



# Lower Merion Conservancy

2023 Annual Report



# Message from the Chairman and Executive Director

Dear Friends,

The Lower Merion Conservancy was founded in 1974 as a watershed conservation group, driven by community activists who were passionate about environmental change and responsible stewardship of natural resources. This past year marked the 50th anniversary of the Clean Water Act, a landmark environmental legislation that established many of the protective clean water measures we rely on today. It also marked a critical juncture for the Conservancy to reflect on the issues we have tackled since our establishment and the various initiatives we have undertaken.

The Clean Water Act prompted municipalities across the United States to address flooding and water quality issues. The municipal requirements also created opportunities for non-profit organizations to make greater impacts. Clean water Initiatives like the William Penn Foundation's Delaware River Watershed Initiative have ignited numerous projects to safeguard creeks, streams, and rivers. The Conservancy, along with our innovative partners and dedicated supporters, have been instrumental in expanding our reach and implementing impactful projects.

However, challenges remain. There is an ongoing need to educate residents about property runoff and its impact on water quality. During the past 18 months, the Conservancy has recorded three fish kills in the upper East Branch of Indian Creek in Narberth and Wynnewood - events likely caused by water pollutants entering the stream. Other neighborhoods and towns with comparable urban density and land management strategies are likely experiencing similar incidents.

To pre-empt future pollution, the Conservancy works to preserve sensitive areas. In December of 2022, we secured a new conservation easement to protect woodlands and limit development on a 15-acre property. We continue to work to ensure the preservation of the woodlands, wetlands, and historic features at the 13-acre property in Villanova where the Lower Merion School District has proposed new athletic fields.

We are grateful for your continued support as we carry our momentum into 2024.

*Maurine McGeehan*  
Executive Director

*Mark E. Taylor*  
Board Chair

# Snapshots of FY2023



Community members tour Delmont Green Street gardens.



Carson Clark installs a tree tube around a newly planted tree in Rolling Hill Park.



A young mushroom enthusiast takes in the varieties of fungi found in Rolling Hill Park during an event.



Participants enjoy a historic tour of Ardmore, led by Kathleen Abplanalp.



Overbrook Preschool students enjoy playing in nature at Rolling Hill Park.



Sarah Marshall and Karen Zimmer pose for a photo at our Annual Gala at Martin and Ro King's home.



Matt Weed and Linshuang Lu stand next to their newly completed rain garden.



Shrubby St. John's wort (*Hypericum prolificum*) in bloom in one of our Green Street gardens.



The Conservancy digs a rain garden to capture roof runoff in Narberth.

# Watershed Conservation

## Delaware River Watershed Initiative



*Partners across organizations come together to work on downspout planter construction.*

For the last 10 years, the William Penn Foundation's Delaware River Watershed Initiative (DRWI) has supported a collaboration among nonprofit and academic institutions working to conserve local waterways. The DRWI has strategically concentrated its efforts on headwater streams, the vital smaller waterways that feed into larger rivers. These smaller streams are particularly sensitive to pollution, making them both more susceptible to degradation and more responsive to remediation efforts. In a targeted approach, the DRWI identified headwater streams that already had active community groups working in their vicinity.

One notable DRWI stream is Cobbs Creek, which originates near Bryn Mawr Hospital and meanders along the western edge of Philadelphia before it joins the Delaware River near the John Heinz National Wildlife Refuge at Tinicum. This stream is fed by several tributaries, including the East and West Branches of Indian Creek as well as the unnamed streams traversing through Haverford College and Wynnewood Valley Park. Due to this interconnected network, the Conservancy was chosen as a DRWI partner to spearhead conservation efforts in this region. The involvement with the DRWI represents a significant opportunity – one that is met with immense gratitude and a sense of responsibility towards environmental stewardship.

Participation in the DRWI has significantly enhanced the Conservancy's water conservation work. Our involvement has fostered collaborations with officials and staff from Lower Merion and Narberth – crucial allies in driving environmental change. Our stream monitoring program has advanced substantially, incorporating cutting-edge technology to gain deeper insights into stream behavior during storms. These impactful on-the-ground projects are rooted in strong partnerships to ensure that the ecological benefits compound over time. Our engagement with other conservation groups in the Cobbs Creek watershed has been invaluable.

