

April 30, 2022

Dear fellow citizens and fellow taxpayers,

RE; The John & Margaret White Gardens Park, a 13.5-acre Fairfax County horticultural park, located at 3301 Hawthorne Lane, Falls Church VA 22042

The Fairfax County Park Authority is on track to make a radical change to the John & Margaret White Gardens Park, breaking an agreement signed with Mrs. Margaret White in 1999. Hundreds of thousands of dollars in public money have already been wasted [1]; if executed, a legally binding contract will remove the park for 24 years or more from the unrestricted public use and horticultural research intended by the White Family's gift to the County.



The White Residence and the 956 Glass Enclosed Porch

Through the misuse of the Resident Curator Program (RCP) [2] [3], the house and perimeter and the barn will be occupied for 24 years or more by a family, with no revenue or services to benefit the gardens.

In effect,

- The house's meeting room will not be available for public use.
- The barn will not be available for public use.
- We won't get any revenue to benefit the park.
- We won't get any services to benefit the park.
- No plans for activating the park itself have been announced.
- Money that should be going into the gardens has instead been spent on making the house ready for private use.
- Additional annual grants are being requested by the Applicant for utilities and other expenses.



Autumn Vista and the Glass Porch/Garden Room



Rhododendrons Viewed from the Garden Room

Because the White Gardens has been so poorly managed as a horticultural resource and not advertised for public use, it has few visitors beyond its immediate neighborhood. The Park Authority is using its own inaction on its expensive 2006 Master Plan [4] as an excuse for turning much of the property and the house into a private residence. This represents a broken promise and misuse of public funds.

Public input opportunity has been lacking; requests for an open meeting have been unanswered.



The Meadow and Old Barn

*We say **No**, to Resident Curatorship at the White Gardens. **Yes**, to immediate community and stakeholder-centered planning for a successful public garden. We **demand** financial transparency from our county representatives.*

Send comments to the Park Authority by Friday, May 13. We urge you to contact the Park Authority, parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov, and Mason District Supervisor Penny Gross, mason@fairfaxcounty.gov. If you live outside Mason District, copy your supervisor – contact information: [Fairfax County Board of Supervisors flyer](#).

Please send a sentence or two to the Park Authority requesting that this RCP program be canceled, or delayed for full public disclosure.

Continue reading for more detail on why the Fairfax County Resident Curator Program (RCP) is wrong for the 13.5-acre John & Margaret White Gardens Park:

1. This plan goes against Mrs. White's wishes. She gave it to be a public garden for all people. The deed covenant stipulated the Park's purpose. Fairfax County promised to abide by the agreement.
2. The house is exceptionally well suited for public use of the first floor, with its 956 square foot climate-controlled glass-enclosed porch with stunning view of



Margaret White on her 103rd Birthday



Catered Banquet in the Garden Room / Porch

meadow and woodland; and first floor bathroom. Mrs. White hosted horticulture club meetings there. There will be no opportunity to use this meeting room for the 24-year duration of the RCP lease. *Why spend any public money on this house unless to open it to the public for regular use?*

3. According to documents on the project webpage, the Park Authority plans to complete by the end of 2022 a substantial share of the rehab work required for occupancy. Long-term lease paid with labor and materials are the core of the RCP. *Why is the Park Authority spending our money to replace the HVAC system, remove wallpaper, paint, repair windows, etc. – on top of having paid for sewer and water hookup (the existing well served the house and is more than adequate for watering gardens)? The RCP policies require the tenant to do this work in exchange for rent.*
4. The RCP is supposed to enhance the park visitor experience, not detract. The house sits prominently at the entrance to the park, and directly in front of the beautiful woodland garden that is the best part of the park. The large, enclosed porch will require an extensive privacy barrier around the house, restricting public access to that part of the garden. According to the Park Authority's own Master Plan, the house is intended to be the visitor orientation area. *Why is the Master Plan, paid by taxpayer funding and created in alignment with Mrs. White's legally binding bequest, being ignored?*
5. There is no justification for a historic designation of this 1939 house that was upgraded and occupied as a comfortable home by Mrs. White until the day of her death at age 103, in 2010. *The Historic Structures Report alone cost \$67,000 in bond money on a house with no historic value.*
6. Growing a public garden park takes years of smart and focused effort. 24 years of RCP residency will kill momentum before it even starts.
7. The \$500,000 of 2012 Park Bond funds set aside for the park and designated for public amenities (trails, benches, shelter, interpretive signage) was spent on everything but those public-serving amenities. Money that could and should be used on the park, including resources to create the best public-private partnership instrument, is misspent on this program.
8. The White Gardens Park is inside the beltway, 2 blocks from Annandale Road. It is a beautiful refuge from urban life, a highly valuable public asset, more valuable



