

## **The White Gardens and the Resident Curator Program**

### ***Frequently Asked Questions – Alternative Response***

**By Donald W. Hyatt**

The Resident Curator Program has posted answers to some of the questions initially raised about their claims to the White Gardens in their document [Frequently Asked Questions - 4/21/2022](#). They are telling us we are victims of “misinformation” and offer what they consider an accurate assessment of the situation. By contrast, I feel it is the Resident Curator Program that is misleading the public and I offer some alternative responses including my rationale. In this document, the FAQ answers provided by the RCP committee are provided in blue text in a slightly smaller font. My answers follow their comments and are in a standard black font of normal size. I do not make unsubstantiated claims but offer my statements supported by facts gleaned from various RCP documents as well as other identified sources.

I do feel that I have the expertise to discuss items related to the White Garden. I knew Margaret and J.C. White well and visited their home and garden for over 50 years. Many people consider me an expert on rhododendrons and azaleas. In fact, the Park Authority has referenced me in a number of their reports posted on the Resident Curator website. I did assist former Directors of Green Spring Gardens with plant identification on the White property. I would like to point out that many images of rhododendrons and azaleas used by the Park Authority in their publications are actually my personal photographs. I have been disappointed, however, that they did not give me proper attribution. More of my images of the White property can be seen at the following website hosted by the Potomac Valley Chapter of the American Rhododendron Society:  
<http://www.arspvc.org/articles/mwhite.html>

**Q: An application for the curatorship of White Gardens is currently under review by Park Authority and Resident Curator Program staff. What is the evaluation process and what are the opportunities for public input?**

A: One application is under consideration by the RCP evaluation team for curatorship of the White Gardens house and barn. This application is not for curatorship of the gardens in the park. The application is available for review on the White Gardens Webpage.

In accordance with the program’s procedures, an evaluation team consisting of relevant Park Authority and County staff was convened to lead a series of meetings over a 30- day public comment period. These include working meetings of the evaluation team, which are open to the public to observe, as well as a public hearing during which the applicant shares a presentation with opportunity for public questions and comments. Written questions and comments were accepted via [parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov) during the 30-day public comment period ending on April 13, 2022.

A virtual public hearing was held on March 29, 2022. Additional meetings of the RCP evaluation team to review and discuss the application were held on March 2 and April 6, 2022. Recordings of these meetings are available [here](#).

The 30-day public comment period has been extended through **May 13, 2022**. Members of the public are asked to email questions and comments to [parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov). Once the public comment period closes, the evaluation team will reconvene to score the application using

the program's criteria and forward its recommendation to the Park Authority Board for review. If selection of the curator is made, the leasing process begins, which consists of a Board of Supervisors public hearing before final approval.

In accordance with the program's procedures, proposals are evaluated using the following criteria: proposed use and public benefit/access, rehabilitation plan, experience and qualifications, overall proposal organization and presentation, and public response.

### **Alternative Answer:**

The opportunity for public input has been minimal at best due to a lack of communication between the Resident Curator Program staff and the local community. Admittedly, some meetings were held in public places. Others were Zoom presentations over the Internet. However, this entire program has been veiled in secrecy and meetings were not adequately advertised, especially to those who have shown a long-standing interest in the White Gardens. To hold a meeting at a public place and not tell people about the event is **not** a public meeting.

There are obvious signs for this criticism of poor communication by the RCP team. An obvious example is the fact that the Resident Curator Program supposedly advertised the availability of the White Gardens curatorship over a period of three months and received only one application. That applicant admitted in her Zoom presentation that she only learned about the opportunity two weeks before the final deadline. There was obviously a communication problem.

The truth is the entire Resident Curator Program and its claim to the White Gardens has come as a total surprise to those of us who have supported that garden for the last 12 years. This includes volunteers who have tried to help maintain the garden after the Park Authority took over in 2010, individuals and plant societies that have made charitable contributions to support the garden, members of the Friends of the White Gardens organization, and even members of the White family. These people should be considered stakeholders and should have been notified of any change in status for the garden. They were not notified and most discovered that the residence was about to be tied up in a lease for possibly as long as 30 years only a few days before the evaluation committee was about to make their final decision on that one application.