Our collaboration with the Pennsylvania Resources Council, the Eastern Delaware County Stormwater Collaborative, and the Darby Creek Valley Association has been particularly important. Like the Conservancy, these organizations are dedicated to improving the health of Cobbs Creek and other nearby streams. Because we operate in densely populated suburbs (developed before modern stormwater management considerations), we face unique challenges. With extensive urban development, there are no singular solutions to stormwater issues; the approach must be collective.

Residential property improvements offer the most cost-effective strategies for managing stormwater. Simple, yet effective, practices, such as planting trees, replacing lawns and pavement with native plants, and redirecting downspouts towards planted spaces benefit streams. Our Stream Smart Stormwater House Call program and Growing Greener Communities initiative - offered in partnership with our four Cobbs Creek partner organizations - have assisted hundreds of residents from Lower Merion to Darby Township to make sustainable changes to their properties.

As the DRWI draws to a close, we remain optimistic about the future. The partnerships forged during this initiative have created a solid foundation for ongoing collaboration and environmental stewardship, promising continued progress in our shared mission of water conservation and wildlife protection.



*Conservancy Watershed Specialist Jamie Anderson and Pennsylvania Resources Council Eastern Program Director Diana Andrejczak install a stream monitoring station.*

## Partnering with the Friends of Harriton Preserve

As urban development increasingly covers our landscape, it is crucial to optimize our remaining natural spaces for wildlife habitat. While the Conservancy does not own land, we collaborate closely with local 'friends' groups who share our commitment to protecting open space and expanding our woodlands, riparian buffers, and native plant life that supports wildlife and pollinators. Groups like the Friends of the Cynwyd Heritage Trail, Friends of Harriton Preserve, and Friends of Sabine Park volunteer countless hours managing and stewarding public park land in their neighborhoods.

In 2022 and 2023, the Conservancy worked with the Friends of Harriton Preserve (FHP) to understand the group's vision for restoring Harriton Preserve, a 8.9-acre public park in Bryn Mawr that features a diverse ecosystem of woodlands, wetlands, and a section of Mill Creek. Although the Preserve offers a beautiful natural retreat, it faces several environmental challenges that need to be addressed.

The loss of ash trees from the Emerald Ash Borer, combined with disruptions from stream bank construction work, has created open spaces within the Preserve. These gaps have become breeding grounds for invasive plant species. The local deer population, which gravitates towards native plants, inadvertently aids these invasive species by leaving them untouched and free to spread. Japanese knotweed has taken over parts of the wetland areas near the stream, multiflora rose is prevalent in the woodland's understory, and various vines are encroaching on the trees at the edge of the Preserve. Without intervention, these invasive plants will overrun the Preserve, wiping out healthy trees and important native plant species. Thankfully, the Friends of Harriton Preserve are actively combating the issue through regular, well-attended workdays aimed at controlling invasive plants.



*A portion of Mill Creek runs through Harriton Preserve.*



*Harriton Preserve hosts StoryWalks installed by Conservancy staff.*

Lower Merion Township recently created a masterplan for the Preserve to lay the groundwork for improvements. The Conservancy is looking to work with the FHP to create and execute a wildlife habitat restoration plan. The plan would be coupled with an invasive plant maintenance plan to help the Preserve thrive for years to come. The Conservancy has applied for grant funding for the project and are awaiting responses from potential funders.

Our collaboration with the Friends of Harriton Preserve presents a valuable chance to enhance wildlife habitats and bring greater awareness to this natural area. The proposed plantings and management initiatives could serve as a model for other properties adjacent to streams. Many such properties maintain closely mowed lawns right up to the stream's edge, a practice detrimental to aquatic wildlife. By implementing eco-friendly landscaping in a public setting, we aim to inspire visitors by showing them firsthand how similar approaches could transform their own properties. We are delighted to have forged this partnership with the Friends of Harriton Preserve and are enthusiastic about the potential positive impacts of our joint efforts.

