

MEADOWBROOK FARM



An Urban Land Institute
Technical Assistance Panel
April 18-19, 2013

On behalf of



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About ULI – the Urban Land Institute

The Urban Land Institute (ULI) was established in 1936 as a nonprofit educational and research institute and is supported by 30,000 members worldwide representing all aspects of land use and development disciplines. ULI's mission is to provide responsible leadership in the use of land to enhance the total environment and to create and sustain thriving communities.

In 1947, ULI began providing advice to nonprofits and units of government that needed help in planning and development. At the tri-state regional level, ULI Philadelphia offers Technical Assistance Panels (TAPs) which bring together planners, developers, lenders, architects, and related professionals to objectively evaluate specific needs and make recommendations on implementation. A TAP is a voluntary process. None of the professionals involved receive monetary compensation for their work.

Introduction/Background

Meadowbrook Farm is a 28-acre property in Abington Township that was bequeathed by J. Liddon Pennock, Jr. in 2003 to the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society, (PHS) a nonprofit organization. Currently it is the only physical real estate owned by PHS.

A horticulturist and celebrated florist, Mr. Pennock had clients up and down the East Coast and was floral designer for the White House during the Nixon Administration. Mr. and Mrs. Pennock were prominent philanthropists and socialites in the Philadelphia area and at various times entertained Princess Grace of Monaco, Ricardo Muti and Julie Nixon Eisenhower at Meadowbrook Farm. Mr. Pennock had close ties to the



The house at Meadowbrook Farm

Pennsylvania Horticultural Society and the Philadelphia Flower Show in particular, earning the nickname “Mr. Flower Show.”

The property, which fronts on Washington Lane, consists of approximately 20 acres of woodlands; the main house, built in 1936; a series of formal gardens and demonstration gardens; a retail shop selling plant material as well as home and garden accessories; parking areas and greenhouses. Meadowbrook Farm has an endowment of \$13 million but operates at a deficit and draws 4-7 percent from its endowment each year; industry standard is a 4 percent draw from endowment.

The Technical Assistance Panel for Meadowbrook Farm was scheduled as a two-day event, held April 18 and 19, 2013, at the Farm. Nine ULI members formed the Panel; 19 stakeholders were interviewed, including staff of Meadowbrook Farm and the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society, members of the neighborhood and neighboring institutions, officials from Abington Township, and leaders from Philadelphia's landscape and garden community.

Panelists began the first day with a one-hour tour of Meadowbrook Farm and then returned to the main house and formed four working groups. The Panelists spent both the morning and afternoon interviewing stakeholders. On the second day, with the interviews completed, panelists discussed the various stakeholder issues and goals and formulated their recommendations. Stakeholders were invited to return at the end of the day to hear a brief preliminary presentation of the comments and recommendations now finalized in this report.



Panelists touring the store

Key Issues

The Pennsylvania Horticultural Society plans to develop a master plan for Meadowbrook Farm. It is the hope of PHS “that Meadowbrook Farm can become a financially sustainable regional destination for high quality plant material, attracting all levels of interest in horticultural and landscape design, while economically strengthening the local economy, benefiting its neighbors, and solidifying PHS as the leading organization for horticulture in the region, if not the country.” More specifically, the TAP was asked to answer the following questions:

- How can Meadowbrook Farm become more relevant and achieve financial stability? What are its highest and best uses?

- What value can Meadowbrook Farm bring to the township, region, horticultural/landscape community and PHS? How can that best be achieved and sustained?
- What programs, products, events or activities are appropriate for Meadowbrook Farm and what marketing and outreach techniques are necessary to make these financially sustainable?

Finally, in considering Meadowbrook Farm and its place within the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society, it is important to note that the current PHS mission is stated as: “PHS motivates people to improve the quality of life and create a sense of community through horticulture.”

Initial Assessment

For purposes of clarity, the Panel categorized the features it assessed as either relevant to the physical property or relevant to the business operations of Meadowbrook Farm.

The Property

Meadowbrook Farm is located in an established, affluent residential area with limited access to public transportation. A frequently voiced concern among area residents was that any changes to Meadowbrook Farm’s business model would bring increased traffic. Additionally, some uses for the property are non-conforming to its current R-1 residential zoning. If Meadowbrook Farm were to expand operations, PHS would likely be required to obtain a variance from Abington Township and could face opposition from neighbors. The site also has **limited potential for adaptive reuse**. Existing site constraints—a steep hillside in the back of the property and wetland area, for example—would make physical expansion or development challenging.

