

May 16, 2018

Melissa R. Gilbert, Ph. D., President, Board of School Directors  
Lower Merion School District  
301 East Montgomery Avenue  
Ardmore, PA 19003

Re: Stoneleigh: A Natural Garden

Dear President Gilbert:

The situation involving one of our members, Stoneleigh: A Natural Garden, is of great concern to all public gardens. As the American Public Gardens Association, we feel compelled to write you on behalf of our staff, board of directors, 625 member gardens, and over 9300 members.

Public Gardens attract over 120 million visitors per year (nearly that of all professional sports combined), serve as economic engines for their communities with an estimated \$2.3 Billion in revenue, and educate over 2 million people per year, the vast majority being those in grades K-5, where our gardens serve as living laboratories of biology, botany, horticulture, and the natural sciences. The over 35+ gardens that make up the *Greater Philadelphia Gardens* collaborative welcome 2.5 million visitors and have a cumulative economic impact of over \$250 million per year.

Stoneleigh: A Natural Garden is one of those gardens. It was conceived, preserved, and opened as an environment where visitors learn about the natural world; the use of Pennsylvania native plants, their pollinators, and all the wildlife and flora dependent upon them. Historic design underpinnings trace back to Olmsted and other pillars of landscape architecture, with much to offer beyond science in the way of the fine and performing arts. It is accessible to the entire community for its benefit and well-being.

The trees, plants, historic landscape and iconic view sheds of Stoneleigh: A Natural Garden must be considered as a whole. Seizing all or part of it and cutting down state champion trees, to make way for the development of parking lots and lighted athletic fields, seems inconsistent with a school district whose strategic plan promotes *"the creation of meaningful relationships to promote experiential learning, ongoing service, and engagement that will strengthen and support the student experience"*.

The Haas Family built Stoneleigh and provides transformational philanthropy through the William Penn Foundation, whose current funding priorities are *"increasing high-quality, educational opportunities for economically disadvantaged students; supporting arts, culture and the development of accessible and vibrant public spaces; and protecting the Delaware River watershed."*

We urge you to reconsider your proposed course of action in regard to this matter. We are not aware of any case in which one of our member gardens has had their property seized in such fashion, and believe it sends a dangerous message regarding the value of our natural world.

Sincerely,



William M. LeFevre  
President, Board of Directors



D. Casey Sclar  
Executive Director

Cc: Mr. Robert L. Copeland, Superintendent of Schools

Advancing public gardens as leaders,  
advocates and innovators.

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