# Watershed Conservation

## NFWF Salt Grant with Villanova

As an organization devoted to protecting water quality, the Conservancy focuses on unraveling the intricate dynamics of vital waterways, raising community awareness about the impact of pollution sources, and engaging in projects that restore our streams.

One of the biggest threats to water quality and wildlife is salt that is applied to roads, sidewalks and parking lots during winter storms. Salt from these impervious surfaces breaks down into sodium and chloride ions as it is absorbed into soil and streams. Elevated levels of salt – on land and in water – are ingested by mammals, pollinators, fish, amphibians and tiny invertebrates, causing an adverse impact on the ecosystem and loss of biodiversity, as some species die off. High salt levels also impact human health, as absorbed salt makes its way into public and private drinking water sources.

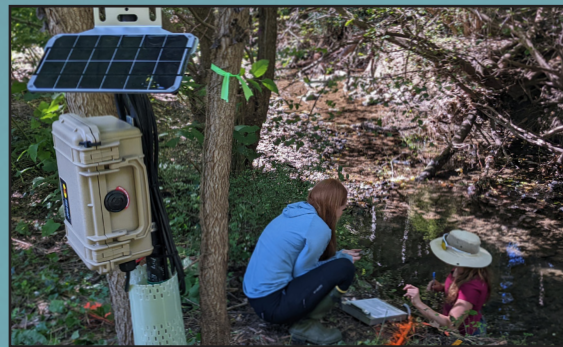
One way to reduce salt levels is to use alternative methods for de-icing surfaces. For example, using brine (salt in a liquid form) rather than solid salt is a more environmentally friendly method of treating roadways in winter, as less brine is needed to melt ice.

The Conservancy acknowledges the challenges and costs associated with snow removal and maintaining safe roadways during winter months. In an effort to help our community switch to brine, we recently applied for and received two grants from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation. Both grants will support research and outreach initiatives with Villanova University's Department of Geography and the Environment, led by Dr. Steven Goldsmith.

If you would like to learn more about the impact of salt, see Dr. Goldsmith's lecture "From Our Streets to Our Tap Water: Consequences of road salt application in an increasingly paved world," available at [lmconservancy.org/past-webinars](http://lmconservancy.org/past-webinars).



*The Conservancy has been monitoring water since our inception.*



*Our partners from Stroud Water Research Center helped us install an Enviro DIY logger on Vine Creek. The logger takes water temperature, depth, and conductivity readings every 15 minutes.*

## Lower Merion Township Partnership

Most of Lower Merion's storm sewers are fed by road inlets and drains that are piped directly to streams, unfiltered. All municipalities that send storm sewer water to streams are required to obtain a permit from the Pennsylvania's Department of Environmental Protection (PA DEP). Permit-holding municipalities are required by the Clean Water Act to monitor the pipes to ensure that they are used only for rain water and snow melt. Because sanitary sewage, bleach, paint, and other pollutants are sometimes illegally dumped down storm sewers, the pipes need to be closely monitored.

To help meet federal clean water mandates, Lower Merion Township contracts with the Conservancy to monitor hundreds of stormwater outfalls to establish that they are functioning correctly. These pipes should only discharge water during and immediately following rain and snow storms. The antiquated nature of the infrastructure, however, can make the inspections challenging. Some of the pipes, for example, lead to hard-to-reach culverts or channel water from hidden streams that flow continuously. Despite these obstacles, the Conservancy's proactive surveillance enhances the probability of detecting pollution. This approach is necessary for mitigating potential environmental hazards.

Under the same PA DEP permit, municipalities like Lower Merion are also required to provide public education related to stormwater and streams. When people understand more about how stormwater runoff affects water quality, there is a better chance that collective action will be taken to prevent pollution from entering streams. Conservancy events, newsletters, social media posts, email blasts, and annual reports all contribute to and count towards Lower Merion's required education mandate.

