

Board Approves Historic Zoning for River Farm

Annenberg Foundation reasserts intent on restrictions, requirements of grant.

BY KEN MOORE
THE GAZETTE

Signs have been posted in front of American Horticultural Society headquarters that say the property is closed to the public, said Katherine Ward, of the Mount Vernon Council of Citizens Association.

"We find that unacceptable," she told the Board of Supervisors Tuesday, April 13.

Former AHS Executive Director Keister Evans, now a member of the Save the River Farms Committee, reiterated the history of River Farm, including negotiations that gave AHS ownership of the land "once we made it clear we would ... keep the property open to the public."

He called AHS plans to sell River Farm "a violation of the trust."

In fact, The Annenberg Foundation's letter to Terry Hayes, chairwoman of the American Horticultural Society dated April 7, surfaced before the Board of Supervisors meeting Tuesday, April 13.

The letter explains the agreement of the Annenberg Foundation to offer \$1 million for the AHS to purchase the land in 1972 for its "national headquarters and horticultural center for exhibits, meetings and related activities."

"The Grant Agreement and the Sales Contract do not provide for any alternate use of the Property, nor the right of the Society to sell the Property. The Grant Agreement further provides that, 'The Trustee and the Society hereby agree that if title to the Property shall not pass to the Society, [the Grant Agreement] shall be null and void,'" according to Cynthia Kennard, executive director of The Annenberg Foundation.

Kennard said Ambassador Walter H. Annenberg would never have made the grant to the American Horticultural Society if it knew AHS would later sell the property.

"The Foundation urges the Society to adhere to the representations and directives in both the Grant Agreement and the Sales Contract, which contain express limitations on the Society's ability to use the Property - specifically for its national headquarters and as a horticultural center - and the Society cannot use the Property for any other purpose," according to Kennard.

Both Keister Evans and Kennard discussed Enid Annenberg Haupt's passion for horticulture and her devotion to River Farm, which she



River Farm.

said "belongs to the American people." Haupt died in 2005.

"The Foundation appreciates the Society's commitment to the conditions of the Grant and Ms. Haupt's philanthropic legacy."

THE BOARD APPROVED a motion Tuesday, April 13, 2021, to rezone River Farm as a historic overlay district, adding a layer of protection for the property, as AHS continues to try to sell the property.

Mount Vernon Supervisor Dan Storck and the Board of Supervisors had asked Planning Staff in November to determine the feasibility of creating the historic overlay district.

"A massive undertaking," said Board of Supervisors Chairman Jeff McKay said Tuesday.

Planning staff recommended approval of the Historic Overlay District on Tuesday, April 13, and the Board approved the measure. Nine Supervisors approved the action Tuesday; Pat Herry abstained.

"This is a historic treasure, an environmental treasure, it is a once in a lifetime opportunity," said McKay. "It would be foolish of us not to take this opportunity."

Sen. Scott Surovell (D-36) introduced legislation in the General Assembly to give the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors additional authority to protect River Farm under its historic zoning authority. Gov. Ralph Northam offered an

amendment adding an emergency clause, so that it goes into effect immediately.

The overlay zoning at the county level, approved Tuesday 9-0-1, also goes into effect immediately.

"IT IS INSPIRING for so many to be advocating for preserving and protecting our history," said Storck.

Katherine Tobin first explored River Farm after seeing signs on the Parkway for AHS years ago.

"I visited and fell in love with the land, the gardens and the wildlife," she testified virtually at the Board of Supervisors public hearing on Tuesday, April 13. She said the history of the property doesn't just begin with George Washington, but with indigenous people who were the first caretakers and treated it as sacred, as did the founding father.

"River Farm is in serious risk for being lost forever unless we save it," said Tobin, one of the several speakers who testified before the Board on Tuesday.

"Never did we dream AHS would jeopardize... this landscape," said Laura Francis, of the Hunting Creek Garden Club.

"They should support this historic overlay district if they want to maintain the 100-year-legacy," said Katherine Ward, of the Mount Vernon Council of Citizens Association.

"A one time chance to save a

special place," said Anne Wilson Fafara.

Fafara was one of dozens of AHS volunteers who donated more than 5,000 hours a year of their time because "we loved AHS and we love River Farm and believed in both, the organization and the property."

