

July 24, 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:

We're following up today from our initial letter of May 16, 2018. We have monitored several outcomes regarding Stoneleigh: A Natural Garden and feel compelled to write you again on behalf of our staff, board of directors, 625 member gardens, and over 9300 members.

In our last letter, we noted that 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 our 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. It has positive impacts on community health, environmental, and the local economy.

Since we originally wrote you, we have observed a tremendous public opposition to your plans to seize all or part of Stoneleigh: A Natural Garden. Additionally, we've observed the rapid and bipartisan support which resulted in Act 45, signed into law by Gov. Wolf on June 25. These collectively show the needless uphill struggle you would face in further attempts to seize these lands, not to mention sacrificing time and taxpayer resources. We urge you to reconsider your proposed course of action in regard to this matter. Again, we are not aware of any case in which any 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.

We reiterate our original message. 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 your own school district's stated strategic goals as well as township, regional, and state priorities and opinions.

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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