



# 2021 BOXERWOOD ANNUAL REPORT

## MISSION

to educate and inspire people of all ages to be environmentally responsible stewards of the Earth.

# Letter from the Executive Director

August 7, 2021

Dear Friends,

The scientist and historian Helen Macdonald states in her book *Vesper Flights* that she writes largely about love – most specifically love for the glittering world of non-human life around us. Her work is about “...finding ways to recognize and love differences. The attempt to see through eyes that are not your own...to think what it might mean to love those who are not like you. **To rejoice in the complexity of things.**”

We do that well at Boxerwood – we rejoice in the complexity of things. From the physical complexity of our diverse woodland habitats to the multidimensional complexity of our programs, we weave together a celebration of life and earth. This past year has been bewilderingly uncertain and painful, yet Boxerwood dug deep into its stores of creativity to emerge stronger--and even more complex. As you'll see, our education report in this issue highlights new programs and partnerships while our garden/facilities report showcases stewardship commitments, long-term and new.

In terms of organizational leadership, we've navigated several changes within our board of directors including the untimely death of our dear friend and board president, Mike Yoemans last winter. Mike's commitment to environmental education lives on as we've welcomed a new generation of board members. Diverse in age, skill, and background, the board is poised

to oversee new growth and direction as Boxerwood increases its capabilities in service of our mission.

We are looking ahead with confidence as many projects under development will start bearing fruit in the coming year. These projects include additional outreach to the schools with the highest need, the launch of COREworks (our homegrown carbon marketplace which funds climate action projects in Rockbridge County), and new community-based partnerships for conservation and waste reduction. To help us carry out this bounty, we've created a new position -- Operations Manager -- filled expertly by Karen Stanley, and expect to welcome several new part-time educators to our staff this fall. We will also be devoting attention to new sustainability initiatives on the Boxerwood property this year.

All this joyful complexity is possible only because of the sustained support from our community – volunteers, donors, partners, our new ambassador program, and even the visitors who stop by to revel in this little spot of nature. On behalf of all of us at Boxerwood, thank you for being part of all this complexity and its ever-unfurling wonder.

*Catrien*

Catrien van Assendelft  
Executive Director





GIRLS' HIKING CLUB

# Education & Programs

## CREATIVITY FROM CONSTRAINTS

It certainly wasn't the best of times, but 20-21 was surely one of Boxerwood's most creative. Disruptions in school, family, and community life invited new ideas, programs, and pathways for carrying out our environmental educational mission. The upshot of it all is a paradox: the constraints created conditions for Boxerwood innovation, learning and growth. Thank you to everyone whose donations sustained us through the journey.

### YOUTH PROGRAMS

This year many environmental education organizations pivoted to virtual-only programming. Boxerwood chose a different path. With community support and strong partnerships we found ways to provide sustained, outdoor, hands-on learning for about a thousand children.

Pandemic year programs took place at Boxerwood, in schoolyards, along rivers, and in the community. Program models included afterschool collaborations, school-day connections, hiking clubs, and weeks of summer camps for children attending three high-need schools.

Although we served less than half the number of children as usual, we were able to go deep, providing week after week of nature-based programming for many children who needed it the most. Going forward, we'll be sustaining this deep work while also returning to full strength: in addition to school-day programs, we look

forward to more school-based clubs and camps.

### FAMILY PROGRAMS

Supporting family-based learning was especially important this home-bound year. We saw successful roll-out of two new initiatives:

This spring we provided a series of well-received **Saturday programs** for families attending high-need schools. The no-cost programs facilitated family-led STEM investigations, literacy connections, and even outdoor yoga at Boxerwood. These programs will continue and grow next year.

A big surprise was public enthusiasm for our pilot **Backyard Composters Challenge**. This 12-week grant-funded program enrolled 62 families in a home-based, citizen-science project focused on food waste diversion. As part of the project, families received a free composter and related supplies in return for weekly reporting to Boxerwood the amount of food they diverted from the landfill. 59 of 62 households successfully completed the program (2 had to stop due to bear forays) and of these, 100% stated they planned to continue composting. Families especially valued the opportunity to show their children how collective action can make a difference. Working together, the families diverted four tons of food from the landfill. Food waste diversion not only creates great compost for gardening but also helps reduce harmful methane emissions from landfill rot: a climate action. We hope to offer this challenge again next year.





