

January 6, 2012



CE

Ms. Lynn Marinelli
Erie County Legislator
92 Franklin Street 4th Floor
Buffalo, NY 14202

Dear Legislator Marinelli,

On behalf of the Board of Directors of the Buffalo and Erie County Botanical Gardens Society, Inc., I am writing to request operational funding from Erie County for 2012.

The Erie County Legislature's vote to provide funding to thirty seven small and medium sized cultural institutions during the 2012 budget process clearly represented a commitment to ensuring that these institutions continue to play a significant role in our region's economy and overall quality of life. When combined with financial support for our library system and the "ten large cultural entities," Erie County's operating support to cultural institutions in 2012 will exceed \$25 million. This is a remarkable achievement!

Prior to the Legislature's vote to adopt the 2012 budget, I met with a majority of county legislators to voice my concern that the Botanical Gardens Society was not included in allocations for either the small, medium or large cultural institutions. Additionally, in a subsequent conversation with the County Executive-elect following that meeting, I again expressed my disappointment that the Botanical Gardens Society was excluded from receiving direct operating support.

In 2004, Erie County entered into a 25 year agreement with the Botanical Gardens Society which contained a commitment by both parties to ensure that this architecturally unique and historically impressive jewel remain a viable and integral part of our community's cultural experience. Under the terms of that agreement, the county ceded operational responsibility to the Botanical Gardens Society while retaining its obligation for capital improvements and repairs to the facility. This public/private collaboration has been very successful. Not only was the county able to reduce its staffing costs, but under the Botanical Gardens Society's leadership, the plant collection and horticulture displays have improved significantly. Our shows, events and programs for children and adults have also expanded dramatically. For example, over the past five years, we have seen a 53% increase in attendance reaching over 90,000 visitors in 2011; and 88% increase in memberships; a 213% increase in volunteers; a 446% increase in private events and a 57% increase in the number of students participating in our educational programs. To maintain this momentum, we recently updated our Strategic Plan to be better equipped to fulfill our mission to become the horticulture hub of Western New York. In addition, we are collaborating with the University at Buffalo's

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School of Architecture to update our Master Plan. Our growth and efforts to achieve self-sustainability have been nothing less than remarkable.

Erie County, by contractual agreement, ended operational support to the Botanical Gardens Society in 2009. Therefore, in 2010 the Botanical Gardens Society participated in the ECRAB process. Through that open and competitive process, ECRAB recommended that the county grant \$322,000 in operating assistance to the Botanical Gardens Society which, as you know, was denied by the previous administration.

The Botanical Gardens Society's Board of Directors applauds the recent action of the Erie County Legislature to restore county operational funding for small and medium sized cultural organizations. The Board also believes that our request for operational funding in 2012 would not only be fair and consistent with the restorations made to other cultural institutions but would also rectify an obvious oversight.

Your consideration and support is greatly appreciated. I look forward to discussing details of the request with you and your colleagues, as soon as possible.

Sincerely yours,



David J. Swarts
President/CEO