

Athens-Clarke Heritage Foundation, Inc.

Vision: To become the leading advocate for the importance of historic preservation to the future of the Athens community.

An Open Letter to the Athens-Clarke County Mayor and Commission:

I am writing on behalf of the Athens-Clarke Heritage Foundation (ACHF) Board of Trustees to ask that you reconsider your recent decision (publicized in the June 23rd issue of the *Athens Banner-Herald*) to remove the Ware-Lyndon House Formal Garden project from the list of 2010 Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (SPLOST) projects to be voted on in November. The following information is presented for your consideration.

In 2009, ACHF was informed that the Athens-Clarke County Government would be seeking public input for the 2011 Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (SPLOST) package. The ACHF hoped at least one project in the package would include an Athens history, education and preservation enhancement component.

For years, the front lawn of the National Register Ware-Lyndon House has been an embarrassment of overgrown, missing, and dying bushes lining the front entrance walkway. We, the ACHF, hired the nationally-awarded landscape architecture firm of Robinson Fisher Associates to assist us in rectifying the situation. It was decided that a concept plan would be created to install an appropriate period southern formal garden to match the interpretive period of the elegant, mid-1850s, Ware-Lyndon House and Athens History Room. We envisioned that this garden be not only southern but also steeped in Athens history. Its design would be based on key historical attributes like those found in the Stevens-Thomas Garden, which was designed and installed in 1848 by John Bishop, designer of the University of Georgia's first Botanical Garden, on the corner of Hancock Avenue and Pulaski Street. At the time, the Stevens-Thomas Garden was considered one of the most well-documented gardens in the south for its comprehensive array of indigenous plant life. Sadly, it was destroyed by development in 1913.

It was further decided that our garden plan would include educational, environmental, and economic components that would benefit quality of life needs in Athens-Clarke County through:

- Enhancement to our local historic tourism and downtown visitor's industry. The Lyndon House Art Center and Historic House attract approximately 100,000 visitors annually.
- Enhancement to environmental education for school children, citizens, and visitors concerning Athens' historic gardens and southern plants
- Enhancement to environmental education concerning the use of cisterns to harvest water for supplying the garden's irrigation system to sustain plantings and any water feature
- Enhancement to an existing Athens-Clarke County art center and National Register house museum
- Enhancement to income potential for private or public events in the garden and on the historic house front porch. Night time lighting for the garden and front of the historic house included in this project will also increase rental possibilities.
- Enhancement to the public art inventory in Athens-Clarke County

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In December, 2009, ACHF submitted its proposal to the SPLOST 2011 Citizens Advisory Committee, along with letters of community support from the Athens Convention and Visitors Bureau, Athens Historical Society, Athens House Museum Association, and The Lyndon House Arts Foundation (also a co-sponsor of the project).

On February 8, 2010, our proposal, along with others, was formally presented to the Committee. We were very impressed by the level of professionalism and attention to detail with which the Citizens Advisory Committee reviewed each project submission. Following the presentation, our project was given overwhelming support from the Committee members. This was one of the only projects that received no negative comments. Two comments of note from Committee members were:

"This project has one of the lowest construction and operational costs, but at the same time it has the most complete plan, and was the best explained."

"This project will be what puts the S in our Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax."

A few months later, we were extremely pleased to find out that not only had our project been included in the final Citizens Committee list, but that it was one of the very top-rated projects, passed by the Committee's unanimous vote.

On June 23, 2010, we were quite frankly shocked to read in the *Athens Banner-Herald* that our project was the only item removed from the Citizens Committee's final list by the Athens-Clarke County Mayor and Commission at a June 22, 2010, meeting. This news came with no prior notice, leaving us without the ability or opportunity to address any concerns or answer any questions about our project. One commissioner attributed the project's removal from the list to its annual operating costs. This explanation made our project's removal even more baffling when we compared its annual costs to those of other quality of life projects on the current 2011 SPLOST Project Program List (see comparison below).

PROJECT NAME	INCREASED ANNUAL OPERATING COST
• Historic Formal Garden at Ware-Lyndon House	\$5,000.00
• Cooperative Extension Agricultural Center	\$39,500.00
• Sandy Creek Park Renovation and Development	\$95,000.00
• Oconee Rivers Greenway Network Connectors	\$82,000.00
• Greenspace Acquisition Program	\$50,000.00
• Georgia Railroad Rail-Trail	\$23,000.00
• Dudley Park Improvement	\$95,000.00
• Center for Hard-to-Recycle Materials	\$66,000.00
Total Annual Operating Increase for all SPLOST 2011 Projects:*	\$1,171,300.00

*This figure does not include any Annual Operating Costs for the large Civic Center and Jail Extensions.

