



THE GARDEN CONSERVANCY

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June 5, 2018

Robert Copeland
Superintendent of Schools
Lower Merion School District
301 E. Montgomery Avenue
Ardmore, PA 19003-3399

Dear Mr. Copeland,

The Garden Conservancy, the nation's leading nonprofit organization dedicated to saving and sharing outstanding American gardens for the education and inspiration of the public, joins a growing number of organizations and individuals who oppose the possible use of eminent domain by the Lower Merion School District to take all or part of the 42-acre Stoneleigh Garden site for a new school and/or athletic playing fields.

In 2016, Stoneleigh was donated to Natural Lands by the Haas family, important philanthropists in the Lower Merion Community Township, with a singular purpose: to open Stoneleigh to the general public so that all could enjoy this natural treasure, free of charge. On their opening weekend last month, they had over 2,000 visitors.

In addition to being a valuable community resource, Stoneleigh also has a rich history and strong cultural significance. The garden design represents the longest, continuous involvement of the renowned Olmsted Brothers, one of the most influential landscape architecture firms in the mid-19th century. The firm prepared 237 drawings over a 50-year period, making Stoneleigh the best-documented property in the firm's history. Stoneleigh Garden boasts ten state champion trees and also emphasizes the use of native plants, making the garden ecologically important, and an important habitat for birds and pollinators.

Lastly, Stoneleigh Garden possesses economic significance to the larger community. In a recent study by Greater Philadelphia Gardens, it was found that **“their collective economic footprint as employers, purchasers of goods and services, and initiators of capital investments is sizable, yielding significant spillover economic activity.”**

While the Garden Conservancy recognizes the need for school districts to grow and expand, we believe it prudent to do so in such a way that would not rob the residents of Lower Merion and the broader region of a one-of-a-kind community treasure. We urge you to explore alternative expansion sites for a new school and/or playing fields.

On behalf of the Garden Conservancy and its Board of Directors,

James Brayton Hall
President and CEO