

The Sacred Grounds Initiative encompasses a long list of ideas, both to enhance the grounds for people and to create a sanctuary for native plants and animals. The Fall 2023 projects included gardens for both aspects. What is next?

Native Plantings

The Desert Canyon demonstration garden is the first of perhaps five native communities. In 2024 perhaps we can build out a Desert Dry Wash garden in the retention pond and a Creosote Scrub garden just to the north of the Desert Canyon garden. (see below)

Around the perimeter of the patio is currently just a rock garden. It would be lovely with blooms of some kind. Perhaps seed with Desert Verbena, or maybe something that provides blooms during the peak winter season. Perhaps we can add year round bloom.

The Garden of Hope vision is a garden featuring native species for butterflies and native pollinators just north of the community room. In addition to the existing rush milkweed we can add native nectar sources, including annuals and perennials. For example, removing some non-native bushes and repairing irrigation can create space for Desert Lavender, a huge favorite of pollinators.

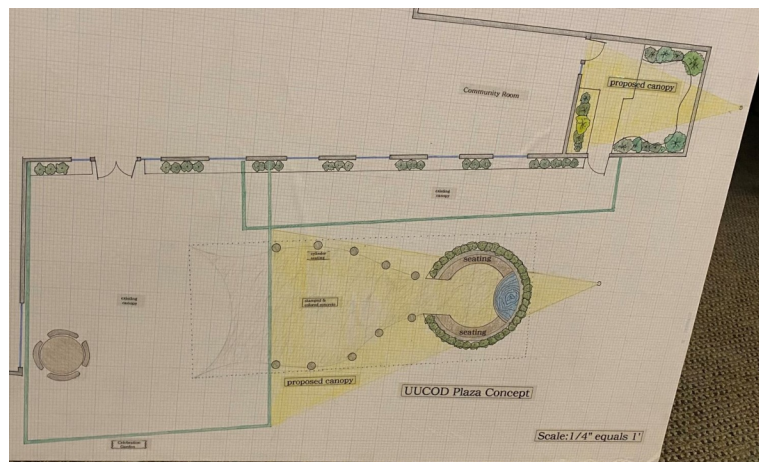
In areas of high visibility we can add native wildflowers for spectacular March-April bloom. With a little irrigation we can have our own super-bloom every year. Potentials include Desert Gold, Desert Verbena, Desert Dandelion, Arizona Lupine, ...

Shade wall

The southwest wall of the Sanctuary (the long wall behind the stage) gets very hot from afternoon sun. It has recorded interior surface temperatures in the high 90s. We can significantly reduce our electrical air conditioning use by shading that wall. Phase 2 might include a proposal for some green wall, perhaps a hedge, an arbor, small trees, or some such. This can also be habitat for species that prefer more isolation from humans. The green wall is open for ideas!

Plaza Water Feature

The original building design included a water feature on the entrance plaza, but that was dropped for budgetary reasons. Perhaps we can now fulfill that vision with a lovely water feature area surrounded by circular seating that can even serve as a tiny outdoor chapel for ceremonies. Hiroshi created an exciting conceptual drawing.



Picnic Area and Peace Garden

The tables by the labyrinth and Peace Pole get considerable use by the general public as a nice picnic spot, lunch break, or family area. The new Desert Canyon Garden expands that with walking paths and shade. Perhaps we could add more seating, including in the Garden. We could also join the Peace Pole and the Peace labyrinth with a foot bridge, and we can add plantings to the stream bed and walking paths.

The Desert Canyon Garden has an educational area with a labeled nature trail. Perhaps we sprinkle short verses for contemplation along the walking paths. Perhaps we add subtle lighting along the walking paths and labyrinth or to highlight the Peace Pole, taking care to be appropriate for the native plants and animals.

The Peace Garden awaits design ideas!

New Diverse Habitat Gardens

As the climate changes we can provide refuge for different ecological communities. Some critters like active sand fields, some like stabilized sand, some like sandy wash, some like rocky slopes. We can create a sanctuary for many different species. For example twelve difference species of lizard have been observed within a half mile of our grounds. If we invite them with the proper habitat, they will move in and thrive.

First is to preserve or enhance the niches currently are flourishing on our grounds. Then we can add additional habitat to create a refuge for more species.

Blow sand

- Behind the sanctuary and to the east is an area of blow sand. Once dominant in the Coachella Valley, this important habitat has been reduced to just 5% of its original size. Despite the tiny size of our little patch, the endangered Coachella Valley milkvetch is thriving.

Creosote Scrub – Stabilized sand fields

- Our stabilized sand fields, typified by creosote bush, support our desert iguanas, pocket gophers and voles as wells as song birds and pollinators.
- For color we can add beavertail prickly pear and annual native wildflowers.

Desert Dry Wash

- Another important habitat is sandy wash, typified by Smoke tree, Desert Willow, and bladderpod. This overlaps our current grounds as irrigation supports dyebush and Palo Verde, which are also typical sandy wash species.
- We envision this in the current retention pond, connected by a path to the Desert Canyon garden.

Honey Mesquite

- Historically there were vast stands of mesquite along the edge of the valley, full of birds, but most of those stands are gone. Year round, songbirds, verdin and quail are drawn to mesquite. Honey mesquite has also been shown to be the most favored tree for migratory birds as the flowers are timed perfectly to provide insects as the birds pass through (<https://pubs.usgs.gov/fs/2009/3038/fs2009-3038.pdf>).
- We have a started mesquite garden along the south edge of the property (to screen the view of a future residential development). What can we do to enhance it?