As you can see, the proposed formal garden has much in its favor at a relatively small cost. Given the Citizens Committee's strong support for this project, we ask that you take a second look and consider carefully the information provided here. Please also take time to fully review the 2011 SPLOST Committee process that ranked our garden project at the top of the project list, our detailed concept plans and drawings, as well as our 2011 SPLOST Proposal.

We wish to conclude with the following excerpt from the Vision Statement in the 2008 Athens-Clarke County Comprehensive Plan (Historic Preservation and Cultural Resources Section):

"Athens Clarke-County will be a county rich in cultural resources that enhance and maintain its unique character and also increase its economic vitality. In pursuit of this goal, Athens-Clarke County will protect, support, improve, and generate cultural resources in Athens-Clarke County that contribute to the character and quality of life that define and make Athens-Clarke County unique."

If you have any questions or need further clarification, please let us know. We welcome the opportunity to address any concerns you may have, and to discuss the reasons for our project's removal.

Sincerely,

Jeff Bishop, President
Athens-Clarke Heritage Foundation Board of Trustees

Museum Mile
ATHENS, GA
Historic House Museums

January 28, 2010

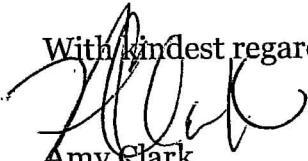
Dear Members of the SPLOST Citizens Advisory Committee:

I am writing in support of the SPLOST 2011 project for a Historic Formal Garden at the Ware-Lyndon House. As chair of the Athens Historic House Museum Association (AHHMA), I speak on behalf of the group in strongly recommending the committee's favorable consideration of this initiative.

AHHMA is a cooperative effort to preserve, interpret, and promote historic resources as vehicles for education, environmental quality, aesthetic appreciation, and heritage tourism. The Ware-Lyndon House is one of the member entities, along with three other house museums in Athens. The four attractions are featured by Classic City Tours in the Museum Mile Tour, an AHHMA program, which is a journey through Antebellum history, decorative arts, and architecture in Athens. Formal, boxwood gardens were an integral part of 19th century landscaping and are therefore present at three of Athens' four house museums. The Association is keen to see the garden enhancement of the Ware-Lyndon House realized to complete that site's restoration.

Thank you in advance for your consideration of the Historic Formal Garden project at the Ware-Lyndon House. The Athens Historic House Museum Association values the Ware-Lyndon House's role both in increasing the awareness of Athens' architectural and cultural heritage through interpretation of historic resources and its place as a source of pride and education for all Athenians. We urge the SPLOST Citizens Advisory Committee to support this project.

With kindest regards,



Amy Clark
Chair, AHHMA



January 21, 2010

SPLOST Citizens Advisory Committee
Athens, Georgia 30601

Dear Members of the SPLOST Citizens Advisory Committee:

While the Athens Convention and Visitors Bureau (CVB) is a joint applicant for improved wayfinding signage with SPLOST funding, the CVB is also supportive of other projects like the Historic Formal Garden at the Ware-Lyndon House. This letter serves as a letter of support.

As the official destination marketing organization for Athens-Clarke County, the CVB targets heritage/cultural travelers. Clarke County attracts a significant number of heritage tourists with almost 2,000 historic travelers visiting our Welcome Center in Fiscal Year 2009 alone. Leisure travelers, of which heritage/cultural travelers are a subset, are critical to hoteliers and other local businesses. Heritage/cultural travelers spend more money and stay longer than an average U.S. traveler: \$994 on average as opposed to \$611 (U.S. Cultural & Heritage Tourism Marketing Council and U.S. Dept. of Commerce, August 2009) and 4.7 nights as opposed to 3.4 nights (U.S. Travel Association, 2003).

The Athens area also attracts a significant number of visitors who are here to visit our gardens and specialty nurseries. Our area has the largest concentration and most diverse number of specialty nurseries in the Southeast. The State Botanical Garden of Georgia draws over 200,000 visitors a year, who desire to experience this facet of our community.

Therefore, the Historic Formal Garden at the Ware-Lyndon House is attractive on a couple of visitor fronts. I should also add that while the focus of the bureau's efforts is to attract more visitors to Athens to generate additional spending, we, at the same time, recognize that residents would surely appreciate this lovely addition to our community. A visually appealing city is more attractive also for prospective businesses looking at opening up operations in The Classic City.

In conclusion, the Athens CVB sees this project as one that should be embraced by the Citizens Advisory Committee. Please let me know if I can offer any other information that would assist in your evaluating this request for funding.