Limitations aside, the grounds—the wooded areas, formal English-style gardens and demonstration and display gardens—are beautiful. The main house, designed by architect Robert McGoodwin in the English Cotswold style, is a handsome focal point. The interior of the home reflects the quirky personality of Mr. Pennock, but furnishings are not museum-quality and the house itself is not sufficiently unique to be an attraction. And although deferred maintenance isn't immediately visible, it is an issue. Rewiring of the home's electrical system and repair to the roof are just two examples of areas that need attention; the greenhouses are also outdated and are not energy-efficient.

Business Operations

Meadowbrook Farm has had a retail presence as a nursery since 1971. In fall and winter the Farm's greenhouses are used to force and grow plants for the Flower Show typically held in March; in spring and summer they are used to grow plant material for the retail operation. Growing and forcing plants for the Flower Show generates the lion's share of Meadowbrook Farm's revenue. In fact, PHS largely agreed to accept Pennock's legacy because of its role as the nursery for the Flower Show. Once operating expenses are factored in, it remains unclear how lucrative the growing and forcing services are.



Hoop greenhouses



Signage at entrance to Meadowbrook Farm

From Washington Lane, Meadowbrook Farm's curb appeal does not meet visitors' expectations for a PHS property or experience. Signage is poor and the entrance lacks the grand statement expected of the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society; overall it does not reflect the PHS "brand." In fact, weak marketing of Meadowbrook Farm is consistent on all fronts, including the PHS website. But the bigger issue is the **perceived disconnect between Meadowbrook Farm and PHS**. Although PHS accepted the gift of the Farm in 2004, the two do not yet share a mission. The Panel considers this to be an overriding issue, and an impediment to Meadowbrook Farm's success.

There was consensus that **the current retail space should be re-evaluated**. Although large, the shop is too humid to offer garden books; the layout is awkward; and visitors must tote their purchases—often large containers of plants—up a slight hill to the parking lot. Much of the shop's inventory seems at odds with the PHS mission.

In its favor, the staff at Meadowbrook Farm is skilled, friendly and extremely knowledgeable. Neighbors view the Farm as their "secret" and consider the property to

be an asset to the community. Tours of the gardens are offered every Thursday during the growing season and seasonal events are held throughout the year. Area institutions have expressed interest in partnering with Meadowbrook Farm, and the local government has been supportive of the property's activities. Perhaps most importantly, the Farm provides PHS with the opportunity to "strut its stuff" and showcase its high horticultural standards year-round -- not just during the Flower Show.



Portion of nursery with greenhouses in rear

Alternatives for Meadowbrook Farm

PHS and Meadowbrook Farm clearly understand that the Farm's **current business model is unsustainable**. Both are doing quite a bit of soul searching to identify and pursue the best use of the property. In addition to the TAP, a master plan is being developed. In a series of interviews, held in early 2013 and led by landscape architect Mara Baird, numerous thought-provoking and creative ideas were generated; many of those ideas have been blended into this report.

The Technical Assistance Panel weighed the available information and input and considered two alternatives: sell

the property or modify Meadowbrook Farm and improve its operations.

Selling Meadowbrook Farm would:

- Initially present a challenge in assessing the property's value.
- Require clarification of deed restrictions and terms of endowment.
- Require a buyer who understands the property's restrictive zoning.
- Generate cash upon sale which could then be used to purchase a property that more readily facilitates PHS fulfilling its mission, if permitted by terms of endowment.
- Eliminate the Farm's operating losses.
- Compel PHS to identify new greenhouse sources for growing and forcing plants in preparation for its annual Flower Show.

Modification and improvement to Meadowbrook Farm would:

- Enable Meadowbrook Farm to **fully align with the PHS mission**.
- Force evaluation of current revenue streams, including:
 - determining the return on investment for growing and forcing plants for the Flower Show.
 - determining if the retail operation can be more profitable or if it should be eliminated.
- Require Meadowbrook Farm to explore new ways to generate income, such as:
 - becoming a wholesale nursery.
 - investing in a larger, more energy-efficient greenhouse for the forcing of trees.
 - hosting additional income-generating events such as weddings or business conferences.