She and the volunteers asked the AHS Board of Directors a number of questions when they learned of the Board's plan to sell the property, questions which were never answered. Nor did the Board of Directors meet with its volunteers, she said. <http://www.connection-newspapers.com/news/2020/sep/26/opinion-commentary-few-questions-about-sale-river/>

"Their promise has fallen by the wayside," said Fafara. AHS wants "to extract \$32 million that they were handed on a silver platter for free."

"AHS has lost the trust of its volunteers and the local community," she said.

THE ATTORNEY FOR AHS, John C. McGranahan, called the Society, "a wonderful steward of the property and a great neighbor."

He pledged that AHS does not intend to sell to a developer for a subdivision, and objected to the historic overlay district classification, saying that the Board of Supervisors has not worked nor included AHS in the process.

"Alarming and unnecessary," Mc-

Granahan called the rezoning classification.

"I reiterate my request for you to take a little more time. A historic overlay district should not be necessary," he said. "Work with AHS for 60-90 days. If successful, it certainly will be worth the time."

Jay Spiegel was the lone voice from the public that objected to the historic overlay district. He said AHS has been the steward of the land for the last 50 years and called the Board of Supervisors' action, "a strange way to show appreciation."

BUT NOVA PARKS, Northern Virginia Conservation Trust, and their partners made an offer to buy River Farm earlier this year, but the AHS Board rejected the offer, looking for their original asking price of \$32.9 million.

"We deeply appreciate the interest of NOVA Parks in River Farm and their proposal to purchase an option on the property, which if exercised, would involve payments to AHS over several years. We deliberated carefully over the proposal and its terms and concluded that their offer as currently written simply does not meet AHS's needs," according to AHS Board Chair Terry Hayes, at the time.

No counter offer was made nor discussion how to keep the property open to the public.

Local agent Sue Goodhart of Compass Real Estate Group in Alexandria listed the farm for sale, calling it a "once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to own 27 plus acres of riverfront property."

Bob Brackman, Interim Executive Director of River Farm said, "Once River Farm is sold, AHS will determine the best location for the headquarters to serve and build our national audience."

McGranahan appeared to convince Pat Herry to abstain from voting yesterday.

"To move this forward without AHS input today is a mistake and sets a dangerous precedent," said Herry. "I can't vote against this because I support the goals, but I can't vote for it because I can't support the process."

Storck said he had five meetings and phone calls with the AHS Board, members, the attorney and others.

"Many of them support our process," said Storck.

AMERICAN HORTICULTURAL SOCIETY went public on Sept. 4, 2020 with its plans to sell the
SEE HELPING, PAGE 12

WWW.CONNECTIONNEWSPAPERS.COM

He Had Their Backs: Harold Bell 'Inside Sports'

BY CHAR MCCARGO BAH
ALEXANDRIA GAZETTE PACKET

Harold Bell was the first African American to host and produce his own Sports Talk Radio show, "Inside Sports," in Washington, DC from 1972 through the 1990s. On his "Inside Sports" radio show he interviewed some of the most famous athletes in pro sports.

In 1975, Bell interviewed Muhammad Ali after he knocked out George Foreman in Zaire, Africa, on NBC affiliate WRC-TV 4, in Washington, DC. This made him the first African American to host and produce his own television sports special in prime time.

His interviews and friendship with Ali and Red Auerbach put his "Inside Sports" talk show on the map. Bell also interviewed national sports figures like Jim Brown, Spencer Haywood, Harry Edwards, Sonny Hill, Don King, Bighouse Gaines and John Chaney, just to name a few. These relationships became valuable when Bell was

advocating for NFL All-Pro Willie Wood and NBA pioneer Earl Lloyd to be inducted into their respective Halls of Fame after they were "Blackballed" by their leagues.

When Lloyd called Bell asking him to campaign for his induction into the NBA Hall of Fame, he in turn called Auerbach and then-Washington Times sports columnist Dick Heller for support. His next call was to an old friend, civil rights icon Congressman John Lewis, to be on the campaign team for Lloyd.

During the NBA All-Star weekend in Washington, DC in 2001, Bell's nonprofit organization "Kids In Trouble" organized an Earl Lloyd Day in Alexandria. The Saturday festival included a basketball clinic at Charles Houston Recreation Center. NBA stars Bob Lanier, Al Attles, KC Jones, Sam Jones, Earl Monroe and others attended.