The minutes of the meetings and tapes of the Zoom sessions are posted on the web but a quick look at them makes the lack of communication by this committee obvious. I must repeat that there was indeed only **one** application for the Resident Curator Program for the White Gardens and that solitary applicant admitted that she only learned about the opportunity two weeks before the deadline date. This is a prestigious area of Fairfax County where available housing is scarce and rents are high. An opportunity to live in a large home surrounded by a beautiful garden, rent-free for a period of 24 to 30 years, should have garnered more interest.

Prior meetings about the future of the White Gardens and the bond referendum brought out big crowds of interested citizens. Many of us attended that meeting in 2012 at the Mason District offices when the bond referendum and future of the White Gardens was discussed. It was standing room only as I recall. Community support was high and the bond referendum did pass. Look closely at the timeline of Resident Curator Program meetings generated from the committee's own notes. Observe attendance levels. There was obviously a problem.

**July 27, 2021, 7:00 PM** – Initial Public Information Meeting at Green Spring Gardens chaired by Ms. Judy Pederson and presentation by Ms. Stephanie Langton. According to

the minutes, only ten (10) people attended and yet there were seven (7) staff members from Fairfax County there to answer questions. Why so few attendees? This meeting was obviously not well advertised.

**August 7, 2021** – Ms. Stephanie Langton conducts an Open House at the White Garden for prospective applicants. This was announced at that July 27 meeting that so few people attended. Did anyone attend this open house? No attendance figures have been provided.

**November 10, 2021** – Deadline date for Application Submission to be a Resident Curator at the White Garden. There was only one (1) applicant for the White Garden and she learned about the opportunity only two weeks before the deadline.

**March 28, 2022, 7:00 PM** – Virtual Meeting held to present the sole application to the committee and the public. This forum was apparently announced by a postcard mailed to a few neighbors who live near the White Gardens.

**April 6, 2022, 10:00 AM** – Virtual Public Meeting to evaluate the solitary proposal. Several people did receive an email alert from the former director of Green Spring Gardens, Mary Olein, only 30 minutes prior to the meeting. Mary is not listed as part of the committee but worked with us in support of the White Garden in her former role. No public input was allowed at that meeting but questions could be submitted by email prior to an April 13 deadline. Apparently, there was enough concern raised in those seven days to cause the committee to extend the deadline date for comments until May 13.

#### **Q: Is the White Gardens house designated as historic?**

A: Yes. The White Gardens house is a two-story brick residence designed by D.C. architect Joe Harry Lapish and built in 1939. The house was designated historic in 2018 when it was approved by the Fairfax County History Commission for listing on the County's Inventory of Historic Sites (IHS). The house exemplifies the cultural, economic, political, and historic heritage of the county, while serving as a visual feature of community identity. The house retains many of its character-defining features, including decorative brick segmental arches over windows, enclosed wrap-around porch addition, U-shaped wood staircase with decorative wood railing, and original wood chair rails, baseboards and crown moldings. Properties listed on the County's IHS are eligible for inclusion in the County's Resident Curator Program (RCP)

#### **Alternative Answer:**

The White residence should not be considered a historic structure. The Master Plan did not consider the home historic and there is no mention of that as a consideration when developing the garden. Margaret White made arrangements to transfer title to the Park Authority after her passing but her intent for the property is clearly stated in the deed which is reference in the Historical Structure Report requested by Mr. David Buchta of the Park Authority at a cost of \$67,000. It was prepared by the engineering firm Wiss, Janney, Elstner Associates, Inc. (WJE) and published on December 20, 2017. On page 23 of the 186-page report, they reference the deed and Mrs. White's intent that her property be used primarily as a horticultural park:

“The Property is being conveyed upon the express, accepted and agreed upon conditions that until September 30, 2075, the Property shall only be used primarily as a horticultural park and shall not be used for golf or equestrian activities and athletic fields.” The Nature Conservancy and American Horticultural Society are granted legal standing to enforce the covenants in the deed.

