

16 March 2021

Federation Statement on the pending sale of the River Farm property

Fairfax County Planning Commission, and
Fairfax County Board of Supervisors

Dear Members of the Planning Commission and the
Board of Supervisors,

After much discussion among Federation Board members, we conclude that the pending sale of River Farm by the American Horticultural Society is potentially detrimental to neighboring communities and to Virginia history.

The proposed sale of River Farm for a published greatly disproportionate amount while the rejection of a fair NOVA Parks offer that would retail River Farm's natural landscape implies that a developer is anticipating building residences or apartments on the property.

This sale may cause River Farm to lose its identity as a healthy parkland rich in scenic biodiversity and educational history. This sale would be contrary to AHS's published mission and vision statements and could ignore the well-being of neighboring residents, county tourism, and Virginia pride.

River Farm is located near historic Mt. Vernon and was owned by George Washington as part of his River Farm Estate. An excellent history of River Farm is on the American Horticultural Society (AHS) website, [here](#).

In 1973, the AHS, a 501(c)3 nonprofit, used funds given the AHS by Mrs. Enid Annenberg Haupt to purchase River Farm as its corporate headquarters. Mrs. Haupt stipulated in the sale that River Farm, all 25 acres, was to be kept "open to the public and act as a model for their mission to educate and advocate for Earth Friendly and Sustainable gardening practices".

Since 1973, the AHS has made River Farm a living example of the Society's principles and mission, stating on its website the AHS "educates Americans about and advocates Earth-friendly and sustainable gardening practices, as well as models them at our River Farm headquarters in Alexandria, Virginia".

This may all change for the worse if the pending sale does not answer one significant question:

What is the intent of the potential buyer?

The AHS, in frequent press releases, state they want an owner who will keep the property open to the public. To that end, the AHS should apply for a Historic Overlay District as well as pursue a conservation easement on the property, which is an opportunity for AHS to sell the conservation tax credits. We understand the rights of the AHS to sell their property but the Federation reminds the AHS to include in its sale decision the impact on local resident's well-being, on the fragile river-edge environment, and on Fairfax history.

The Federation asks the Planning Commission and the Board of Supervisors to recommend the AHS, prior to the sale, to pursue a Historic Overlay District and a conservation easement for River Farm.

Thank you for your consideration and action on this local history and quality-of-life issue.



William S. Barfield
President, Fairfax County Federation of Citizens Associations
President@fairfaxfederation.org

To: ClerktotheBOS@fairfaxcounty.gov
Plancom@fairfaxcounty.gov
Cc: Board@fairfaxfederation.org