## COMMUNITY PROGRAMS

If ever there was a year to dream big, this was it. This year we redirected some of energies to bring forth some new initiatives that complement or extend what we already do:

1. We founded and continue to facilitate a community mechanism that helps coordinate community waste reduction actions. The **Rockbridge Waste Reduction Roundtable** is comprised of 7 - 10 local non-profits, agencies, businesses whose representatives meet monthly for information-sharing and networking. It's working!
2. Want to reduce your carbon footprint by

offsetting your carbon emissions ton-for-ton? Get ready to make a donation to the **COREworks Fund**, which converts 100% of your donation into new carbon-reducing projects in Rockbridge County. After 18 months of research and development, **our carbon marketplace initiative** will go live Fall 2021. The goal of COREworks is to accelerate green projects in Rockbridge while also engaging more people in environmental conversation and action -- a way to build a climate-friendly local culture right where we live.

3. We are fine-tuning plans to pilot a small, regional **AmeriCorps** program starting Fall 2022. Our federal-supported program

will introduce young adults to conservation careers via one-year placements at nature centers. We hope to place 2-3 AmeriCorps direct service members at Boxerwood and several others nearby.

## NEXT YEAR & BEYOND

Years of groundwork (and community support) are leading Boxerwood to a new level of programmatic complexity: a good thing. We anticipate renewed activities with our school partners, including more school-day programs, more afterschool programs, more family programs, and more grant-funded camps. We also foresee launch of our COREworks conservation activities in community tree-planting and school food waste diversion.

To support this new level of mission-aligned service, we will be welcoming several additional part-time educators to Boxerwood this fall. We're also preparing the groundwork for additional help through the AmeriCorps program launching Fall 2022. 2021-22 will be yet again challenging year -- but in a good way. When it comes to promoting earth care education and action there is always more work to do. Thank you to all those who travel with us in this sustained journey.

*Elise*

Elise Sheffield  
Director of Education





PLANTING SHRUBS FOR BIRDS (PALS)

# Garden and Facilities

## STEWARDSHIP IN ACTION

In spite of the challenges of the last year, we were able to keep the garden open as a haven for all, and we have continued to move forward with some important stewardship efforts: increasing biodiversity, taking good care of the water that flows across our land, and reducing the environmental footprint of our organization.

The Boxerwood garden is an ecosystem unto itself: a home for birds, mammals, insects, amphibians — countless living things. It is an outdoor classroom for students who participate in our education programs. For our other visitors, it is a place to rest, explore, and learn. And we continually aspire to make the garden a living demonstration of good Earth stewardship practices. In our mission to demonstrate and teach good stewardship, we completed the following initiatives in 2020-21.

We updated the landscaping at the main entrance with a **new demonstration garden**. This is a New Perennials Garden in the tradition of garden designer Piet Oudolf, with the goal of creating gardens in symbiosis with nature. The garden was planned and installed by the Rockbridge Area Master Gardeners, and funded by a grant from the Stanley Smith Horticultural Trust.

We installed **two new bio-retention ponds**, thanks to a grant from Virginia DEQ. These mini ponds capture stormwa-

ter runoff and allow it to infiltrate, helping Boxerwood keep its topsoil in place, and preventing sediment runoff into the watershed. To further aid in preventing erosion, we planted 40 new water-and-shade-loving plants, including swamp white oak, bald cypress, paw paw, American cranberry, and swamp red milkweed.

We continued to cultivate **successful partnerships** with groups such as the Rockbridge Area Master Gardeners, the Native Plant Society, and the Rockbridge Bird Club. The Master Gardeners meet weekly at Boxerwood to tend the Pollinator Garden, the new entrance garden, and several other areas. The Native Plant Sanctuary is thriving under the care of the Native Plant Society. And the Birding Club has led regular bird walks and helped summer campers fall in love with birds at Boxerwood.

