December 12, 2017

Mr. John Engel, Chairman
The Town Council of New Canaan
New Canaan, CT

Dear Mr. Engel:

The National Association for Olmsted (NAOP) is most concerned by the recent approval by the New Canaan Parks and Recreation Commission to allow a substantial redesign of the Upper Garden at Waveny Park, an important feature of the Lewis Lapham estate designed by the nationally significant Olmsted Brothers firm. We understand that the decision was made against the advice of the long-standing and knowledgeable landscape planners for this property, Keith Simpson Associates, and without critical information that will be forthcoming from the National Register nomination study currently in preparation.

Without the research, evaluation and preservation treatment recommendations to be determined through this open and informed federal process, the Upper Garden and other original features may be lost or altered, affecting the historic integrity of this property, thus compromising the public’s ability to understand and enjoy the Olmsted Brothers design for this signature garden.

Mrs. Lapham, as one of the founding members of the New Canaan Garden Club, had a long and cordial relationship with principals in the Olmsted firm over a nearly 40 year period. The work on this property began in 1907 with John Charles Olmsted and continued under Olmsted partners, Percival Gallagher and Edward Clark Whiting. As the lengthy correspondence indicates, Mrs. Lapham relied upon the Olmsted advice, both in planning and in horticulture, as they together forged the aesthetic for this property, particularly concerning this Upper Garden.
Therefore, altering this feature without a better study of the Olmsted/Lapham collaboration would precipitate an unfortunate and unnecessary loss to integral character-defining elements of this property. Pursuing such alterations to accommodate a singular event for a special interest group does not seem in the best interests of the municipality.

New Canaan is fortunate to have acquired this heritage Olmsted-designed property to include as a significant asset for its citizens’ open space needs and enjoyment. Waveny is a property that also allows the community to celebrate and share in a regional, state and national legacy of Olmsted designed landscapes. Waveny should be studied and preserved according to nationally determined preservation treatment standards so as not to compromise its historic values. We support a process where preservation goals are given all necessary consideration, while working to accommodate the needs of the community and not manipulated to meet unique requests.

Very truly yours,

[Signatures]

Arleyn A. Levee, Hon
Co-Chairs, National Association for Olmsted Parks

Lucy Lawliss, FASLA

cc. William N. Pollack PLA, ASLA
Keith Simpson
Barbara Yaeger, CT ASLA