



Agriculture and Horticulture Advisory Committee

Meeting Date: March 3, 2026

External Participants:

Vince Kuyvenhoven — Field Sales Representative, Carlin
Madeline Alvarado — Grower, Ball Horticulture Company
Patricia Cortes — Talent Management Lead, Midwest Groundcovers
Kelsey Minalga — Product Manager, Ball Horticulture Company
Nick Esthus — Gardens and Facilities Manager, Anderson Japanese Gardens
Michael LaRusso — Grower, Hampshire Farms
Jenny Wold — District 2 Program Advisor, FCAE Local Program Support
Trevor Ryan — Senior Assistant Superintendent, Barrington Hills Country Club
Chris Bausman — General Manager, Crimson Valley
Catherine Marsh — Horticulturist, Anderson Japanese Gardens
Larry Hubbard — Owner, Pepper Creek
Vicki Hubbard — Owner, Pepper Creek

Internal participants:

Dr. Jessica Berek — Interim Associate Vice President of Instruction
Jescelynn Gibbons — Associate Dean of Instruction
Robert McGarry — Associate Vice President of Campus Operations & Technology
Kristopher Rissman — Director of Campus Operations
Courtney Walz — Director of Development
Terry Lyn Funston — Director of Curriculum & Program Development
Janet Gallaher — Horticulture Faculty
Sean Walters — Biology and Horticulture Faculty
Kimberly Rotella — Greenhouse Ground Specialist
Catherine Macias — Administrative Specialist I

I. Department Updates

- A. The Horticulture Job Fair was held immediately prior to Advisory Committee meeting. Business partners expressed appreciation for the event and shared the two-hour length was appropriate.
- B. Horticulture U.S. Field Studies students visited several industry and cultural sites, including the Kane County Cougars' field, Unilock in Aurora, Cantigny Park in Wheaton, and Wilson's Nurseries in Hampshire.
- C. Gallagher shared that Horticulture students are participating in the Art in Bloom fundraiser at the Rockford Art Museum, received hands-on Tatami mat instruction from Artist-in-Residence Bill McKinley, and will develop art interpretation projects for display in the college library.



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- D. Walters shared that during Fall 2025, the Horticulture Club hosted children from the Early Learning Center for pumpkin decorating and bulb planting activities and continued its work on the pollinator garden.
- E. The department participated in the CTE Open House in Fall 2025 to promote college programs to high school students.
- II. College Updates
 - A. Berek reported that Spring 2026 enrollment is down 1% overall, while Horticulture enrollment has remained flat. The college anticipates stronger enrollment in Fall 2026.
 - B. The All-In Tuition model, implemented in Summer 2025, offers a flat rate of \$160 per credit hour, including textbooks, and is proposed to remain unchanged next year, pending Board approval.
 - i. The model has received national recognition, including coverage in professional publications and national conference presentations.
 - C. The college is developing a phased, multi-year plan to address deferred maintenance needs, including window and door replacements.
 - D. Nearly 60% of students are first-generation, and business partners were recognized for their support of student success through industry expertise and workforce alignment.
- III. Greenhouse Construction Project Overview
 - A. McGarry reported that the existing greenhouse, built in 1976, poses ongoing safety concerns due to age and structural shifting.
 - i. Plans propose constructing a 36' x 95' (approximately 3,500 sq. ft.) greenhouse designed to reduce costs while meeting program needs, featuring a concrete foundation, improved ADA access, radiant floor heating, shade systems, and updated irrigation and automation.
 - ii. The project is currently out for bid, with a recommendation expected at the next Board meeting.
- IV. Partner Updates
 - A. Hiring / Labor Market Needs
 - i. Business partners reported that Artificial Intelligence (AI) is being used to supplement the workforce by addressing labor shortages and improving efficiency, enabling employees to focus on skilled, judgment-based tasks. While AI enhances equipment efficiency, it cannot replace the value of human expertise and experience.
 - B. Other Updates
 - i. Business partners noted growth in agricultural education, particularly at the middle school level, with expanded programs emphasizing early career exploration and increased student participation to strengthen the pipeline into postsecondary programs such as Horticulture.