In the Fairfax County Inventory of Historic Sites Master List dated March 2022, there are three homes as well as two churches listed in the Mason District as historic. They are all at least 100 years old including the Moss House of Green Spring Farm which dates back to the 1700s. The White's home is not comparable in age to those other structures. The facts show that the Whites built their home in 1939 and the only distinguishing characteristic is the wrap-around glass porch / garden room they added in 1958. It was recently added to that list of historic homes in the Mason District in 2018 following the WJE report. That entry is highlighted in red because it is not included in Fairfax County's Comprehensive Plan.

There is a small barn on the property originally used to support a pig farm but it cannot be used as an example of a representative structure from a prior era. The Whites modified that barn significantly. They made the lower portion into a garage for cars. They added three windows to the upper portion so the children could have a play area. The building is not historically accurate.

The WJE Historical Structures Report did reference the motivation of the Park Authority for commissioning that expensive report:

“The Park Authority is proposing to include the main house and possibly the barn into the Resident Curator Program, which would allow the property to be occupied and maintained.”

“The Park Authority has requested Historic Structure Report (HSR) documentation be performed, along with a cost estimate for all proposed recommendations. The cost estimates would be utilized to inform the Park Authority and any potential resident curator on repair and maintenance work.”

Taxpayers in Fairfax County should be outraged to learn that the Park Authority used \$67,000 of the 2012 bond referendum money to obtain this report. That money should have been used to develop the site into a public garden, not to force it to fit within the guidelines of some other committee looking for a project to keep them busy.

One final comment about that Historical Structures Report is that it includes six pages of historic context about the land in Annandale where the Whites built their home.

“The property developed by John C. and Margaret K. White in 1939 was part of a large land grant conveyed to King Charles II of England to a group of noblemen in the 1600s. The land was subsequently rented to farmers and other settlers and over time subdivided into smaller and smaller parcels.”

They include all kinds of historic details about title transfers and ownership of that large tract over 300 years leading eventually to the White's purchase of their 13 acres. That may sound very impressive until one realizes that the White's property was an insignificant parcel at the northeast edge of the large tract they reference. The same history applies to every home and business in large region centered around Annandale including the Dollar Tree on Little River Turnpike. Should the county erect some kind of historical marker there, too?

**Q: Does the deed and Master Plan allow for a resident curatorship on the property?**

A: The John C. and Margaret K. White Horticultural Park Master plan from 2006 enumerates the goals and objectives of the park, as primarily a horticulture park. These include preserving and enhancing the horticultural resources, ensuring that sensitive resources are appropriately maintained and preserved and promoting stewardship, educational, and interpretive opportunities, all to produce a quality, passive user experience. The deed, also outlined in the Master Plan, allows the house to be rented for residential use if any revenue produced is used for horticultural park purposes. Under a residential curator lease, investments made by the curator go directly toward improvements to the leased historic structures, with no revenue accrued. Residential curatorship of the house and barn is not to interfere with the current and future natural resource management or public use of the park as outlined in the deed and park's master plan.

**Alternative Answer:**

It is important to look at the mandates in the Master Plan before discussing any actions of the Resident Curator Program. Mrs. White approved the Master Plan when they shared it with her in 2006. The first page of that plan specifies guidelines for property development.

**Purpose and Description of Plan**

The Master Plan for the White Horticultural Park will guide its development from a private residence and garden to a public garden. The plan addresses resource management and preservation, cultural resource preservation, and site improvements, and recommends strategies to enhance visitor enjoyment and experience. This document serves as a guide for all future planning on the site. It should be referred to before any planning and design projects are initiated.

The Resident Curator Program in Fairfax County was just started in 2014 following a 2011 resolution in the State of Virginia allowing such programs. It obviously did not exist in 1999 when the Park Authority signed the original agreement with Mrs. White. The guidelines that the Resident Curator Program chose for their implementation are not compatible with the plans the Park Authority agreed to when they made the initial agreement with Mrs. White. The Master Plan for the White Property that was published in 2006 does mention the possibility of a resident in the home but not such a restrictive lease as the Resident Curator Program wants.

The Master Plan proposes the effective use of the residence on page 25 (pdf p. 33). It indicates in several places that the upper level of the home could be used for a resident who could oversee the garden whereas the lower level is reserved for public use. The following discussions are quoted from the Master Plan.