The Conservancy also works with the Township on an environmental protection effort similar to our conservation easement program. In 1990, Lower Merion Township adopted the Open Space Preservation Overlay District



(OSPD) ordinance. This ordinance stipulates that when a parcel of five or more acres is proposed for subdivision or land development, half of the parcel must be preserved as open space. This regulation was designed to safeguard environmentally sensitive areas, such as woodlands and streams. Maintenance and operations plans outline the specific care and management required for the preserved land. To ensure adherence to these plans, the Conservancy, in collaboration with Lower Merion's Building and Planning Department staff, conducts inspections of the OSPD properties every two years. Following these inspections, reports are drafted by the Conservancy and sent by the Township to the property owners. These reports detail necessary adjustments and establish a timeline for remediating any potential violations to conservation agreements, thereby ensuring ongoing compliance and protection of these critical natural spaces.



Left: Signage alerts people that the sewer drains directly to waterways. Right: Iron bacteria on the bottom of a stormwater outfall.

## Cynwyd Heritage Trail Update

In October 2022, the Conservancy planted thousands of native trees, shrubs, grasses, and flowering perennials along the Cynwyd Heritage Trail downhill from the Barmouth Trailhead. The project was a collaboration with the Friends of the Cynwyd Heritage Trail (FOCHT), Lower Merion Township and Gray Landscape Design, LLC. It was funded by a grant from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation's Delaware Watershed Conservation Fund. The plantings followed a thorough plan created by landscape designer, Bob Gray, with input from Dr. Karen Snetselaar, a botanist and Conservancy and FOCHT board member. The goals of the project were to capture stormwater runoff, increase wildlife habitat, and stabilize the banks of Vine Creek. The project complements existing FOCHT native plantings that you can see all along the trail, particularly near Cynwyd Station, the Barmouth Trailhead, and Bala Cynwyd Park. While seeing the plants go in was exciting, weeding and watering in the coming years will determine whether or not the plan fully comes to fruition.



Dr. Karen Snetselaar leads volunteers at the Cynwyd Heritage Trail during a Friends Central School service day.

The unusually dry spring and summer was hard on the new plants. Determined volunteers from the Friends of the Cynwyd Heritage Trail Stewardship Committee and the Conservancy put in countless hours hauling water from a pump at West Laurel Hill Cemetery to water the new plants and cutting back invasive plants. The efforts resulted in the newly planted flowering dogwoods blooming and many of the other plants taking first year leaps.

One of the reasons we were excited to work with the FOCHT was their experience taking an herbicide-free approach to dealing with difficult invasives, particularly Japanese knotweed. Every time plants are dug up, cut down, or killed with herbicides, space opens for new plants. These new plants can emerge from buried seeds, new seeds blown in, or chopped plants growing back. Clearing an area can feel satisfying in the moment but the action often causes more damage than good. Bare soil is more susceptible to erosion and invasive plants are usually able to colonize spaces more quickly than native plants. Sometimes pulling a patch of one invasive plant can let a more difficult to remove invasive plant establish. The Friends of the Cynwyd Heritage Trail Stewardship Committee, led by Dr. Snetselaar, have been strategically cutting back specific patches of knotweed for years to weaken the plants and create openings for native plants. Their dedication has been paying off.

There is no straightforward way to deal with invasive plants - especially in parks like the Cynwyd Heritage Trail. We look to create advantages for native plants so they can mature and spread. We cannot eliminate invasive plants but we can increase plant diversity, which improves wildlife habitat.

We are optimistic about the progress at the Cynwyd Heritage Trail. We have additional funding for the Cynwyd Heritage Trail through our current grant and will continue to explore opportunities to bolster the great work going on at the Trail.

# Open Space

## Easements

The Conservancy holds conservation easements that limit development rights on private properties to protect natural spaces like streams, woodlands, wetlands, and meadows in perpetuity. To qualify for a conservation easement a property must meet one or more of the following objectives: maintain and improve water quality, protect natural habitat, prevent loss and depletion of soil, protect scenic views, prevent erosion and flooding downstream, or ensure that the land is managed so that it can always support sustainable forestry or agriculture.

