



Good evening. I'm Molly Morrison, president of Natural Lands.

It's difficult not to be angry about the last few months of interactions between the Lower Merion School District and Natural Lands, the owners of Stoneleigh: *a natural garden*.

It should have been a time of anticipation—Natural Lands was just completing two years of planning and planting in order to open Stoneleigh's 42 acres as a public garden. Instead, it turned into a time of dread and fear of condemnation by the school district.

Our opening on Mother's Day weekend should have been a time of discovery and celebration by a community that had supported the transformation of Stoneleigh as a public space and that eagerly awaited the day when Stoneleigh was open for all.

Instead, those who visited expressed their disbelief that any of this green jewel would be put in jeopardy by the School District.

Natural Lands should be spending this time now planning programs for adults and children, and establishing partnerships—including with the School District—that would use Stoneleigh as an inspiring platform for teaching horticulture, botany, environmental science, biology, STEM, the arts, and more.

Even before we opened, we began hosting a student from Harriton who has been completing her senior project at Stoneleigh. Instead, we are spending time and money fighting with the school district over who will ultimately own the very land that she is using for her studies.

It's also difficult not to be angry about the disrespect the school district's action shows for John and Chara Haas and their family. It was in 1996 when John and Chara placed a conservation easement on Stoneleigh. Well over 20 years ago, they chose conservation over development.

Let me tell you what else has happened over the last 20 years in Lower Merion Township. Through their charitable giving, John, Chara, and their foundations have funded libraries, and fire companies, and churches, and art centers, and community health services, and parks, and conservancies, and schools, and Stoneleigh: *a natural garden*, and many other organizations—over \$65 million in total—all in Lower Merion Township, all in the last 20 years.

Could there be a family that has been more generous and more thoughtful about the future of its community? The answer is no. And that generosity has not been limited to Lower Merion Township. Every year, the William Penn Foundation, founded in 1945 by the original Haas family owners of Stoneleigh—Otto and Phoebe—invests more than \$110 million in the quality of life in the greater Philadelphia region. Every single year. Is this how the citizens of Lower Merion Township pay back the Haas's incredible affection for their home, their township, and the Philadelphia region?

There is only one way to right this wrong. And that is for the school district to publicly state that it will not pursue the taking of any portion of Stoneleigh for its purposes.