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August 3, 2018

MEMORANDUM

TO: Fairfax County Architectural Review Board (through Laura Arsenau, Preservation Planner)

RE: NTHP/Arcadia Development Proposal at Woodlawn

With great respect for the work that you do, and awareness of the responsibility you have undertaken “to preserve, protect and enhance” historic resources in Fairfax County, I wish to share with you my deep concerns about a number of aspects of the current proposal for the property. I do so as a longtime member of the National Trust, as a former employee of the Trust responsible for technical and management oversight of this and other Trust properties, as a former longtime resident of Fairfax County, and finally as a life-long preservationist.

I wish to make clear my understanding of, and support, for the general principles that comprise the essence of the operational concepts developed by Arcadia. They offer some unique and important services and learning opportunities that can be well suited to the agrarian landscape extant in many areas of Woodlawn today. I am also thoroughly aware of the need to strengthen and enhance the financial underpinnings of the property to ensure its long term sustainability as an important historic site in Virginia and a National Historic Landmark.

It is my professional opinion that both of these objectives can be accomplished on the site after re-examination, re-ordering and relocating some of the more egregious planning recommendations that currently affect adversely the historic core of the National Landmark portion of the property.

These comments are generated with reference to the Special Exception Presentation dated June 2018 and consist of some critical broad scope observations as well as a few specific comments on items illustrated in that presentation.

General Comments:

It has been asserted that existing historic features will not be affected by this process. While this may be the case in a limited sense with respect to standing architecture, landscape features and other tangible aspects of the site, it is decidedly not the case with respect to the fundamental

character and setting of the historic core. Critical aspects of the core that will be affected include its spatial character, its sonic, luminous and olfactory environments, its commanding presence on the hill seen in principal view sheds to the site and along principal access routes, as well as the fundamental sense of domestic design ethics, intent and order that have defined this iconic example of a Federal period plantation complex for over two hundred years.

The introduction of numerous buildings of variable type, size, scale and use which are largely incompatible with the historic setting, combined with a significant increase in volume of highly incompatible traffic will not enhance the setting and experience of Woodlawn, but will serve to detract from and diminish them substantially and irrevocably.

As alluded above, I believe that the majority of these new functions, if absolutely necessary on this portion of the property, can be effectively established in the areas south of the former greenhouse and maintenance facility. There is a large area of unbuilt space, outside of principal approaches to the historic core and generally outside of critical view sheds, which could accommodate growth and changes to these functions in the future. It would be important to bring all residential components of the site to this area in order to minimize intrusive traffic patterns on the other areas and to counter the effects of randomly strewn site placement as proposed. The existing vegetable garden could remain in its current location.

Additionally, and critically, the access point and vast volume of incompatible traffic (defined as deliveries, mechanical equipment, trash trucks, agricultural vehicles, and restaurant patrons who may have no large role or interest in the historic core) could be directed to the former footprint of the Richmond Highway, eliminating entirely its inevitable adverse presence from the historic core.

An additional benefit of relocating this intrusive traffic and its entry access would be the removal of a great deal of extraneous intrusive traffic of all types from the immediate areas adjacent to the Friends Meeting House, itself a National Register property. The Meeting House must have a site which is safe, silent and sacred.

Recommendation/Request:

I request respectfully and recommend strongly that these considerations and recommended changes be shared with the applicant for consideration and response. The intent of these comments is to ensure long term, and mutually compatible, benefits for all occupants of the site: Woodlawn and the historic core, the Pope-Leighey House, the Alexandria Friends Meeting House, and the programs developed by Arcadia.

Specific Comments:

- There seems to be little if any modification of the plans based on ARB review and comments from the initial presentation of October 2017.
- The prevailing character of physical examples shown as ‘inspiration’ for new construction on the site appears to be generally weak, uninspired or inappropriate.
- The zoning concept for the north side of the site appears not to recognize the unique character of the core of the NHL and its principal architectural resources, particularly in the manner in which changes or new elements are added to existing context where a high priority for subordinate relationships to primary resources should be implemented.
- The primary and only public entry to the historic core should not be marred by the intrusive presence or view of commercial or even educational facilities.
- The architectural character and quality of the new construction should be compatibly contemporary, designed with the principles that characterize Woodlawn and the Pope-Leighey house and be equal in quality to them.
- Separation of traffic as noted above should be applied carefully to all parts of the historic core and at the Friends Meeting House.
- Plate 4: Proposed amphitheatre location may overlay an historic road bed and should be preceded by archaeological investigation.
- Plate 7: The few parking spaces on the cedar allee appear to inadequate to serve the proposed restaurant which should be relocated away from the entry road to a site south of the proposed conservatory (the use of which is not clear in this plan). The camp playground is highly inappropriate in the proposed location, and should be nearer to the residential complex.
- Plate 12: Cabins/tents strewn randomly about the hillside have no sense of order nor do they contribute to a sense of place needed to define their presence. These an all other principal lodging elements and parking should be integrated into the south field area.
- Plate 14: Architectural concepts for the cabins and ‘motel’ appear to be inappropriate.
- Plate 15: Apart from questions of scale, the use of part of the former Richmond Highway road bed for parking appears to be a good device to recall abstractly that portion of the road’s history; likewise, preservation/re-use of the earliest portions of the paved highway as access to the stable complex is an appropriate solution.
- Plates 24/25: Proposed structures and uses are inappropriate for these locations, all part of the Pope-Leighey view shed. The point of foraging trails unclear; are they proposed to be new?