



May 24, 2018

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

Dear President Gilbert and members of the Lower Merion School Board,

As representatives of the Philadelphia region's outstanding public gardens, arboreta and historic landscapes, we are deeply concerned about the threat to *Stoneleigh: a natural garden*. We urge the Lower Merion Board of School Directors to leave this unique garden intact.

Each of the 30-plus members of our consortium, **Greater Philadelphia Gardens**, contributes its own extraordinary attributes to making this region "America's Garden Capital." For more than 300 years, horticulture has been integral to the fabric of daily life in the Philadelphia region, from the small historic gardens within the city boundaries, to the grand estates of the Brandywine Valley, to the green canopy of early 20<sup>th</sup> century arboreta, to the more recently established gardens dedicated to the conservation of native species.

When Stoneleigh, the home of the Haas family, was donated by the Haas estate to Natural Lands in 2016 with the intention of opening the garden to all visitors, we were overjoyed that it would join our network of beautiful green spaces.

Stoneleigh encompasses exceptional trees, sweeping vistas, and intimate garden spaces that provide opportunities to refresh, learn, and be inspired. Portions of the garden and estate were designed by Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. and John Charles Olmsted, masters of American landscape architecture. It is a showcase for the aesthetic beauty of designed gardens and the natural richness of native plants and habitats.

Public gardens have an enormous impact on our region's economy – supporting over 1,500 jobs and generating an estimated \$256 million each year – and they are essential to preserving the environmental health of our planet. These green spaces are also vital to the education and experience of young people, who can discover the lasting "peacefulness and beauty" that was the wish of John and Chara Haas, whose ashes are scattered on their beloved Stoneleigh.

Please honor the bequest of their home and gardens to Natural Lands, this region, the public, and future generations.

Thank you,

R. William Thomas, Executive Director of Chanticleer & Chair of Greater Philadelphia Gardens

Maitreyi Roy, Executive Director of Bartram's Garden

Dr. Harold Sweetman, Executive Director of Jenkins Arboretum & Gardens

Nancy Goldenberg, Executive Director of the Arboretum at Laurel Hill & West Laurel Hill Cemeteries  
Paul B. Redman, President and Chief Executive Officer of Longwood Gardens  
Paul W. Meyer, Executive Director of the Morris Arboretum of the University of Pennsylvania  
Jeffrey A. Downing, Executive Director of Mt Cuba Center  
Matt Rader, President & CEO of the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society  
Claire Sawyers, Executive Director of Scott Arboretum of Swarthmore College  
Elizabeth 'Cricket' Brien, Executive Director of Tyler Arboretum  
Chris Strand, Director of Garden & Estate for Winterthur Museum Garden & Library  
Connie Houchins, Executive Director of Andalusia  
Chris van de Velde, General Manager of the Awbury Arboretum  
Dr. Jacob Thomas, Deputy Director for Living Collections at the Barnes Foundation  
Jane Weston, Director of Development and Community Relations of Barton Arboretum and Nature Preserve of Medford Leas  
Miles Arnott, Executive Director of Bowman's Hill Wildflower Preserve  
Virginia Logan, Executive Director & CEO of Brandywine Conservancy & Museum of Art  
Thomas Padon, Director of Brandywine River Museum of Art  
Valerie Flick, Director of Education at the Camden Children's Garden  
Gary Garrido Schneider, Executive Director of Grounds For Sculpture  
David A. Cole, Executive Director of Hagley Museum and Library  
Claudia Kent, Executive Director of Haverford College Arboretum  
Meg Bleecker Blades, Executive Director of the Highlands Mansion and Gardens  
Jack Staub, Executive Director of Hortulus Farm Garden & Nursery  
Josh Darfler, Garden Manager of James S. Kaskey Memorial Park of the University of Pennsylvania  
Jenny Rose Carey, Senior Director of PHS Meadowbrook Farm  
Barbara Tiffany, Executive Director of the Gardens at Mill Fleurs  
Kimberly Andrews, Executive Director of Shofuso Japanese House and Garden  
Lyle Rosenberger, Executive Director of Tyler Formal Garden  
Victoria Laubach, Executive Director of Welkinweir  
Jessica Baumert, Executive Director of the Woodlands Cemetery  
Jennifer Carlson, Executive Director of Wyck Association