- enhancing, expanding and better-promoting tours of the gardens including family-oriented arts and entertainment.
- adding more programming to the schedule, for professionals and the public.
- leveraging the Farm to increase PHS membership.
- cultivating philanthropic support in the community.
- exploring sponsorship opportunities for the Farm.
- positioning the Farm as a non-profit research and educational hub that might attract alternate sources of funding.
- Encourage ideas on how to **reduce operating expenses**, for example:
 - performing and acting on an energy audit.
 - moving some staff from the PHS office in Center City to existing space at Meadowbrook Farm.
 - pruning unprofitable operations and functions.
 - thinking long-term and investing in improvements to infrastructure and facilities.
- Analyze expenses, including staffing and marketing, and how to clearly categorize Meadowbrook Farms' expenses in these areas as line items separate from PHS' general operating budget.
- Consider **internships and co-op programs with area institutions**; develop a system-wide program that enables volunteers to be efficiently deployed and used at the Farm.

Next Steps

To move forward, Meadowbrook Farm and PHS must determine if indeed the Farm can find a place within the PHS mission, work that is beyond the scope of this Panel. If a role within PHS can be found, several key steps are

outlined below. If integration is not thought possible, PHS would be wise to sell the Meadowbrook Farm property and invest the proceeds in programming that does support its mission.

The Panel believes that Meadowbrook Farm can become a more integral and sustainable part of the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society and has made tangible suggestions:

- **Create a mission statement** that encompasses the mission and the work of all entities under the PHS brand.



One of the garden "rooms"

- **Increase internal communications and interaction.** Time and again, the Panel heard and saw evidence that the Farm's role within PHS was unclear; it was referred to as a sort of "stepchild." Mission alignment will be key. And increasing opportunities for staff of both entities to interact with each other will improve understanding and a feeling of teamwork. Alternating meetings between the Center City office and Meadowbrook Farm would be one way to familiarize city staff members with the facilities and options available at the Farm. For example, some PHS meetings and organization-wide "retreats" should be held at the Farm.



Back patio

- **Develop a business plan.** Stakeholders and Panelists alike had ideas worth being explored as part of a business strategy, including:
 - Subdivide and sell part of the property to enhance endowment and meet specific financial goals.
 - Commit to expanding the PHS mission into the suburbs and other parts of the state with Meadowbrook Farm as a “beachhead” for that effort; use the Farm to physically and philosophically represent PHS in the suburbs.
 - Use Meadowbrook Farm as a **year-round “Flower Show Live”** with a focus on superior horticulture; develop a calendar of changing exhibits that invites repeat visits; expand the gardens and host celebrity gardeners and designers; make Meadowbrook Farm an encompassing “all senses” experience; invite area florists to mount installations; utilize both gardens and the house as a “white canvas.”
 - Outsource the growing and forcing part of the business and free up the greenhouse space for other use.
- **Establish a niche** for Meadowbrook Farm as a source for rare plants; attract customers and “horticultural tourists” with specialty stock such as alpines, cacti, succulents and begonias; perhaps include and market seeds and cuttings collected from the Farm.
- **Leverage PHS brand** to develop Meadowbrook Farm as the PHS educational facility with programs for lay gardeners on propagating plants or landscape architecture; build a lecture series for landscape horticultural professionals.
- Expand retail operations into the ground floor of the main house; perhaps outsource retail; use the retail area to create a “vision” for the shopper with products that reflect the high standards of PHS.
- Focus on PHS-branded products; expand and market PHS Gold Medal Plants; continue to develop and market a PHS lifestyle line; explore Meadowbrook-branded garden tools and reproductions of lattice-work furniture in the house.
- Consider creating a café or tearoom; engage an outside operator for food service.
- Become a model for **sustainable growing techniques** and practices like active composting; host sustainability tours and workshops.
- **Put the “farm” back** in Meadowbrook Farm; use the Farm as a “working lab” for development of its Gold Medal Plants; host a CSA and/or farmer’s market via the Philadelphia Food Trust; focus on wholesale farm-to-table produce; investigate chicken farming for locally produced eggs; offer pick-your-own produce, honey or flowers.

