cemeteries.



Planting perennials at a new Goth Garden at Laurel Hill East Medallion Garden

Energy, Waste and Water

- **Funeral Services has accommodated families with specific green requests.**
For families having green funerals, Funeral Services staff has provided at-need bouquets of flowers harvested from green burial areas to accommodate last minute floral needs.
- **IT department has considered sustainability in its activities in 2025.**
Green efforts in the IT Department have focused on improving energy efficiency and reducing our environmental footprint. These include moving toward the purchase of more Energy Star-certified devices such as laptops, monitors, and printers; reducing the number of on-premise servers through consolidation and virtualization; and encouraging document sharing and collaboration through OneDrive, SharePoint, and Teams to minimize paper usage. In addition, we have been transitioning more of our services to the cloud and leveraging energy-efficient data centers and modern infrastructure to further support sustainability goals while enhancing system performance and reliability.
- **Development department has reduced materials used in their products.**
The Development team has made efforts to lessen the impact on our planet by shifting our membership card program from a heavy plastic credit card style card (approximately 500 or more sent out annually) to a thinner card integrated into paper. We are investigating a digital version of the card to further reduce the use of paper and plastic.
- **Gatehouse restoration project had some sustainable construction practices.**
Contractors used Burns Dumpsters for debris removal, which targets 607% of construction debris for recycling and repurposing. This project also installed American Standard high-efficiency toilets, which are certified by the EPA's WaterSense program.
- **Process for streamlining and standardizing disposables has begun**
Our assistant superintendent ordered samples of sustainable cleaning supplies and paper goods and is planning to meet with each department

to review their needs. Right now, each department orders disposables individually, leading to no standardization and more separate deliveries. The goal in the future is to have one delivery that favors sustainable products company-wide.

Engagement, Communication, and Programming

- **Green Burial Certification for Valley View Green and Bala Green**
In 2025, we submitted stewardship manuals for both Valley View Green (Laurel Hill East) and Bala Green (Laurel Hill West) to the Green Burial Council for review. These green burial sections now join previously approved Nature's Sanctuary and our Funeral Home in receiving Green Burial Council certification. This achievement was promoted through the Laurel Hill website, social media, email marketing, and our dedicated green print advertising throughout the Philadelphia area. We are now proud to say that we are the only cemetery in the City of Philadelphia that can claim GBC certification.
- **Family Services Continues to receive high interest in Green Burial Services.**
While it's difficult to track walk-in and phone requests, since 2022 Laurel Hill's website forms allow us to track families interested in green burial relative to other sorts of burial (Jewish, traditional, cremation, etc.) Both in the General Contact Form and the Pre-Planning Form, green burial continues to have the most number of inquiries. In 2025, green burials accounted for 19% of property sales.



Entrance Beds at Valley View Green

- **New sustainable programs, tours, partnerships**
 - Participation in the Backyard Bird Count in collaboration with local ornithologists was expanded in 2025, with horticulture staff participating to share information about the arboretum and using knowledge of plant species to help find birds and enhance the guest experience.
 - New Equinox Tree Walk and Meditation programs have been very successful, sold-out events.
 - Community drives for coats, essential toiletries and other non-perishable items were added to fall events to promote recycling and community engagement. For instance, at Family Fun Day 30 coats and 2 bags of brand new toiletries were collected for Rabbit Recycling to distribute to communities in need.
 - A “Nature Interest List” was created to identify people who have attended a nature- or arboretum-related event to be able to more regularly communicate with this group about relevant programs. Seasonal e-mails are being sent to promote nature-based programming.
 - Continuing our partnership with the Sustainable Business Network, we hosted their kickoff of the Urban Forestry Initiative at Laurel Hill East this summer.

2026 Focus Areas and Goals

Land Conservation

- Plant 200 trees and 400 shrubs – increase percentage of native plants planted to 60%.
- Continue to promote and expand the Legacy Tree Program in partnership with Development and Strategic Marketing teams.
- Develop portfolio of horticulture products to promote grave gardens to families as a source of revenue. Track amount of turf removed and replaced with gardens on lots.
- Develop green burial cremation area between Telford Path and Chapel of Peace to integrate cremated remains with existing trees and new plantings and to maximize burial of cremated remains at Laurel Hill.
- Continue to work toward achieving Level III arboretum status.

- Investigate the feasibility of installing a cutting garden for burial greens.
- Produce a plan for reducing litter and dog waste throughout the cemetery, including investigating the feasibility of more trash cans and more doggie-bag disposal areas.

Energy, Waste and Water

- Develop protocols and assign responsibility for consistent utility bill data entry to establish a baseline. Continue to maximize use of Energy Star Portfolio Manager for monitoring all energy, waste and water usage.
- By the end of Q1'26, establish a seasonal maintenance schedule for all fleet assets and equipment.
- Develop and execute a plan with Rabbit Recycling to conduct a variety of specific material disposal/recycling drives.
- Achieve a recycled material overall goal for 2025 of 10,000 pounds.
- Submit proposal for an employee “free store” to exchange belongings they no longer need with coworkers.
- Working with the Facilities Manager, establish responsibilities and methods for providing a baseline to improve the efficiency of our water usage.
- Develop a strategy with costs to implement energy audits on Laurel Hill buildings in 2027.
- Standardize across the entire organization the ordering of paper and cleaning products from more sustainable providers to ensure that Laurel Hill expands its investment in sustainable products with fewer deliveries.
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Engagement, Communication, and Programming

- With Strategic Marketing team, design a visitor engagement guide to the Arboretum, inclusive of green burial areas.
- Repeat and maximize engagement in the successful therapeutic horticulture program, Great Backyard Bird Count and other programs that relate to our culture of sustainability.
- Provide quarterly sustainability updates / trainings to Laurel Hill staff during all-staff meetings.