**Residence Adaptive Reuse**

The residence on the White site presents many opportunities. Consideration may be given to the conversion of the first floor of the residence to public space. The second floor may be set aside for use as an on-site caretaker's residence. Exterior access to expanded restroom facilities within the residence may be provided.

### **Conceptual Development Plan**

Some of the proposed elements are new to the site and some are adapted from existing features, but all are intended to support the horticultural functions of the park and enhance the visitor experience.

### **Caretaker Residence and Program Space**

The residence may serve two purposes. The first floor may be utilized for public use, such as garden/horticultural programs and as meeting space for small groups, while the second floor may serve as a caretaker's residence. Any public use will require that all facilities be ADA compliant.

Nowhere in the Master Plan is there a suggestion that the key architectural elements in the White Garden should be leased to another party and made off limits to the general public for an extended period of time of 24 to 30 years.

### **Q: What would be the role and responsibilities of a resident curator at White Gardens?**

A: The Resident Curator Program enables the County to enter into long-term leases with qualified tenants who agree to rehabilitate and maintain publicly owned historic structures in accordance with established preservation standards, while providing reasonable public access. A resident curator lease would allow for approved use and rehabilitation of the historic structures, which in the case of White Gardens includes residential use of the house and use of the barn. The leased boundary around the structures would be kept to a minimum to not interfere with public use of the grounds, with an area designated for curator parking. In addition to fulfilling required improvements to the historic structures within the first five years of the lease, the curator is responsible for ongoing maintenance of the leased area for the duration of the lease.

In accordance with the terms of the lease, the curator is required to provide reasonable public access to the historic structures. This typically occurs in the form of an annual open house event, though there are other virtual opportunities to explore as well.

Use of the barn is to be shared with Park Authority staff in coordination with volunteer efforts.

### **Alternative Answer:**

The Resident Curator Program is only interested in finding someone to live in and maintain a building. It has not considered that the primary focus of the White Gardens is horticulture and developing a public garden and not historic preservation. The Master Plan does reference the need for skilled staff at the garden on page 28 (pdf p. 36).

### **Site Personnel**

Oversight and/or staffing by professional horticulturalists and specially trained grounds staff will be required. Managing and maintaining high quality horticultural resources requires staff with specialized education, training, and experience. During peak gardening season, additional volunteer hours per week would enable the staff to maintain quality plant displays. Ideally, the primary horticulturalist would have at least a two-year degree in horticulture plus a few years of experience. Seasonal staff with specialized training would be beneficial.

The family applying for the Resident Curator Program does not have any horticultural training.

**Q: What responsibilities would the curator have for the natural resource management of the park? Will the RCP evaluation team consider the applicant's skills and experience in horticulture when selecting?**

A: Curator responsibilities will not include care or maintenance of the natural resources in the park, or any concern outside of the leased curator property. The RCP evaluation team will consider the experience and qualifications of the applicant as they relate to the proposed use and rehabilitation of the house and barn.

Should the curator be interested in contributing to these broader park efforts, this would occur on a volunteer basis with oversight from the appropriate Park Authority branch, and any donation of the curator's time or resources would not count toward the curator's required investment as written into the lease. The existing management, oversight and operations related to the horticultural collection and to park maintenance will continue uninterrupted by the addition of a curatorship of the house and barn. Use of the barn will be designated in the lease as shared with Park Authority staff and park volunteer programs.

**Alternative Answer:**

As stated in the previous section, the Resident Curator Program should not apply for the White Gardens. The Park Authority, however, should clearly be looking for competent staff with strong horticultural skills to properly maintain the plantings.

**Q: What improvements to the house and barn are required of the curator by the Resident Curator Program?**

A: For curatorship of the house, the program requires the curator to undertake the necessary improvements outlined in the 2021 Adjusted Treatment Plan. This document modifies the 2017 Treatment Plan for the property by removing improvements already made to the structure, while accounting for inflation. The total estimated project cost for the house is \$270,930. If a prospective curator is interested in use of the barn, the curator will be required to make the priority improvements outlined in the 2021 Adjusted Treatment Plan. The total estimated project cost for the barn is \$57,296.