We also launched a new **ambassador program**, where our friendly volunteers serve to meet, greet, and orient visitors coming to Boxerwood on the weekends. And happily, we've been able to bring back our Music in the Garden Series this summer.

**The Play Trail** is thriving thanks to a dedicated group of volunteers who come every week to weed, water, plant, and to just generally maintain the Play Trail as a beautiful and inviting place for children to play and explore.





MILKWEED



SOLAR ARRAY



NEW GARDEN



WOOD STOVE



NEW WINDOWS

The Lodge houses offices for our staff and serves as a classroom when the weather is inclement -- it is “home base” for Boxerwood. Our stewardship efforts include the built environment and with that in mind we have been working towards shrinking our environmental footprint; we made significant progress toward that goal this past year.

**We installed an 11.05 kW solar array** that will cover all of our electricity

usage in the Lodge, including heating and cooling.

**We replaced all nine windows in the office wing** of the Lodge with high efficiency double pane windows from Anderson — a huge boost to our building’s energy efficiency. Many thanks to the Boxerwood Warriors for their help in getting the windows installed!

**We installed a Matherly wood stove insert** to prevent heat loss up the chim-

ney. This also allows us to supplement winter heating with wood from trees and branches that get trimmed for safety purposes - a free and carbon-neutral energy source.

### LOOKING AHEAD

Our commitment to stewardship continues. In the year ahead, we have a number of projects lined up already, including analysis and upgrading of NEWTS (our

nature-emulating water treatment system), parking lot and road improvements, and easier access to parts of the garden. Lodge restoration efforts and garden maintenance will continue as we ensure both great visitor experiences and sustainable care of the natural and historical resources in our care.

*BEN*  
Ben Eland  
Garden & Facilities Manager





# Financial Information

This past fiscal year began when we were in the throes of the pandemic (and financial anxiety)– cancelled camps and events, loss of school programming, a year warped by too much screen time and too much isolation. Yet with community teamwork, ingenuity, and resourcefulness, we created a host of new nature-based programs responsive to pandemic needs. We also ended the year with more money in the bank than we started.

The **Payroll Protection Program** helped us weather the most challenging months, but even more help came from the incredible generosity of both long-time and new supporters. An anonymous gift of \$50,000 came along at exactly the right time. Each of our appeals raised about 20% more than in years' past. Our staff wrote a record-breaking 27 grant applications. Many local businesses continued to support our work by providing discounts, donated materials, and sponsorships. After several years of careful fiduciary respon-

sibility, we have finally been able to grow a reserve equivalent to 3-4 months of expenses and plan to maintain this reserve for emergency use, enabling us to plan and grow strategically.