*Athens Convention
& Visitors Bureau*

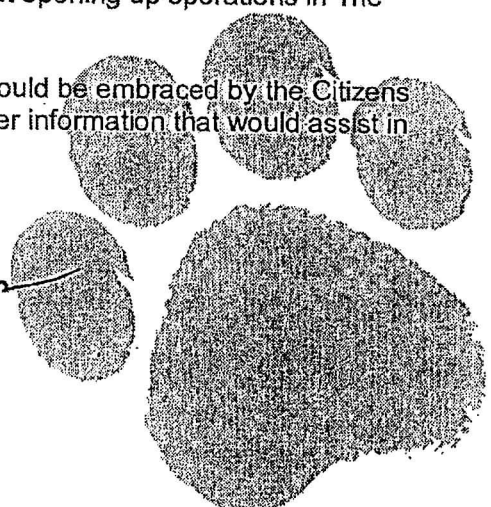
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Athens, Georgia 30601

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tourinfo@visitathensga.com
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Sincerely,

Chuck Jones
Director



Athens Historical Society, Inc.

P.O. Box 7745 • Athens, Georgia 30604-7745

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February 3, 2010

Athens-Clarke County SPLOST Committee

Dear Committee Members:

The Board of the Athens Historical Society supports inclusion of the Ware-Lyndon House Historic Garden Concept on the 2011 SPLOST referendum. This tangible reminder of Athens garden design and horticultural history would be a valuable educational resource for the community.

The proposed formal garden is an interpretation of the 1848 Colonel Stevens Thomas garden, which was located at the corner of Hancock Avenue and Pulaski Street until the Thomas house was relocated in 1913 and the Y.M.C.A. erected. The Stevens Thomas garden was renowned and one of the best-documented formal gardens in antebellum Georgia. John Bishop, an English landscape gardener in charge of the University's botanical garden, laid out the grounds. *Garden History of Georgia, 1733-1933* contains a detailed drawing of the garden and a plant list that is possibly the most complete inventory of 19th century plantings in north Georgia. The only other Athens garden named in this important reference is the garden of the University President's house.

The proposed garden would provide an attractive and appropriate setting for the historic Ware-Lyndon house, and would educate the public about Athens garden history. Accordingly, we offer our support for this project.

Sincerely,



Blair Dorminey
President, Athens Historical Society

LYNDON HOUSE
ARTS FOUNDATION



January 22, 2010

Lyndon House
Arts Foundation

293 Hoyt Street
Athens, Georgia 30601

P.O. Box 187
Athens, Georgia 30603

Dear SPLOST Advisory Committee:

The Lyndon House Arts Foundation hopes you will recommend the proposed initiative to create a Period Southern Garden on the grounds of the Lyndon House Arts Center at the entrance to the Ware Lyndon house.

There are many excellent reasons to install the historic garden. It would be educational, enhance the front entrance to one of the most important historic houses in the state, be a point of interest for the community and tourist, as well as provide an example of a working cistern system. It would upgrade the declining landscape along the walkway entrance, provide a focal point for outdoor events, and extend the possibilities for educational programs in the studio arts.

The garden would provide quality educational experiences to the public, enhancing the mission of the Lyndon House. With the interpretative panels, visitors can learn about this period art form and relate it to the aesthetics and way of life that are part of our heritage in Athens and throughout much of the South. This garden would be a continuation of unique educational opportunities already enjoyed by thousands of people of all ages each year.

Currently when visitors tour the Ware Lyndon House their comments reflect a genuine appreciation for the quality of their experience. Some visitors, knowledgeable about antiques, find fine examples and an authentic interpretation of the decorative arts of the periods when the Ware and Lyndon families inhabited the house. Others, more interested in history, appreciate how the house reflects the lifestyle and tastes of pre and post Civil War Athens. The history room is full of artifacts, and the house holds unique items such as the whale oil lamp, which stir the curiosity and imagination of the historian in all of us. Children inevitably compare how life for a child was different from the life they have today. These same types of education experiences could continue in the front yard of the Ware Lyndon House bringing history to life and giving year-round enjoyment to our community and our visitors.

The use of a cistern to irrigate the garden is a unique educational purpose to the project. At a time when limited water resources compete with growing populations all over the Southeast, garden enthusiasts, community planners, business owners and others can learn from the interpretive display on sustainability and wise water use.

The Lyndon House Arts Foundation, Inc. was created to advance the arts and support the development and operation of the Lyndon House Arts Center. We believe this project not only serves our mission but also will support artists, businesses, local schools, and the community at large. We urge you to include this project as part of SPLOST 2011.

Sincerely,

Madeline Darnell

Madeline Darnell
President, Lyndon House Arts Foundation