**Alternative Answer:**

Margaret White had just turned 100 when the Master Plan was released in 2006. By that time, she was beginning to lose mobility and had started regularly using a walker and occasionally a wheel chair. She was wheelchair bound in the final years of her life but she had made the entire first floor of her home including the glass porch where she spent most of her time completely accessible. The Master Plan does state that all trails and walkways should be made ADA compliant but that should be extended to the first floor of the home so the public can appreciate the spectacular garden room. It looks out on the core of the garden and the most scenic views on the property including the most majestic rhododendrons in the garden, the azalea border, and the meadow. Making sure that the property is ADA compliant should not be the responsibility of a curator. Money from the \$500,000 bond referendum in 2012 should have been used to make those changes.



**Q: What improvements has the Park Authority already undertaken at the White Gardens House?**

A: The Park Authority has made numerous improvements to the house in recent years and is preparing for additional improvements to be completed in 2022. The improvements were made to prepare the house for the RCP and offer an attractive situation for curators. Maintenance since 2018 has included mold remediation, roof repairs, wallpaper removal and painting, wood window rehabilitation and weatherization, porch addition, roof repairs and HVAC replacement. Infrastructure work in 2022 will include public water and sewer connections.

**Alternative Answer:**

It is difficult to see any improvements by the Park Authority to the house or the garden over the past 12 years. The entire place has declined during that time due to neglect. One cannot expect a refined garden or a residence to sit idle for that length of time without any deterioration. The \$500,000 bond money from 2012 could have been used to begin the conversion of this property to a public garden two years following Mrs. White's death. We have now gone 12 years and the Park Authority has apparently spent most of that money on expensive reports and trying to counter decay cause by neglect. Mrs. Marie Reinsdorf, a former member of the Park Authority, inquired about the money from the bond referendum and was told they had spent already spent \$483,683 but would not provide an accurate accounting. She was able to track down invoices and expenditures related to write a November 13, 2020 article for *Annandale Today* titled "[The John & Margaret White Horticultural Gardens: What happened to the bond money?](#)" for *Annandale Today*.

She produced the following list in that piece which admittedly does not reconcile with the Park Authority's totals. Regardless, this waste of money allocated to develop a public garden is appalling. I will reference portions in future discussion.

- Repave 150 feet of driveway – \$115,634
- Invasive species management – \$21,912
- Limited archaeology – \$11,452.75
- Meadow restoration – \$80,000
- Preservation and documentation of existing garden – \$19,800 (two invoices were provided adding up to this amount)
- Historic structures report – \$67,867
- Archaeologist/historian hours/Versar Inc. – \$35,294.99
- A spreadsheet lists more than 90 entries for grounds, design, construction and other costs – \$195,613.34
- Another spreadsheet lists more than 40 items for grounds, design consultant, construction site work, and other items – \$193,017.64.

We do know that the Park Authority used \$67,867 to produce that Historic Structures Report so they could claim residence for their program. There were additional costs for historian and archaeology studies that have nothing to do with horticulture mission of the park. These were obviously incurred in order to try to reclassify the property in order to use it for the Resident Curator Program. The truth is, county's master list of historic structures in the Mason District



identifies 3 houses and 2 churches, all of which were 100 years old or more. In 2018, they used those efforts to add the White home built in 1938 with the garden room added in 1959 to the list so they can claim it for their program.

The Park Authority claims to have used \$21,912 for invasive species management but I find that figure hard to believe when entire portions of the garden including many large rhododendrons and azaleas were engulfed by vines and subsequently perished. There were two invoices totaling \$19,800 for documenting and preserving the existing garden. I personally walked the property many times helping to identify most of the rhododendrons and azaleas in the garden. I worked with interns funded by local plant societies who were recording that data. I volunteered my services and certainly didn't charge a fee

Then there is the whopping \$80,000 in 2020 to restore the meadow. From the time the Whites bought the property in 1938 until she died in 2010, the Whites cut that 3-acre field several times a year so it was always lovely meadow of native grasses and buttercups. When the Park Authority took over, they did almost nothing with the meadow for a decade so it degenerated into an eye-sore with invasive plants, brambles, and weed trees.

I did walk the property in 2020 with former Green Spring Gardens Director Nicole Connor and staff from the Larry Weaner Landscape Associates from Pennsylvania that they hired to clear the meadow and replant it with wildflowers. That firm has warned the Park Authority that the plantings will need care and maintenance or the meadow will return to that same tangle of invasive plants and weeds in short order.

