

## **Guide-Gardener Walk with James Warkentin - Thursday, April 4, 2019**

Notes by Marilyn Goebel & Reviewed by James

On a beautiful spring morning, James Warkentin, Garden Superintendent, shared with us several new projects. Our new director, Yann Gagnon, is bringing a sense of detail and a lot of energy to Garden operations. Cynthia Sayre and the gardeners are actively involved in the new curatorial work. There are currently 7 gardeners working (and an 8th vacant position):

- Laura P: Bentall, Roses, Black Garden, Grasses, Western North America & sub-foreman
- Lisa W: Exterior areas
- James P: ENA, Mediterranean, Southern Hemisphere, Succulents, "Astilbe" Bed
- David G: Perennials, Heather, Conifers, Ravine, Laburnums, Cherry Walk
- Rhemus: Rhodo Walk, Oaks, Japanese, Great Lawn island beds
- Erin: Sino-Himalayan, Fern Dell, Camellias, Korean, Meconopsis Dell
- Miguel: Canadian Heritage, Vegetables, Alma VanDusen, Maze, Stone Garden
- Vacant: North area, with sculptures and maples, BC Habitat

In addition, Sean L is the equipment operator in charge of lawns, ponds and general maintenance. Parks will be giving us more arborist support this year, so we will be able to better maintain our important tree collection.

A current assignment list and map are posted at [www.ericanotebook.com/gardener-walks.html](http://www.ericanotebook.com/gardener-walks.html).

One of this year's big challenges is dealing with chafer beetle damage. The island bed facing Oak Street has been particularly hard hit, and we might lose the Garry Oak and pines planted there. Chafer-beetle-resistant fescue might be used in this area. Another damaged area is the Marshall sculpture bed just north of the Plaza. The remaining turf will be removed and pavers installed to extend the seating area. The Great Lawn is doing better but has been set back due to compaction from all the events in 2018. James says that a program started three years ago to annually core, sand, and drill in seed in early May is really helping with the health of that lawn.

There are a number of projects to improve the vista from the Plaza and visitors' first impressions. Laura is working on the Western North America Garden to reduce repetition and will be adding plants like penstemon to give it more punch. James P. is cleaning out the reed bed and will be adding new plants as well. But the big project, now underway, is at the north end of the Rosaceae bed where many of the heritage roses have been removed to make way for an eye-catching drift of perennials (especially astilbes), heucheras, ferns, grasses, and oak leaf hydrangeas. This bed has not been renovated since Roy's time. It is a unique bed, especially for the carts, in that it is at eye-level. To make a nice ending point for this new area, the yuccas at the north will be transplanted next to the Stone Garden, and an exciting seasonal succulent bed will replace them, with plantings similar to the summer succulent pots on the Plaza. The *Pinus longaeva* will stay for the time being. James P. will add this garden to his area of responsibility.

In the Bentall Garden, Laura will be installing more seasonal plants in the pool, such as fishtail palms, cannas, taros, and *Cyperus*, and will remove some of the water lilies. Lots of spring bulbs, especially daffodils, have been planted this year. The glasshouse is slated for demolition, as it is not suitable to be retrofitted. Plans for this area will be developed in 2020. No changes are predicted in the near future for the Stanley Smith Garden. New disease-resistant roses are coming from Select Roses.

The Laburnum walk needs renewal piece by piece. Some of the laburnums will be pruned for better cart access. After the May bloom, some of the leaning trees will be replaced, and more new trees will be planted in the next few years.

The Lathhouse is also slated for demolition, but there are no immediate plans for that area's development. James is not sure if the wisteria is salvageable. Just across the road, James pointed out the contorted "Harry Potter" beech (actually *Fagus sylvatica* 'Pendula') which is now visible due to some tree and shrub removal. A path up to it has been created, and a bench will be installed shortly.

Across the lawn, the Japanese Display Garden under the cherries is being renovated by the Vancouver Japanese Gardeners Association just in time for Sakura Days. We are now in year 3 of this garden. 2020 was the original date for this temporary project to end, but we may be able to negotiate continuing it for a longer period.

Next we stopped at the BC Habitat Garden, where pruning and understory work has opened up more vistas from the path into this Garden. Additional plants and benches are coming soon, and the native understory will be embellished. There may be a wood sculpture that finds its way into the habitat area in 2019. North of the road, some of the turf has been removed, and more native plants will be added. There is a small Sitka spruce planted in the middle of this new bed, and James is hoping to add a nurse log. There are plans to ivy-bust in this area.

James mentioned that the Vegetable Garden theme will be the same as last year's, i.e. sustainability. James is working on who will get the harvest bounty. It's a challenge for the Food Bank to distribute produce, and a new sharing arrangement may be possible with Shaughnessy Restaurant and local soup kitchens. Bee management has moved from Allen Garr, who retired, to the beekeeper at Main Street Honey Shoppe, who also manages the hives at Sunset Nursery and Bloedel. This winter was hard on the bees. James is not sure whether there will be honey available in the gift shop.

As we headed back, James said that the former dried-flower bed north of the maples has been seeded with grass for the near future. There are no firm plans to create an educational garden this spring, but some work may begin later this summer. The greenhouses in the service yard will be reskinned soon for future use. Our final stop was at the Southern Hemisphere Garden, where there will be some changes, as Yann is very enthusiastic about plants from this area.

James, too, is enthusiastic about all the work going on and feels he has a team capable of rising to the challenges of managing projects and day-to-day maintenance.