

LINDENWOLD MONTGOMERY COUNTY

701 S. Bethlehem Pike, (Ambler) Upper Dublin Township

THREAT: Inappropriate ALTERATION from Residential Development



DID YOU KNOW?
Lindenwold was the setting for the 1966 movie *The Trouble with Angels* featuring Hayley Mills.

Recently used as St. Mary's Villa for Children, Lindenwold estate is eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places both for its association with Dr. Richard V. Mattison and as an important example of its architectural type and style. According to the Pennsylvania Historical & Museum Commission, the landscape features are contributing elements of the property, in addition to the buildings and structures.

Lindenwold is currently owned by the Sisters of the Holy Family of Nazareth, who have moved to a new location that better serves their mission. They have signed an agreement of sale with a development team who hopes to establish a mixed-use residential community on this 45-acre property. That development proposes to: remove approximately 1,580 trees over 8 inches in diameter; demolish the carriage house and other secondary buildings and structures; regrade the site to make it more suitable for construction; build 16 duplexes (32 units), 72 townhouses and approximately 255 apartments; and build a four-story parking structure and additional surface parking lots. However, the developers also currently plan to: retain 19 acres of open space (including the required setbacks and undevelopable wetland); retain the primary residence known as "the castle"; rehabilitate two gate houses as residences; and preserve the front gate and front entrance promenade, the sunken garden and the lake. The developer and the township feel like they are considering historic preservation, but the true nature of the property is not being preserved by this development plan.

Upper Dublin Township approved a zoning change for the property. The township recently received a conditional use application for the 45-acre estate, which is being reviewed by the Planning Commission. A public hearing will likely take place before the Board of Commissioners in the first quarter of 2016. The conditional use review is the first step in a lengthy land development plan review process.

The township has a preservation ordinance that recognizes Lindenwold as a historic resource. However, that ordinance does not have sufficient "teeth" to prevent a development that is allowed under local zoning. The historic commission will have an opportunity to review the design details of the new buildings, but not prohibit them to protect the historic landscape.

Despite the fact that elements of the historic property will be retained, development of this scale and intensity will severely compromise the historic character of the estate by altering its significant landscape and the relationship among its contributing features.

A citizens group known as Residents for Open Space at Lindenwold Estate (ROSLE) has organized to promote preservation of the property. ROSLE and other members of the community understand that it is not financially feasible for the Sisters to continue using the house as a home for abused and neglected children and maintain all of its buildings and its important landscape. However, since the historic landscape of the estate is a significant feature of the property and community, they think that the open space should be preserved as well as the buildings, structures and objects. They believe that a sufficient range of alternatives has not been explored, and that a more appropriate development plan might exist. Alternatives such as reusing the property as a hotel and conference or event center might allow the property to be financially viable while preserving the historic buildings and character-defining landscape.

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