Rhododendron 'Cadis' as Viewed from the Garden Room

with each new square foot developed in the area. *Its value as a public resource is unquestionable – think of the possibilities!*

9. When considering history, urban parks were founded in the 19th century to provide access to natural beauty and recreation to the public, just as the well-to-do had private estates and country clubs. *Why are we considering effectively converting this public park into a private estate?*
10. We have been unable to make sense of the project finances from the posted documents. According to project webpage's White Gardens Adjusted Treatment Plan – 2021, \$53,000 worth of work on the house remains. This can't be correct. We would like to see not only the complete workplan but understand the public cost-benefit.
11. The 16-member RCP staff team together with the 5-member Community Technical Advisory Committee [5] does not include any plant people – the house and the park go together; nor does it include any community members. Both are needed for conformance to the park master plan.

We call on the Fairfax County Park Authority to:

1. Withdraw the house and barn from the Resident Curatorship Program.
2. Hold an open house to show work done and condition.
3. Hold an open public meeting for live question and answer session.
4. Present at same public meeting a detailed financial business plan and benefit cost analysis in an understandable, transparent manner. We expect it to include answers to the many questions that have been asked but not yet answered: *How much has been spent at the park, and on what? Where is the documentation to prove the RCP is a good deal for Fairfax County taxpayers?*
5. Organize a series of visioning and planning sessions to come up with community-based, incremental steps to build a vibrant public garden, including public use of house and barn. We need at these sessions public garden development experts, horticulture experts, and conservancies experts. Commit to the park as the public asset promised.
6. Install a welcoming sign at the street entrance, a trail loop for touring the garden, benches, and interpretive signage posted by the house.



Azalea Border from the Glass Porch /Garden Room

The RCP plan for the White Gardens Park highlights systemic issues.

- No disclosure on how bond money is spent.
- Lack of public accountability.
- Poor public input process.
- County Master Plans lack implementation timelines and don't identify funding, putting them at risk to be nothing more than shelf-dressing.
- Too many invisible, unknown parks are not managed and left to decay.
- Members of the public are turned away when they want to contribute, participate, do something for community good or aid a neglected park.

Again, we urge you to contact the Park Authority, parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov and your county supervisor by **Friday May 13**.

Please visit the park. Look for azaleas in bloom, then rhododendrons; don't miss the wooded garden behind the house.

signed,

*Marie Reinsdorf, Susan Richardson,
Anne Sheerin, and Donald Hyatt*

*Thanks to Annandale Today for its
past news coverage. [6]*

Contact: Marie Reinsdorf – marie.reinsdorf@gmail.com

Links:

[1] [The John & Margaret White Horticultural Gardens: What happened to the bond money? | Annandale Today](#)

[2] [White Gardens | Park Authority \(fairfaxcounty.gov\)](#)

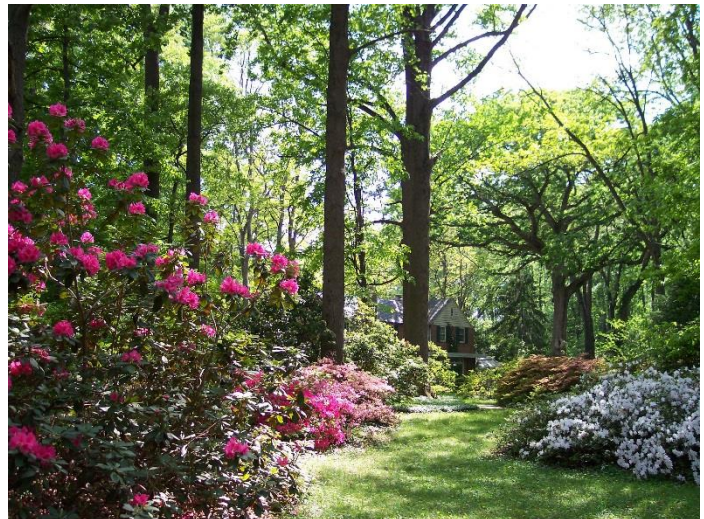
[3] [Resident Curator Program | Park Authority \(fairfaxcounty.gov\)](#)

[4] [White Horticultural Park Master Plan \(fairfaxcounty.gov\)](#)

[5] [Program information, scope and parameters \(fairfaxcounty.gov\)](#)

[6] [More details emerge on resident curator | Annandale Today](#)

Webpage – White Garden Concerns: <http://www.arspvc.org/articles/mwhite.html>



Woodland Garden Behind the House