

Warner Reading Garden Path Proposal

Overview

In January 2015, the Montgomery County Parks Department convened the Historic Properties Workshop in Kensington, MD to discuss three properties that require renovations and greater community involvement: the Warner Mansion, Noyes Library for Young Children, and Kensington Cabin. While the Workshop and subsequent discussions generated many suggestions for ways to address the challenges each property faces, there were also exciting proposals made to create synergy between the properties. One of the most concrete was to establish a "reading garden" on the Warner property that would tie it directly to the smaller space occupied by Noyes Library. This project would be spearheaded by the Noyes Children's Library Foundation in conjunction with the Parks Department and interested members of the community.

Purpose of the Garden

The purpose of the Warner Reading Garden is to create an outdoor space that:

- Invites people of all ages to pause and experience the beauty of a natural setting;
- Creates a setting that can be enjoyed alone or with others;
- Celebrates books and literature, the unique history of Kensington, and public art; and
- Utilizes all of the best practices for accessibility, water management, native plantings and low maintenance.

Garden Path Concept

In consideration of the topography of the 4.5 acre Warner Mansion grounds, and of the historic landscape plan of the grounds, which takes advantage of long, elegant vistas and both large and small trees, we propose a "garden path" garden.

This curvilinear path - echoing the circular theme that predominates in the streets and architecture of Old Town Kensington - would run along the western side of the property, roughly between an imaginary line drawn between the kitchen side porch and the stone steps onto Montgomery Avenue, and the large beech tree across from Noyes Library.

The Garden Path Garden would replace the current asphalt path in this area. A broad walkway of stamped bricks would be added to the road surface between the Warner property and Noyes. Safety features would be added to alert drivers to this walkway.

The concept of the Warner Reading Garden Path resonates with so many other elements of the surrounding community. Kensington is a town where people walk - we are fortunate to have many gardens and green spaces, as well as life's conveniences in walking distance, so it is fitting to create a "journey" garden. Kensington is an intergenerational town - children grow up knowing older neighbors, so it is fitting to honor the Nursing Home that was in the Mansion for decades by creating a space that appeals to a wide range of ages and invites interaction between generations. Kensington is a town of readers, of artists, and of gardeners, so it is fitting to give residents and different community groups the opportunity to design and /or sponsor a "niche" of the curvilinear Garden Path. And finally, the tie to Noyes Children's Library reminds us that children love a journey, love surprises, love finding favorite spots and coming back to them. This is the magic that the Warner Reading Garden Path can create for children, and the child in all of us.

Additional Considerations

An additional benefit of the Garden Path plan is that it can be done in stages: the basic infrastructure can be created (removing current asphalt path; creating new path of rain-friendly material; outlining the niches) and perhaps the first and last areas established with seating, planting and features. The remaining areas can be established at later times. This process could include inviting community groups and residents to sponsor the areas and submit designs for approval.

Other items discussed for the Warner grounds include the possibility of a larger space for reading programs, concerts or other public events. While the Garden Path plan allows for small groupings of readers - for instance, on one to three benches in different niches of the Path - a larger space would be best in another area of the property. In the past, the southwest quadrant of the Mansion grounds included an informal amphitheater and the topography there does suggest that use. Alternatively, seating options for larger groups could be created and stored in the Carriage House (currently not in use), then brought out for events.