
Waynesboro Borough Council Seeks “One Renfrew”

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WAYNESBORO — Waynesboro Borough Council announces efforts to enhance the services and experiences provided to the public by its asset Renfrew Museum and Park, a 107-acre historic site and nature preserve located at 1010 E. Main Street in Washington Township, through an internal reorganization of two separate non-profit institutions that currently call it home. Celebrating its forty-fifth anniversary of operation this year, Renfrew is a beloved community treasure nestled along the banks of Little Antietam Creek. Renfrew features an outstanding collection of period furnishings and decorative arts, extant nineteenth century historic buildings, and a public park with walking trails where anyone can enjoy its breathtaking scenery and natural wonders daily from dawn to dusk.

Renfrew was granted to the Borough as a bequest by Emma Geiser Nicodemus in 1973. Mrs. Nicodemus’ Will detailed her intent for the property to be used as a public park for recreation and for her 1812 stone house to become a museum to interpret early American life. Mrs. Nicodemus detailed her plans for the governance structure of this newly created institution with sole management responsibility to be vested in a seven-member committee, known as the Renfrew Board. This board, in conjunction with the Borough Council, created the Renfrew Institute for Cultural and Environmental Studies, Inc. (now The Institute at Renfrew, Inc.) in 1989 to be a supporting arm of the Renfrew Board in enhancing educational opportunities at Renfrew. In 1996, the Borough created Renfrew Committee, Inc. (RCI) as an independent non-profit to oversee management of Renfrew with all operational responsibility for Renfrew transferred to RCI upon its formation. While the two organizations have utilized the property since then, both are to be supporting one vision and one mission, that of Renfrew Museum and Park. In accepting the gift of Renfrew, the Borough agreed to adhere to the mission laid out in the Nicodemus Will with the overall management of the museum and park delegated to one Renfrew entity.

The Borough has engaged in a process to memorialize or update agreements with local entities with which it directly conducts business. As part of that effort, Waynesboro Borough Council identified a need to replace the 1996 lease agreement (that hasn’t been updated in almost a quarter of a century) it holds with RCI for use of the Renfrew property with a revised lease agreement more accurately reflecting present conditions, best practices, and the Borough’s wishes to better align operations at Renfrew with the Nicodemus Will. As a result of the current lease terminating on October 18, 2020, the facilities use agreement between RCI and The Institute at Renfrew will also terminate. The Borough has attempted to engage both RCI and The Institute in discussions regarding the use of Renfrew following the lease termination. The Borough intends to enter into a lease agreement between the Waynesboro Borough and RCI. The goal of this new lease agreement is to reestablish “One Renfrew,” creating a single organization that offers many services to our community, bringing together into a single entity RCI (tasked with the overall management of Renfrew) and the supporting organization, The Institute.

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Despite duplicating branding, staffs, fundraising, and operational efforts, the distinction between the two nonprofits is still not widely understood in the community. Most people perceive the site as simply “Renfrew” and are eager to support any activities which will advance the mission of this special place without qualification. As securing much-needed resources becomes increasingly difficult, joining forces and streamlining efforts would benefit both organizations greatly. Additionally, in collaborating to reestablish “One Renfrew” the separate institutional program and events calendars would combine, simplifying participation for visitors and perhaps also increasing the number of volunteers in a time when volunteerism in general is declining. A union would also positively impact the budget of both organizations by eliminating duplication of expenses, boosting fundraising and development efforts, and allowing the strengths of both staffs to be leveraged in the most efficient way to best serve the community. Most importantly, the merger would not impact any of the current educational programs, activities and events offered but instead allow for them to be strengthened and grow beyond what each organization could do on its own.

Not only has the Borough attempted to engage RCI and The Institute in collaborative discussions regarding reestablishing One Renfrew, the Borough has also retained Strategy Solutions, Inc., a consulting firm with extensive nonprofit experience, to facilitate this collaborative process. Outreach by the Borough occurred well in advance of the lease termination and the Borough desires to move forward with the One Renfrew initiative before the end of this year. Willingness to engage in collaboration from all parties is necessary to create One Renfrew.

According to Harold Mumma, Borough Council President, “the mission of Renfrew Museum and Park is of significant importance to this community and to one of its most valuable resources. The Institute plays an important role in fulfilling that mission. The Borough was involved in the creation of the Institute and RCI and it’s the Borough’s obligation to make sure that their operation furthers the mission of Renfrew. We are looking to establish an organizational structure that reflects the structure contemplated by the Will and one that ensures a common, cohesive mission that will serve our community well into the future. I hope that dedication to the mission of Renfrew brings all of the entities to the table with an open mind.”

“Our goal is to bring these organizations together, under the management of Renfrew Committee, Inc. (RCI) which is currently tasked with operating Renfrew Museum and Park, and to build on existing strengths, and create synergies that will sustain programming for all organizations into the future, while ensuring that we are operating within the tenants of the original Nicodemus Will” remarked Councilmember Mike Cermak Sr. Cermak and the members of Borough Council’s Property Committee initiated discussions regarding the establishment of “One Renfrew” and have been in communication with the two organizations regarding the potential for this organizational merger. The Borough of Waynesboro Council fully intends to support the two organizations in the initial stage of collaboration so a mutually-beneficial structure can be established to best move forward with discussions to execute the singular mission of Renfrew Museum and Park as one entity. Questions regarding the creation of “One Renfrew” may be directed to Borough Manager Jason Stains at (717) 762-2101 or jason@waynesboropa.org.