

Ware-Lyndon House Historic Garden

SPLOST 2011 Project # 33

Proposed Project Concept

To Whom it may concern:

I write in reference to the Ware-Lyndon Garden project concept recently presented to Athens/Clarke Commission. I am particularly interested in this project for the following reasons:

- My long-time interest and experience in preservation, and enhancement of historic properties in Athens and across Georgia.
- My long-time interest in the Lyndon Arts Center and the historic Ware-Lyndon House, including the need for an appropriate landscape treatment of the entrance to the house from Hoyt Street (I was one of eight contributors to the recently released (Dec. 2013) Ware-Lyndon House Album. The p.25 illustration, entitled "Inspiration for the Garden," represents a recommendation I made some time ago, endorsed by the renowned southern historic garden expert James R. Cothran, author of the recent book, Gardens and Historic Plants of the Antebellum South. Cothran was a friend, colleague and, until his recent death, taught the entire historic landscape sequence of courses that were a part of the Master of Historic Preservation Program at UGA. He and I had a number of extensive conversations about the appropriateness of the Stevens-Thomas Garden plan for Ware-Lyndon House and its significance to the garden heritage of Athens. The design of that garden was in his book as well as the highly regarded Garden History of Georgia: 1733-1933, published by the Garden Club of Georgia in 1933 and reprinted in 1976.
- Cothran was an enthusiastic supporter of utilization of the Stevens-Thomas Garden Plan, designed by the curator of UGA's first botanical garden, for three reasons:
 - (1) It is a design original to Athens, developed within the antebellum period.
 - (2) The documentation of plantings used in the garden is the most extensive for any historic garden in our area and would reinforce the historic and cultural garden heritage of Athens (including the extant boxwood parterre garden at the University President's House, the Berkman's designed garden at the former Barrow House on Dearing Street, Founders Memorial Garden, developed to commemorate the founding of the first garden club in America here in Athens, the Tree That Owns Itself, and the Trustees Terrace of our State Botanical Garden). Replica- tion of Stevens-Thomas Garden Plan would attract

historic garden and heritage tourists from far and wide, benefiting the economy of Athens.

- (3) Utilization of the historic Stevens-Thomas Garden Plan does not require a new design. However, its use does demand a landscape architect with the credentials and experience required to recreate and adapt this design to the Ware-Lyndon site.
 - (4) While Stevens-Thomas Garden Plan was designed for a Greek Revival residence, its boxwood parterre “paisley-design-inspired” (shapes resembling a twisted teardrop) beds are far more appropriate for Ware-Lyndon House, as its architecture, Italianate, is classified as “romantic,” while the Stevens-Thomas House was classical in design.
- It is with the thoughts provided above that I reviewed the Proposed Project Concept. My background and basis for these thoughts? : I hold both the Bachelors and Masters degrees in Landscape Architecture, am founder and former director of UGAs Graduate Programs in Historic Preservation, with a 40+ year perspective of experience in historic preservation of architecture and gardens in Athens and across the State of Georgia. Thus, I submit the following comments regarding the Project Concept, not as criticism, but as a way of supporting your efforts and to enhance your pursuit of an appropriate – and unique to Athens – landscape concept for the Ware-Lyndon House. If you have questions, or would like to further discuss any of my suggestions or comments, I would be happy to meet with the User Group, or others, at your invitation.

Comments/ Suggestions re Proposed Project Concept presented Jan. 14, 2014

Page 6 Garden area should include a gate entry approximately three feet back from the top of the Hoyt Street entry steps, extending toward the house to include the space before and around the porch, while allowing access to existing walks leading down either side of house. This entire area would be enclosed with a period picket fence (picket fence @ UGA President’s House is good example)

Page 7 re “Must Have” stipulations:

- A history-based design is mandatory and only approach defensible.
- Lighting for the garden should not introduce non-historic light fixtures. Much can be done with up-or-down landscape lighting which requires sensitivity and judgment, not just a fixture. There is a delicate balance between providing desirable night lighting while not being inconsistent with the historic character of the garden. Recommend that you strongly consider up and down lighting of mature trees on site, outside the enclosed garden area, so as not to impact the historic nature of the garden design.

- While foot traffic will require a stable walkway from the gate to the porch and from there to the existing walks along the side of the house, the traditional material for all walks within a boxwood parterre design was not paving, but sand. Given the heavy use of the area by a stream of visitors, perhaps it would be possible to utilize a form of soil-cement to ensure a solid walking surface not requiring extensive maintenance, instead of brick. With the utilization of the correct “recipe” of combined soil and cement, it may be possible to do all of the walks in this material, therefore maintaining the overall visual design integrity of the garden area and utilizing brick only for bed edges.

Page 8 “Highly Wanted” Comments:

- In a garden of this type, the overall design is the focal point and statues, water features, or urns were not a part of the Stevens-Thomas Garden. Given the nature of the Inspiration for the Garden (Stevens-Thomas Garden), the two sides of the garden on either side of the central entrance walk should be mirror images of each other. This would seem to rule out a water feature, expensive to both create and maintain in running condition. Cast-iron urns should be used with restraint.
- Historical-based protective fencing would be constructed of wood (UGA President’s House), not cast-iron or a modern replication of cast-iron.
- Interpretative educational signage can easily destroy the sense of a history-based garden. Ideally there are only two locations for an illustrative sign. The surface of these signs should be parallel to the ground, illustrating the respective locations of Lyndon House and Lyndon Arts Center with directional arrows on the surface of the signs. These two locations are: (1) at the base of the Hoyt Street steps, at street level, and (2) at the main entrance of Lyndon Arts Center. As for the interpretation of the garden, itself, directional signs would only detract from the history-based character of the area while traditional information brochures and/or cell phone or smart phone applications would not only serve that need, but not compromise the history-based character of the garden.
- Since boxwood parterre gardens were constructed for strolling (exercise) and/or to be viewed from a raised porch, there is no need for cast-iron benches within the fenced garden area. If desired, those benches could be located on the grounds outside the enclosed garden. In addition, seating could be provided on the raised porch.

Page 8 “Nice to Have” Comments:

- I assume complementary landscaping in front of the Historic House along Hoyt Street would be in the form of street trees, the typical element of “streetscapes.” It would be nice to also have street trees on both sides of Thomas Street, from Dougherty to Hoyt, as long as the vista of the house was maintained.
- Handrails on the steps should be functional and simple in design, and not decorative, in an attempt to prevent any suggestion that they were connected with the historic development of the site when they were not. The functional character of handrails “advertizes” their use and benefit and is not a part of the historic interpretation of the site.
- I would assume that complementary landscaping, outside the enclosed garden, would be primarily turf and trees in an effort to minimize initial expense as well as an on-going high-maintenance requirement.
- Steps must be functional and, ideally, should have a riser/tread ratio of treads that are 2 and ½ times (inches in depth) the height of the risers. This formula provides for steps that are comfortable and safe, as opposed to the oft-used architect’s option of 6 inch risers with 12 inch treads.
- Directional signage references, referenced in this section, should be satisfied by comment # 3 re educational signage, as stated in the “Highly Wanted” segment above. You do not need directional signage around the enclosed garden itself as it would only destroy the history-based design.

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