Some of the actions taken by the Park Authority have puzzled us. They removed the copper guttering from the home because they thought it might attract thieves but they did not replace it. That could have been the cause of moisture damage to the home and foundation including water problems in the basement. That likely contributed to mold problems in the house that we understand they are trying to correct now. The Park Authority also took down the greenhouse as they thought it would attract vandals.

We see major expenditures of the bond money to fix up the interior of the home so they can turn it over to that family, rent-free, for at least the next 24 years. Most of those problems in the home were likely caused by neglect, too.

**Q: How will the Resident Curator Program and its evaluation team address any additional proposals in the application which go beyond the scope of the house and barn?**

A: The applicant puts forth a detailed work plan for carrying out the tasks required for the house's rehabilitation. Similarly, a detailed work plan is presented to carry out required improvements to the barn. The proposal includes reasonable public access to these historic structures. These proposals are under consideration by the evaluation team. The parameters of the Resident Curator Program require that when the program's evaluation team is considering an application for curatorship, it adheres to strict evaluation of these required responsibilities. Consequently, the evaluation of any additional proposals offered by applicants for improvements outside the scope of the historic structures and beyond the

capacity of the RCP evaluation team, requires separate review at a later date. These proposals are not for consideration for approval under a resident curator lease.

Beyond the scope of what is required for a resident curatorship at White Gardens, the applicant proposes investment into the following: restoration of the greenhouse, contributions to parking improvements for visitors, an ADA facility for visitors, use of multi-media for interpretive guides and tours, and public events related to the park and the property's heritage.

Of these additional proposals, the evaluation team will consider the proposal of the current applicant to restore the greenhouse. While it is not a requirement for curatorship of the house, it is an improvement which would directly impact the house and is worthy of consideration as a significant piece of the dwelling's heritage.

The other proposed investments outlined in the application with broad impact to the park and its operation would require a separate review and public comment process at a later date. The RCP evaluation team will not consider these proposals during its evaluation and scoring of the application.

If the prospective curator is interested in participating in the natural resource maintenance efforts throughout the park, the curator will work with the appropriate branch of the Park Authority for direction and approval, on a volunteer basis.

### **Alternative Answer:**

The Resident Curator Program should abandon any projects related to the White property. Their actions only impede the development of that site into a public garden. Management of this asset should be transferred to some competent organization instead.

In fact, the county should review the cost effectiveness of the entire Resident Curator Program. It seems that the resources the group uses could surely be used more effectively elsewhere. A review of the RCP accomplishments since its establishment in 2014 is genuinely sad. To date, after seven years of operation, there are only seven homes listed in their inventory, one of which is the White Garden which clearly does not belong. Of the other six homes, one has a curator, one will be re-advertised soon, three are undergoing rehabilitation, and one just finished the application process. Those properties are listed below:

- Ellmore Farmhouse, 2739 West Ox Road, Herndon, VA, 20171 – Curator Selected
- Lahey Lost Valley, 9750 Brookmeadow Drive, Vienna, VA, 22182 – Re-advertised Soon
- Hannah P. Clark House, 10605 Furnace Road, Lorton, VA, 22079 – Under Rehabilitation
- Turner Farmhouse, 10609 Georgetown Pike, Great Falls, VA, 22066 – Under Rehabilitation
- Stempson House, 9501 Furnace Road, Lorton, VA, 22079 – Under Rehabilitation
- Ash Grove House, 8881 Ashgrove House Lane, Vienna, VA, 22182 – Applications Closed

One can only imagine how many expensive reports this group has requested and how much money has been used in repairs, only to turn those properties over to individuals with extended leases that do not generate any income for the county. The RCP website just added three more properties they hope to include in the future but the responsibility for those homes could easily be managed by some other section of the Park Authority.

