

MEMORANDUM TO TOWN COUNCIL

II-E

Prepared on April 19, 2018 for Town Council Meeting on April 23, 2018

Re: Dennison Bequest and Centennial Garden

Lee Dennison, a longtime Town resident who lived at 4406 Leland, sadly passed away on August 31, 2012 at the age of 60. In December 2012 the Town was notified that it was the beneficiary of a bequest from Lee in the amount of \$100,000, specifically to support the beautification and/or the maintenance of public space within the Town with the specific intent that these funds shall be used to augment rather than to replace public funds. Lee was a community-minded person and gave generously of her time to various Town projects, including serving on the Traffic Committee. This bequest reflects her dedication to and love of the Town.

In early 2013, the Town Council held a discussion of the bequest and directed the staff to make recommendations as to possible uses of the funds consistent with the terms of the bequest. As reported in the May 2013 *Forecast* in the article "Town Receives Bequest from Ms. Lee Dennison:"

*The Town Council has asked staff to develop a proposal for the use of the funds and will discuss this issue at an upcoming Council meeting. Ms. Dennison had a deep love for the arts and, from 1975 to 2004, she worked for the National Endowment of the Arts. Ms. Dennison also was active in the community. She especially enjoyed gardening and participated in the Town's Garden Tour for several years.*

While the Council did schedule this matter for discussion, it was postponed several times due to more urgent, time-sensitive matters. In June 2015 the Council again discussed the bequest and asked the Community Relations Committee to consider possible ideas to be brought forward to the Council. In July 2015 the Committee reported back to the Council as follows:

*Lee Dennison Bequest—Following discussion about the \$100,000 bequest given to the Town by former Town resident Lee Dennison to be used for Town beautification projects, the Committee decided that the best way to honor this bequest would be to use the funds in conjunction with the Town's upcoming centennial.*

In February of 2018 Mayor Mary Flynn convened a meeting of a group of residents who had expressed interest in environmental issues and participating in an Climate & Environment Advisory Group, lead by Irene Lane. Some residents present at this meeting were also a part of the planning for the Town's centennial. At this meeting, Kathy Strom brought up the idea of discussing and considering ways to use the Dennison bequest as part of the centennial year celebration of the Town, consistent with the recommendation of the Community Relations Committee. In a discussion,

there was an informal consensus among the group that building a community teaching garden during this centennial year would be desirable and a good way to use Lee's bequest for her intended purpose of Town beautification and maintenance of public spaces.

**It was suggested at that meeting that the bequest could be used to create an environmentally sustainable teaching garden. Following the meeting Sally Kelly expressed interest in spearheading the sustainable teaching garden. Todd Hoffman consulted with Ron Bolt as to whether the teaching garden fell within the terms of the bequest and Ron advised that it did.**

In March Irene Lane convened a meeting of Sally Kelly and several other volunteers and Town Manager, Todd Hoffman, to preliminarily discuss possible locations for the sustainable teaching garden within the Town.

There are three main decision points for the establishment of the sustainable teaching garden:

1. Location: the group needs to determine the exact public space that will serve as the location for the teaching garden, as well as gain any necessary permissions
2. Costs: the group needs to obtain cost estimates for both the initial garden installation and maintenance as well as determine whether maintenance will be covered by the bequest or by the Town
3. Resident Involvement: the group needs to draw up a plan for how the garden will be tended by residents, utilized for educational purposes, and outreach.

Following that meeting it was agreed that it would make sense to bring this idea before the Council in order to obtain feedback about next steps, and see how best to move forward with the bequest, if possible, during this centennial year.

Irene Lane, Chair, Climate and Environment Committee

Bridget Hartman, Chair, Centennial Committee

Sally Kelly, Member of Environmental Advisory Group

Vicky Taplin, Member of Environmental Advisory Group

Kathy Strom, Member of Centennial Committee

Within Appendix 1, there is some additional information about the proposed sustainable teaching garden.

Appendix 2 contains links to Lee's obituary and a more recent magazine article. Lee was an accomplished and highly respected staff person at NEA for many, many years. This magazine article from Interlochen certainly provides insight into Lee's sense of the relationship between a healthy environment and one's own health, and perhaps a thoughtful context in which to consider her gift to the Town.

## **Appendix 1**

### **Town Sustainable Teaching Garden Requirements**

Webster's Dictionary defines sustainability as "using a resource so that the resource is not depleted or permanently damaged." As the Town celebrates this year its 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary, what better way to create a long-lasting gift for future generations of Town residents than to build a sustainable teaching garden using a bequest from a former resident whose Leland Street garden was enjoyed by so many.

The sustainable teaching garden would show how to create a landscape that protects and nurtures our natural ecosystem. It would offer instruction and information about native plants and shrubs, water conservation and rain gardens, wildlife-friendly landscapes and organic methods to maintain them. It would demonstrate that embracing basic sustainable gardening practices, the result is a garden of beauty and enjoyment.

A Town of Chevy Chase sustainable teaching garden should have:

- easy access from the street
- access to water and power
- sun, though some shade for shade-loving plants is important
- a place for water to collect to demonstrate a rain garden
- an area large enough for a path or two
- a demonstration spot for actual teaching
- a bench or two
- a sculpture, perhaps commissioned/donated from an artist at Interlochen to which Lee was closely tied
- an area free from invasive species
- instructional signage with links to the Town's website for more information
- an annual maintenance budget to support proper organic and pesticide-free maintenance

## **Appendix 2**

[Lee Dennison Obituary](#)

[A Lasting Impression - Lee Dennison Leaves a Gift that Keeps on Giving](#)