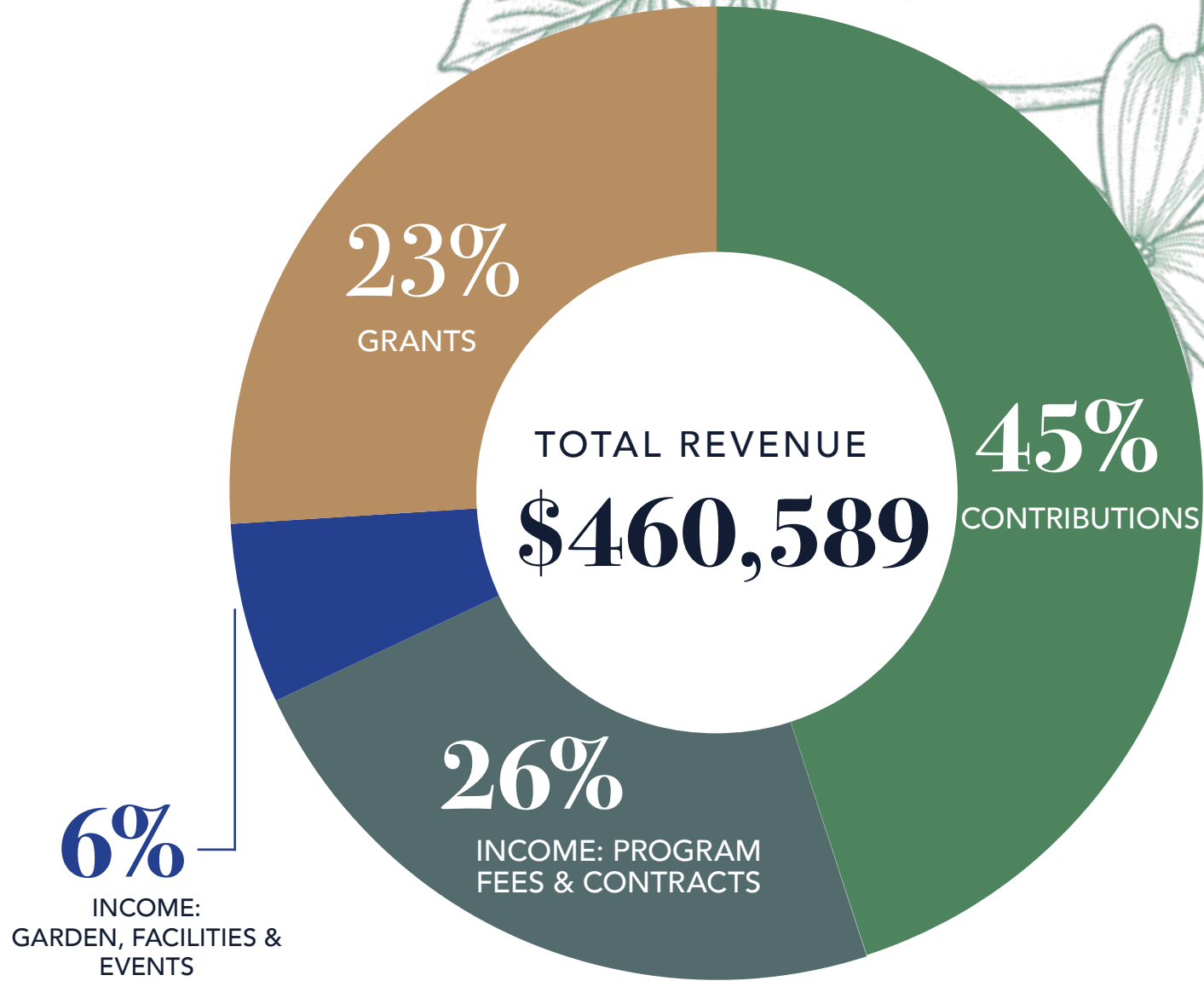
On the expense side, we kept our belts tight, while still keeping the garden open to the public. Our biggest financial commitment was (and always is) payroll, because our fine employees are Boxerwood's greatest asset. With only one of us full-time and nine of us part-time (including our executive director), our small but mighty team continues to find new, efficient ways of doing things, forging new partnerships and programs and working from the heart to prepare us for a vibrant, post-pandemic future. Their strength of heart is matched by our volunteers, many of whom continued to serve during this challenging year: together, we made it happen.

Thank you.