- Expand recreational opportunities at the Farm; create “heart smart” trails; use undeveloped land for Outward Bound-type programs.
 - Develop and market programs and features for children.
 - Explore acquiring adjacent land or partnering with others to create a sustainable green corridor with the Meadowbrook Bird Sanctuary, Jackson Park and the Meadowbrook School.
 - Meet all necessary code restrictions and renovate the house to become a prime venue for social occasions or business meetings; employ discrete signage throughout the house to communicate the history of the house and its relevance to PHS.
- Create a master plan for the property that supports the PHS mission as well as the business plan for Meadowbrook Farm.
 - Identify interim improvements for wayfinding and educational signage at the entry and a few key locations.
- Work with the Township to assure that all permitting processes and requirements are met for all activities and development.
 - Increase the profile of Meadowbrook Farm within the community and the region; emphasize Pennock’s legacy of community service.
 - **Establish partnerships** with area institutions that align with the mission; for example, Penn State Abington might consider staffing a lifelong learning program hosted by Meadowbrook Farm; Abington Memorial Hospital might be interested in a healing garden.
 - **Create and execute a comprehensive and multi-faceted marketing plan** that supports the business plan.



Panelists touring the nursery

Stakeholders Interviewed

Drew Becher, President, Pennsylvania Horticultural Society

Regina Broscius, Writer/Public Relations Specialist, Penn State Abington

David Fierabend, Landscape Architect, Groundswell Design Group, LLC

Nancy Goldenberg, Vice President for Policy and Programs, Pennsylvania Horticultural Society

Steve Kline, Commissioner, Abington Township

Judith Kratka, Director/Facilities Management, Abington Memorial Hospital

Charles Marsh, Director of University Relations, Penn State Abington

Paul Meyer, Director, Morris Arboretum

Michael Narcowich, AICP, Senior Community Planner, Montgomery County Planning Commission

Ed Pacizky, Former Volunteer, Meadowbrook Farm

Joey Roberts, Neighbor and CEO, Roberts Event Group, Inc.

Barrett Robinson, Vice President for Operations, Pennsylvania Horticultural Society

Karen Wiley Sandler, PhD, Albert and Suzanne Lord Chancellor, Penn State Abington

Bonnie Schorsch, Neighbor

Andrew Scott, Neighbor and Senior Vice President, Urban Engineers Inc.

Lucy Strackhouse, Executive Director, Fairmount Park Historic Preservation Trust

Steve Turner, Rydal-Meadowbrook Civic Association

Veronica Wentz, Director of Internet Partnerships, Greater Philadelphia Tourism
Marketing Corporation

Ken Wood, Chair, Meadowbrook Farm Committee; Member, Pennsylvania Horticultural
Society Board of Directors

Technical Assistance Panelists

Anthony S. Rimikis

TAP Co-Chair

Senior Vice President, Brandywine Realty Trust

Mr. Rimikis is Senior Vice President for Urban Development at Brandywine Realty Trust. He is responsible for the company's downtown Philadelphia development and construction activities and has more than 30 years' experience in the field of real estate. Since joining Brandywine in 1997, Mr. Rimikis has been responsible for the development of over eight million square feet of commercial and industrial space. His most recent project is the renovation of the former United States Postal Service building at 30th and Market Street, into the new headquarters for the Philadelphia Region Internal Revenue Service and an 11-level garage. The combined cost of the two projects is \$350 million. Phase Two will include an additional 800,000 square feet of residential, retail and office space. Mr. Rimikis serves on the Executive Committee and the Board of Directors of the University City District of Philadelphia, and is a member of the Philadelphia Real Estate Council.

Jayne Spector, LLA, ASLA, LEED-AP

TAP Co-Chair

Associate, Langan Engineering & Environmental Services, Inc.

Ms. Spector has more than 25 years of experience in landscape architecture and urban planning. She has handled all aspects of project development as principal and lead designer for public, commercial and historic landscape projects. Her practice has focused on restoring and adaptively reusing sites to promote sustainable development patterns. In addition to her work with Langan, Ms. Spector has instructed courses in Landscape Architecture and Preservation Planning at Rutgers University and the University of Pennsylvania and has presented at professional conferences on sustainable urban planting and stormwater management, and cultural landscapes.

Buck Collins

Director of Client Services, Bohler Engineering

Mr. Collins is a Philadelphia native with more than 30 years of experience in civil engineering, land development, environmental site services and real estate projects throughout Pennsylvania, New Jersey, New York and Delaware. As Director of Client Services for Bohler Engineering, a Civil and Environmental Engineering firm, Mr. Collins is responsible for clients and projects within the firm's service area. Previously he has been a principal in real estate and consulting firms. Mr. Collins is active with the American Institute of Architects, Society for College and University Planning, International Council of Shopping Centers, Lehigh Valley Economic Development Corporation and the Delaware Valley Green Building Council. He is a certified LEED Green Associate.

