

# The stage is set for a River Farm sale, but not to a private buyer

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COMPASS

River Farm currently serves as the headquarters for the American Horticultural Society, but is now up for sale.

The American Horticultural Society has agreed to enter into negotiations with Northern Virginia's regional park authority regarding its "interest in River Farm," as the AHS's attempt to sell the historic 27-acre property north of Mount Vernon has faced one hurdle after another.

A majority of the 10-member AHS board voted Friday to open formal talks with Nova Parks, per a release. That would include "possible partnership opportunities" and, presumably, a potential sale.

The park authority, according to that release, submitted a second offer in April after the "AHS Board determined an initial offer submitted in January did not meet AHS's needs." That second offer, as the Washington Business Journal's Alex Koma [previously reported](#), was for \$16 million and came from a partnership of Nova Parks and the nonprofit Northern Virginia Conservation Trust.

The property, 7931 E. Boulevard Drive, remains an active listing with Compass for \$32.9 million.

Negotiations are expected to begin in earnest next week.

The AHS board vote came two days after Virginia Attorney General Mark Herring held a press conference nearby to announce he may have the authority to block the controversial sale of River Farm, a bucolic property fronting the Potomac River that was once owned by George Washington. In late April, meanwhile, half of the AHS board came out in opposition to a potential sale.

"AHS can and should continue to steward the property in accordance with the public promises made by the society for nearly 50 years, and we will continue to do all in our power to accomplish that purpose," those members said.

The AHS has said repeatedly it needs to sell the property in order to steady its finances. But critics of that decision have long argued that philanthropist Enid Annenberg Haupt donated \$1 million to the nonprofit in 1973 to help it buy River Farm under the condition the site remain open space — certainly not a new subdivision or a private estate. Haupt was spurred to act some 48 years ago as River Farm [was being eyed by the Soviet Union as a retreat for its diplomats](#).

“We believe in reading the deed and other legal documents generated at the time when AHS purchased the property, that Mrs. Enid Haupt was very interested in keeping the property out of the hands of a foreign government,” AHS Board Chair Terry Hayes wrote in a recent letter to donors. “I think if she were alive today and asked to make a choice between AHS becoming the conservator of River Farm or investing the sale proceeds in the future of AHS and horticulture in America, she would choose the latter.”

Herring believes Haupt was sufficiently clear about her intentions that the AHS must respect those wishes. The nonprofit had vowed to find a buyer that would keep River Farm open to the public, but until this Saturday morning announcement, had not committed to negotiate with a nonprofit over other potential bidders.

While the society's decision likely takes River Farm off the market for a private buyer, the 16.5-acre River View, just next door, [remains on the market for \\$60 million](#).



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