Then-Governor James Gilmore declared it "Earl Lloyd Day" in the state of Virginia. The historic jazz and blues club, "The Bohemian Caverns" in Washington, DC, was the site that closed out the Earl Lloyd festival with Auerbach as host and basketball legend Sonny



From left, Earl, his wife and Harold.



Harold Bell.

Washingtonian. Bell attended high school at Spingarn where he was an all-around athlete playing three sports. After high school, Bell attended college and played football and basketball. He met his wife in 1967 and they married after the DC riots in 1968.

Today, Bell has his own weekly program, "Speak the Truth" Zoom Show every Sunday and Inside Sports Detoxx video show on YouTube. In addition, he is a popular blogger for Black Men in America.com.

Char McCargo Bah is a published author, freelance writer, independent historian, genealogist and a Living Legend of Alexandria. She maintains two blogs, <http://www.theotheralexandria.com> and <http://www.findingthingsforu.com>.

bid in our auction!

support the kids!!

invest in college dreams

Last Call...

to sponsor or attend

the scholarship fund of alexandria's

GALA 35

our 35th anniversary gala & auction for scholarships

VIRTUALLY | SATURDAY APRIL 24th

SPONSOR COCKTAILS at 6:15 PM | GALA at 7 PM

dinner | signature cocktails | music
inspiration | swag bag | community

sfagala.givesmart.com

THE SCHOLARSHIP FUND OF ALEXANDRIA

Much gratitude for our 2021 Corporate Partners

Jack Taylor's ALEXANDRIA TOYOTA

MGAC

KBR amazon FOURIER PRATT JBG SMITH DONOHOE

new target niji SignalVine Alexandria Gazette Packet CARBON • MCGARY • BLACKBURN Health Management Group

to support or join us!

Hill.

Lloyd was inducted into the NBA Hall of Fame in 2003 thanks to the efforts of Lewis, Auerbach and Bell who carried the torch for the NBA pioneer.

Bell was no stranger to the City of Alexandria; he worked closely with "The Untouchable" founders, George Logan-El, Lawrence Brown and Michael Johnson. They helped him coordinate his annual toy party for needy children leading into the Christmas holidays.

Another passion of Bell is helping at-risk inner city children. Bell and his wife Hattie founded Kids In Trouble, Inc., and the Hillcrest Saturday Program in 1968 shortly after the Washington, DC riots. The program served neighborhood kids and their families. Their work with at-risk children did not go unnoticed; President Richard M. Nixon invited them to the White House.

Harold Bell was born on May 21, 1938; he is a fourth generation

Board Approves Historic Zoning for River Farm

FROM PAGE 10

property, and continues to defend its decision. The majority of its Board, they said, called the sale, "the most viable option to allow for the continuation of our national nonprofit during very difficult financial times," said Terry Hayes, AHS Board Chair.

"Like many national, member-based nonprofits, our revenue streams are being reduced by the on-line habits of a population outside our traditional community. ... With the added financial strain caused by COVID-19, we have re-evaluated our priorities."

"The proceeds from the sale of River Farm will be used to create a significant endowment which has been the missing link in our financial viability. And so, the time has come," said Hayes. "As we prepare

to pass on the stewardship of River Farm, we share the community's hope of finding a new owner who will work to preserve and protect this beautiful and historic property."

GEORGE WASHINGTON ACQUIRED the 27.57-acre property at 7931 East Boulevard Drive in 1760, when it was called Clifton's Neck.

After a series of different owners and different names, the Soviet Embassy offered to buy the property in 1971 for use as a retreat for its staff. But during the Cold War, "many across the world objected to the thought of George Washington's farm becoming the possession of the Soviet Union," according to Board of Supervisors documents.

Philanthropist Enid Annenberg Haupt, a member of the American

Horticulturalist Society, helped the organization purchase the property and make it the headquarters of the society under the condition that the property remain open to the public and in honor of former president George Washington, of the nation's first great gardeners and horticulturalists.

The property was named River Farm.

"AHS has long sought to make River Farm a living representation of its principles and organizational vision of raising awareness about and fostering sustainable, earth-friendly gardening and horticultural practices. Thus, we were greatly shocked and saddened by the news on September 4, 2020 that the AHS Board of Directors intended to sell the River Farm property," Storck said.