I am amazed when I review the extensive staff list on Resident Curator Program website. In addition to its director, Ms. Stephanie Langston, one must question what all these other people do to accomplish so little:

## **Fairfax County Resident Curator Program Program Information, Scope and Parameters**

### **Park Authority Staff**

Kirk W. Kincannon, CPRP, Director, Fairfax County Park Authority  
Sara Baldwin, Deputy Director, Operations, Fairfax County Park Authority  
Aimee Long Vosper, Deputy Director, Chief of Business, Fairfax County Park Authority  
Cindy Walsh, Director, Resource Management Division  
Dr. Elizabeth Crowell, Manager, Cultural Resources Management and Protection Branch  
Karen Lindquist, Historic Preservation Program Coordinator  
Denice Dressel, Historic Preservation Specialist

### **Resident Curator Program Development Project Team Members**

#### **Staff Work Team**

Linda Blank, Department of Planning and Zoning  
Kellington Bodden, Purchasing Branch, Fairfax County Park Authority  
Janet Burns, Financial Management Branch, Fairfax County Park Authority  
Anne Keisman Cissel, Public Information Office, Fairfax County Park Authority  
Leonard Clark, Risk Management  
Alan Crofford, Park Operations Division, Fairfax County Park Authority  
Elizabeth Crowell, Resource Management Division, Fairfax County Park Authority  
Denice Dressel, Resource Management Division, Fairfax County Park Authority  
Josephine Gilbert, Department of Finance  
Michael Lambert, Facilities Management Department  
Judith Pedersen, Public Information Office, Fairfax County Park Authority  
Daniel Robinson, Office of the County Attorney  
Sara Silverman, Office of the County Attorney  
Cindy Walsh, Resource Management Division, Fairfax County Park Authority  
Connie Weyant, Facilities Management Department  
Brian Williams, Planning and Development Division, Fairfax County Park Authority

#### **Community Technical Advisory Committee**

Robert Beach, Fairfax County History Commission  
John Burns, Fairfax County Architectural Review Board  
Christopher Daniel, Fairfax County Architectural Review Board  
Elise Murray, Fairfax County History Commission  
Michael Thompson, Fairfax County Park Authority Board

Fairfax County would be better served having a committee that advocates for public gardens in our region. There are some treasures including Meadowlark Gardens, Green Spring Gardens, and now the White Garden. Horticulture is big business in the entire Metropolitan Washington region. It begins with attractions like the Cherry Blossoms followed by other world-class displays including the Glenn Dale Azaleas at the National Arboretum. The economic impact of gardening is significant in Fairfax County so leaders should take advantage of these interests and help coordinate activities that will encourage commerce and increase income.

**Q: How does the Resident Curator Program determine the length of the lease?**

A: According to the Park Authority's Enabling Legislation, the Park Authority must establish a Fair Market Rental Value (FMRV) for the property. The Resident Curator Program uses the FMRV in a formula to derive the curator's lease length, considering the additional anticipated expenses that the curator will incur each year. An adjusted FMRV is determined, using anticipated annual occupancy and maintenance costs. This reduced FMRV is divided into the total estimated cost of rehabilitating the structures to determine the length of the lease. Considering the current applicant's proposed investment into the house, barn and greenhouse, the lease would be approximately 24 years. The longest lease available through the Resident Curator Program is 29 years. Leases cannot be 30 years due to zoning regulations.

**Alternative Answer:**

This seems arbitrary and apparently is initially proposed by the applicant. The original request for the White Property was 30 years but the committee reduce that to 24 years after initial review. I do question why the person submitting the application for the White Property was not requesting the lease for herself but for her daughter, son-in-law, and their two children. Does the committee ever interview the people who will actually live in the home to determine their suitability? What procedures are present to remove a resident who turns out to be inappropriate for the site?

**Q: How would curatorship of the White Gardens house and barn affect public access and use of the park?**

A: By signing the RCP lease, the resident curator acknowledges the public nature of the park and existing park regulations. Unlike other sites leased through the program, the boundary of the RCP leased property at White Gardens will be kept close to the house and barn to not interfere with park operations and public use. The lease will specify shared use of the barn with Park Authority staff and in coordination with volunteer efforts. Natural resource management will continue uninterrupted, as will future volunteer opportunities. The permitting process for the public to host large events at the park will remain in place.