# OPERATING REVENUE

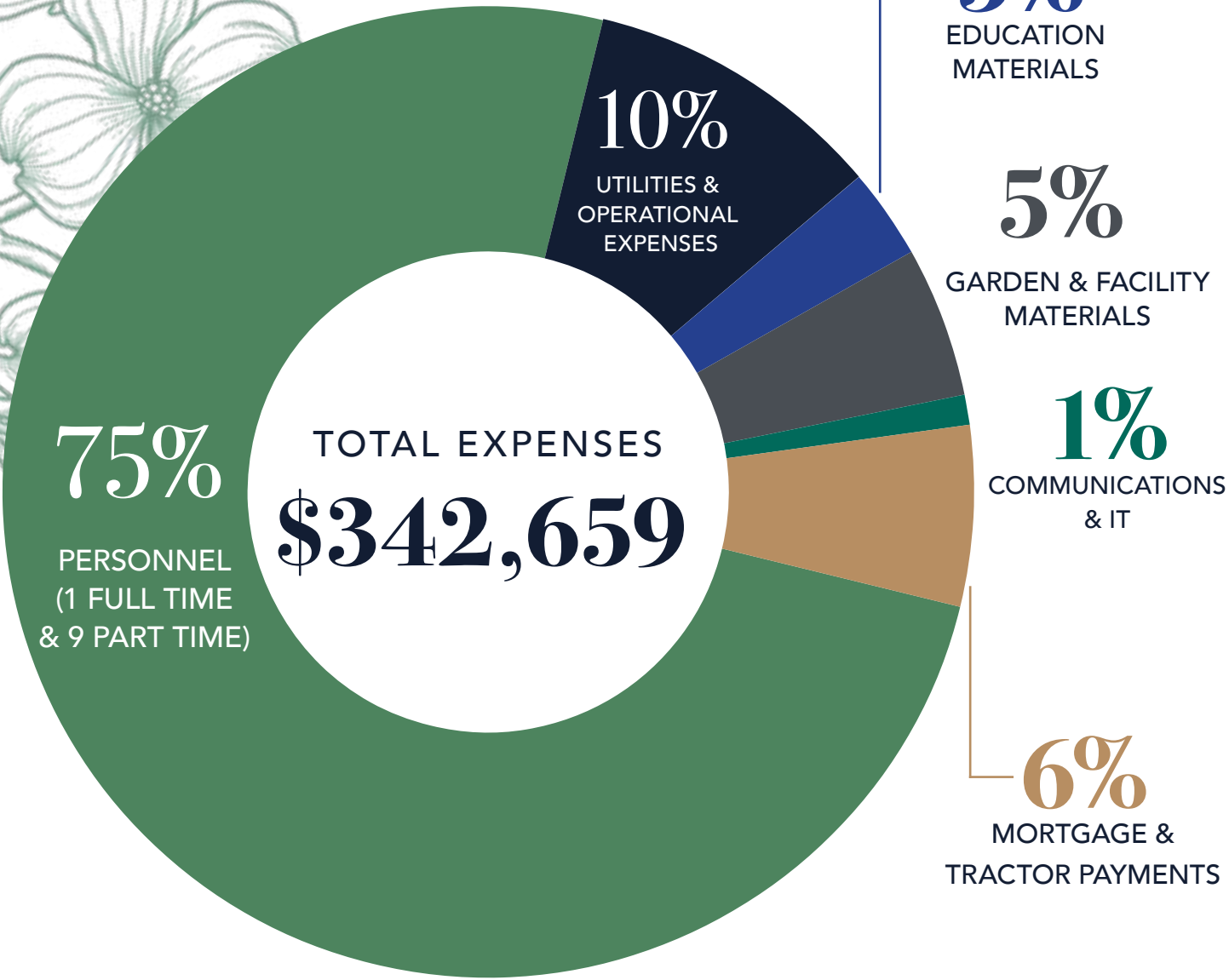
FY 2020 - 21



CONTRIBUTIONS	\$186,979
INCOME: PROGRAM FEES & CONTRACTS	\$110,387
INCOME: GARDEN, FACILITIES, EVENTS	\$24,954
GRANTS	\$95,164
SUBTOTAL	\$417,484
PAYROLL PROTECTION PROGRAM LOAN	\$43,105
TOTAL	\$460,589

# OPERATING EXPENSES

FY 2020 - 21



PERSONNEL (1 FULLTIME, 9 PARTTIME)	\$255,561
UTILITIES & OPERATIONAL EXPENSES	\$35,251
EDUC. MATERIALS	\$10,401
GARDEN/FACILITY MATERIALS	\$16,908
COMMUNICATIONS/IT	\$4,856
MORTGAGES & TRACTOR PAYMENTS	\$19,682
TOTAL	\$342,659