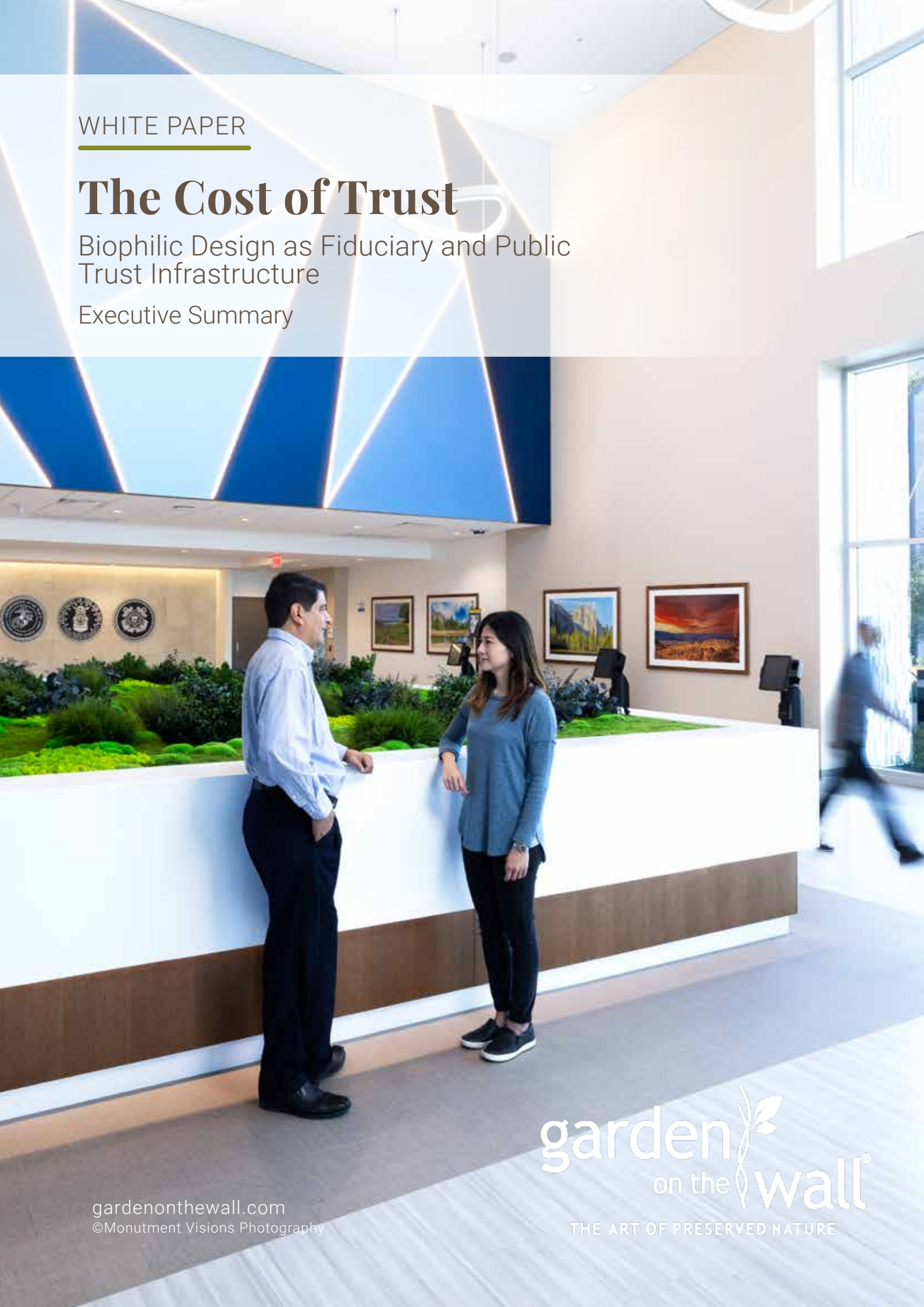
WHITE PAPER

The Cost of Trust

Biophilic Design as Fiduciary and Public Trust Infrastructure

Executive Summary



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THE ART OF PRESERVED NATURE

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Executive Summary

The Fiduciary Case for Biophilic Public Buildings

Government is the only buyer in the built environment with two binding obligations at once: spend public money efficiently, and serve the public good. This paper argues those obligations are not in tension in interior design decisions, they are frequently the same decision. The choice that produces the lowest total cost of ownership over a public building's lifecycle is also the choice that does the most to support employee wellbeing, visitor de-escalation, and the public's underlying trust in the institution housing them.

