

## WEEKLY BRIEFING

# River Farm no longer for sale

The year-long battle over the future of River Farm has seemingly come to a close. The five American Horticultural Society board members who supported the sale of the historic property resigned on Sept. 30, and the five remaining board members, all of whom opposed the sale, terminated the listing agreement for the property on Sunday.

"In the best interest of the American Horticultural Society, the Board's five officers have resigned to allow for the institution to forge a new path forward," the board members said in a statement. "The departing Board officers wish the organization well."

River Farm will reopen to the public and will continue to serve as the headquarters for AHS, as it has since the 1970s, according to a statement from the five remaining board members.

"Throughout the year-long debate over the future of River Farm, we have always been convinced that there is a strong and viable path forward – with AHS as the steward of the property, supported by like-minded friends and partners. And now, with

River Farm officially off of the open real estate market, we have the opportunity to fully realize this dream," the AHS board members said in a statement.

Over the next few weeks, the board will work to reopen the property to the public and resume AHS' garden volunteer program. The board members also announced the launch of a fundraising campaign to help ensure the long-term future of River Farm and AHS.

The five remaining board members, who are starting the process of reconstituting the board, expressed optimism about the future of River Farm in a statement released on the night of Sept. 30.

"This development marks a turning point for AHS and River Farm and presents an important opportunity to chart a new course on the eve of our 100th anniversary celebration – one that will both strengthen AHS as the stewards of River Farm and will ensure the preservation of this priceless property in perpetuity," the remaining board members said in a statement.

AHS put the property up for sale in September 2020,

claiming the sale of the site, which was once part of George Washington's stretch of Potomac River-side farm properties, would allow the organization to support its national mission. The decision drew widespread criticism from the surrounding community, local politicians and even Gov. Ralph Northam (D) who feared a sale of the property would close the property to the public.

Many argued such a move was in direct violation of the conditions philanthropist Enid Haupt laid out when she donated the \$1 million AHS used to secure the property in the 70s. Consequently, Virginia Attorney General Mark Herring and Washington D.C. Attorney General Karl Racine launched investigations into AHS to determine whether the sale of the property violated Virginia or D.C. nonprofit laws.

According to a spokesperson for Racine's office, the D.C. investigation has been dropped since the board members' departure.

"It's a positive step that the American Horticultural Society is no longer selling its property and River Farm will remain available to the public just as the donors of the site intended," according to the statement. "... Following our investigation, the property will now remain a nonprofit site for the public to use and enjoy."

The decision to sell River Farm also divided AHS' board. Five board members led by former Board Chair Terry Hayes supported selling the property, while five board members – Laura Dowling, Holly Shimizu, Marcia Zech, Skipp Calvert and Tim Conlon – opposed the sale. Last week, the deadlocked board was un-

able to vote in support of an offer that would have sold the property to NOVA Parks. The regional park authority and the Northern Virginia Conservation Trust have worked over the last year to secure public and private funding to purchase the property in order to keep it open to the public.

"Over the past few months, the divisions that existed on AHS' board had prevented them from mov-

ing forward as an organization, and hopefully that changes now," Alan Rowsome, executive director of NVCT, said in a statement. "We are excited to work together with the new leadership of AHS to support them and to ensure that River Farm remains an incredible community asset that honors the cultural, historical, and natural legacy it represents."

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PHOTO/CODY MELLO-KLEIN

The historic River Farm property has been on the real estate market since September 2020.



## WAIT UNTIL DARK



Set against the socially turbulent 1960s, this play follows the story of Susy, a blind woman who, while left alone in her apartment, becomes embroiled with a group of con men hatching an elaborate scam. As the tension mounts, Susy must fend for herself, but the phone line is cut and the house is plunged into darkness. Can Susy outwit her murderous visitors?

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