**Alternative Answer:**

This is of great concern. First, Margaret White's vision as outlined in Master Plan is for her home to be a mixed-use building with public activities related to horticulture on the lower level and potentially a resident manager living on the upper floor. She used her home that way for many years right up to the time of her death by inviting plant societies to host meetings and picnics at her home. The Resident Curator Program eliminates that option. The house, the glass garden room, the barn, and a privacy region around the residence of yet undetermined size would be off limits to the general public and become the sole use of the family who signed the lease.

People need to realize that the Whites built their home on the crest of the hill under a magnificent old oak tree. That was the place with the best views of their property and where they had the core of their garden with the largest and most impressive rhododendrons. They added the large, 956-sq.ft. wrap-around glass porch in 1958 so the garden and actions of the abundant wildlife and rare birds that found sanctuary there could be appreciated year-round. Margaret always kept a

bird identification book on the table beside her favorite chair in that room. The Whites continued to design the garden to be appreciated from that vantage point. Yes, that climate-controlled room with its floor to ceiling windows is an integral part of their garden and should be part of the visitor's experience. To deny the public an opportunity to witness the garden as it changes seasons from that room is wrong.

By eliminating the glass garden room as an asset of the White Gardens, that also removes many potential income-generating activities for the park. That room could be utilized by plant societies and nature organizations for meetings. The facility could be used for receptions and catered banquets, too. The barn should not be restricted either since it could be used to store furniture and other items that might be needed as activities change in the glass garden room.

**Q: What is being done currently toward natural resource management at White Gardens?**

A: The natural resource management of the park falls outside of the scope of the Resident Curator Program, and as a result is handled by a separate branch of the Park Authority's Resource Management Division. Heritage Conservation Branch's Resident Curator Program staff and the Natural Resources Branch of the Resource Management Division work closely together to ensure FCPA missions and operations align and compliment the significance of White Gardens.

**Alternative Answer:**

The Master Plan clearly identifies the priorities for the White Gardens. The deed to the property states:

“The Property is being conveyed upon the express, accepted and agreed upon conditions that until September 30, 2075, the Property shall only be used primarily as a horticultural park”

Therefore, it is any claims by the Resident Curator Program that should fall outside of the management considerations for the White Gardens. To date, Resource Management of the White Gardens has been unfairly dumped as an extra duty for the Director of Green Spring Gardens. The Master Plan does indicate that this garden needs its own management team but should work in close association with Green Spring. It is important to hire competent staff who will be onsite directing natural resource management and coordinate activities with other groups.

**References:**

**White Garden Master Plan**

<https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/sites/parks/files/assets/documents/plandev/master-plans/whitemp.pdf>

**Resident Curator Program – FAQ: White Garden Application**

<https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/sites/parks/files/assets/documents/naturalcultural/rcp/2022-04-21-whi-faq.pdf>

**Resident Curator Program – Program Information - Staff**

<https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/sites/parks/files/assets/documents/naturalcultural/rcp/rcp-program-information-scope-parameters.pdf>

**Fairfax County List of Historic Sites – Master List**

<https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/planning-development/sites/planning-development/files/assets/documents/historic/inventory-master-list.pdf>

**WJE Historic Structures Report - White Garden**

<https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/sites/parks/files/assets/documents/naturalcultural/rcp/2017-12-20-whi-hsr-final.pdf>

**Minutes – July 27, 2021 Information Meeting y**

[https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/sites/parks/files/assets/documents/naturalcultural/rcp/2021\\_08\\_06\\_whi\\_pim\\_meeting%20minutes.pdf](https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/sites/parks/files/assets/documents/naturalcultural/rcp/2021_08_06_whi_pim_meeting%20minutes.pdf)

**RCP White Garden Announcements: Extension for Comment & Zoom Videos**

<https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/resident-curator-program/white-gardens>

**Fairfax County – 2012 Bond Referendum**

<https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/budget/sites/budget/files/assets/documents/fy2012/adopted/cip.pdf>

**Annandale Today – May 7, 2012: Article about the White Garden**

<https://annandaletoday.com/white-horticultural-park-was-saved-from/>

**Annandale Today – November, 2020: Marie Reinsdorf Article about wasted bond money**

<https://annandaletoday.com/the-john-margaret-white-horticultural/>

**White Gardens MEP Report – September 13, 2017**

<https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/sites/parks/files/assets/documents/naturalcultural/rcp/2017-09-13-whi-mep-report.pdf>