Why This Building Is Different

Most citizens never read a budget report or a performance scorecard. The DMV counter, courthouse corridor, and permitting office are the only government most people ever touch in person, and the room shapes how competent that government appears to be. Procedural justice research shows people judge legitimacy by the fairness of process, not just outcome, and the physical environment is part of that process.

29%
reduction in crime, including gun violence, in a randomized trial of greened vs. neglected public land

20+ years
GOTW preserved garden lifespan vs. recurring-cost living or fresh alternatives

$0
federally enforceable indoor VOC standard exists today, per EPA, making third-party verification essential

Deferred Maintenance Is a Confidence Problem

Public capital budgets are lumpy; discretionary maintenance is cut first. A dying living wall or neglected planter does not read as a maintenance lapse, it reads as institutional neglect, and that signal shapes how the public judges the agency behind it. Preserved botanical design removes the recurring cost most exposed to this budget cycle.

Total Cost of Ownership as Fiduciary Proof

Government's own facilities guidance, from the Whole Building Design Guide to the National Academies, treats life-cycle cost, not sticker price, as the standard for materials decisions. A 20-plus year preserved installation converts a volatile annual maintenance line into a single auditable capital expenditure, exactly what fiduciary responsibility looks like in practice.

The Multi-Output Efficiency Argument

Government is accountable for outputs most buyers only have to justify one or two of at a time: employee retention, visitor de-escalation, procedural legitimacy, and civic trust. Peer-reviewed research links nature contact directly to two of those outputs, finding that exposure to plants increases the degree to which people attribute warmth and trust to others around them, and that neighborhood vegetation density correlates with higher civic engagement and trust extended toward people outside one's own group. A single design line-item, justified once, returns measurable value across all four accountability lines simultaneously.

1,622 participants
across six controlled studies linking nature contact to perceived trust and warmth in others

7 year
GOTW manufacturer warranty backing every installation

4 outputs
accountability outputs served by one design decision: retention, de-escalation, legitimacy, civic trust

From Compliance to Public Good

The Audit-Proof Safety Net

With no binding federal VOC ceiling for non-industrial buildings, third-party verification is the de facto compliance layer agencies are pointed toward. GOTW's credential stack, HPD v2.3 at 100 ppm, Declare Red List Free, CDPH Section 01350, ASTM E84 Class A without fire retardants, and a cradle-to-grave EPD with negative cradle-to-gate embodied carbon, gives procurement officers documentation an audit can stand behind.

Serving the Public in the Same Room

The visitor at a social services counter or custody hearing is often encountering government on a hard day, not by choice. Research on high-stress public-facing waiting environments links overcrowded, chaotic settings to increased aggression, and calmer, more dignified environments to reduced stress. The most fiscally defensible expenditure and the most humane one are, in this category, the same line item.

What Doesn't Survive This Environment

Public buildings filter out design options most other sectors can afford to consider. Resilient material selection for areas within direct public reach, thoughtful placement of delicate elements out of reach, ADA and systems and fresh floral programs before cost is even discussed.

"The building that costs the public the least over its lifecycle and serves the public the most in the room is the same building."

Garden on the Wall® Standard

Garden on the Wall® maintains the most comprehensive third-party verification portfolio in the preserved botanical category: HPD v2.3 at 100 ppm full-system disclosure, Declare Red List Free, CDPH Section 01350, ASTM E84 Class A whole-system without added fire retardants, and a cradle-to-grave EPD with negative cradle-to-gate embodied carbon. The company has completed more than 1,900 installations exceeding 186,000 square feet, serving more than 60 Fortune 500 clients across more than 460 award-winning projects, with a 7-year warranty and 20+ year expected lifespan.

20+ year	Zero Maintenance	EPD Published	Complete Verification
product lifespan	No Water, light, or care required	Negative cradle-to-grave carbon	HPD • Declare • CDPH• ASTM E84

Download the full white paper with complete research citations, detailed ROI calculations, and implementation guidance at gardenonthewall.com. Request samples through Material Bank · CEU available through Architectural Record's Continuing Education Center (AIA/IDCEC/GBCI accredited)