Clifford C. David, Jr.

President and CEO, Conservation Economics

Conservation Economics works with property owners to develop new strategies to generate additional revenue from their property in an environmentally beneficial way. The company evaluates, analyzes and implements environmentally compatible uses for a property that combine economic development with environmental benefits. Mr. David has been working to blend business and environmental protection for nearly 30 years. He has experience in government, non-profit and the private sector identifying strategies to develop under-utilized assets to benefit the land, the land owner and the community. He has extensive experience in real estate development and management. He was co-founder and member of Investors Circle - Philadelphia, an angel investment group that provides early stage funding for impact companies that provide positive financial, social and environmental results.

Rebecca Devine

Co-Founder and Principal, Maven Communications

Ms. Devine is co-founder and principal of Maven Communications, a full service public relations agency specializing in real estate, professional services and technology communications. During her career, she has developed communications strategies for a number of residential and commercial real estate companies, launched technology and venture capital start-ups, positioned CEOs as industry thought leaders and developed strategic communications campaigns for a variety of non-profit and cultural arts organizations. Ms. Devine is also experienced in crisis/issues management response in areas including criminal investigations, food contamination, corporate mergers and acquisitions and real estate development. She is a regional board member of Big Brothers Big Sisters Southeastern PA and is actively involved in the Public Relations Society of America and the Philadelphia Public Relations Association.

Antonio Fiol-Silva, FAIA, AICP, LEED AP BD+C

Principal, Wallace, Roberts & Todd

As principal at WRT, Mr. Fiol-Silva's architecture, urban design, and planning practice encompasses high-profile projects in both the public and the private sector, highlighting civic places, urban mixed-use redevelopment, transportation and urban infrastructure, and sustainable planning and design. His green planning and design work have earned him a 2010 AIA National Urban Design Award for the US House of Representatives Office Buildings & South Capitol Area Plan in Washington, DC, as well as awards for Arts Quest's Levitt Pavilion Steel Stacks in Bethlehem, PA and the Roosevelt / City Hall Plaza in Camden, NJ. Mr. Fiol-Silva is the incoming president of the American Institute of Architects Philadelphia. With ULI he serves on the National Advisory Board of the Rose Center for Leadership in Public Land Use and is a Rose Center faculty member.

David A. Henrich

Executive Vice President, A10 Capital, LLC

Mr. Henrich has been involved in commercial real estate finance for 22 years and has extensive experience with construction, bridge and permanent loans. With A10 Capital, a privately owned, non-bank bridge lender, he is responsible for loan originations in the Mid-Atlantic and New England markets. Prior to joining A10, Mr. Henrich was a top producer with Northmarq Capital, also assisting in the servicing and management of all loan assets originating in Philadelphia. Additionally, he was with GE Capital and a public mortgage real estate investment trust. Mr. Henrich is an active member of the Mortgage Bankers Association and the International Council of Shopping Centers.

Peter J. Porretta, AIA

Principal Architect, Lighthouse Architecture

Mr. Porretta brings a unique sensibility to architectural design. Growing up in his family's construction business, he learned to appreciate the full scope of talents needed to execute an architectural concept, from the challenges of the construction process to completion. His design and construction experience was broadened by a master's degree in Business Administration and co-ownership in a real estate development company. Mr. Porretta is a National Council of Architectural Registration Boards Certified Architect, a Construction Specifications Institute Certified Construction Specifier and Certified Construction Contract Administrator, and a United States Green Building Council Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design Accredited Professional (LEED AP). Mr. Porretta's memberships include American Institute of Architects, Construction Specifications Institute and International Code Council, Lambda Alpha International - the Honorary Society for the Advancement of Land Economics, and the Pennsylvania Restaurant Association.

Adam M. Silverman

Attorney, Cozen O'Connor

Mr. Silverman joined Cozen O'Connor's Philadelphia office in 2009 in the Business Law Department. A member of the Real Estate Practice Group, he concentrates his practice in the area of commercial real estate and related transactions. Mr. Silverman has represented regional and national developers in a wide array of matters, including the development of high-rise office towers, shopping centers, warehouses, and mixed use developments, as well as portfolio acquisitions, joint ventures, and merger transactions. He also represents lenders and borrowers in matters ranging from structured project finance to secured and securitized loan transactions. Mr. Silverman is admitted to the Pennsylvania and New Jersey Bars and is a member of the American Bar Association and the Philadelphia Bar Association.



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