The Conservancy holds 21 easements on 198 acres, with the most recent easement becoming official in late 2022. Our newest easement is at Martin and Ro King's property in Gladwyne, where we had our 2023 Gala. The easement reduces the number of buildable lots on the property from 5 to 2 and protects 4.5 acres of woodlands. These woodlands are particularly important because they are close to a stream on a neighboring property. Trees help filter water, so the stream water is cleaner and healthier than if the property were to be built out. The easement protects the woods so future owners cannot clear cut the trees to create a larger lawn.

If you are considering the possibility of placing a conservation easement on your property, contact [Maurine@lmconservancy.org](mailto:Maurine@lmconservancy.org). We are always looking to work with people who want to preserve the ecological features of their property.



*Background photo: Preserved scenic viewshed on the King property.*



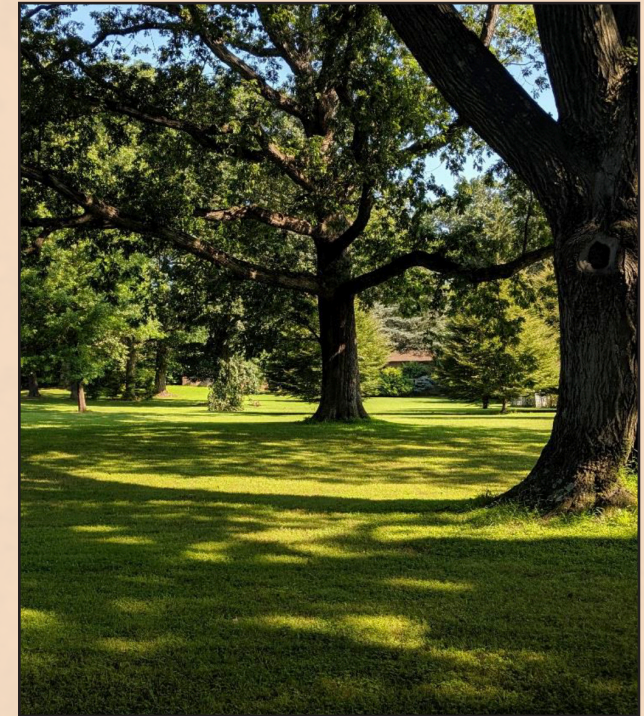
## School District Properties

The Conservancy helps to protect open space by working with residents to permanently preserve their land with conservation easements. We also monitor the Township's preservation areas, provide technical assistance to people interested in capturing stormwater and adding garden space to their properties, and facilitate discussions to create public open space (like the newly-acquired 3 Elmwood Avenue property in Narberth). In addition, we advocate for sensitive land development that protects the environment, maintains the character of our community, and preserves important historic resources and landscapes.

The Conservancy recognizes that the term "open space" can be understood in different ways. A parking lot could be perceived as open space, yet it provides no ecological value. Lawns are open space but they offer minimal habitat for wildlife or capture for stormwater runoff. The Conservancy's open space work specifically focuses on conserving streams, wetlands, woodlands, and other natural areas. Laws exist to protect streams and wetlands (to an extent), but woodlands, despite their numerous benefits to people and the environment, are largely unprotected.

The Conservancy commends Lower Merion Township's recent commitment to add 200 new trees throughout the township to restore the tree canopy. However, trees are being cut down faster than they are being replanted. Therefore, the best way to save the canopy is to preserve, rather than replace trees. This strategy is especially important when considering the Lower Merion School District's proposal to cut down hundreds of mature trees on a 13-acre Villanova property to create middle school playing fields.

As part of our overall goal of preserving the environmental and historic integrity of the school district properties, we also remained steadfastly in favor of design solutions that will permit the preservation of the ca. 1900 brick garden complex, a significant commission of the noted Philadelphia architect Frank Miles Day.



*Mature trees slated for possible removal on the site of the proposed middle school field.*



*An aerial map shows the woodlands at risk of being cut down to make way for playing fields.*



*The size and maturity of the trees on the site of the proposed Lower Merion School District middle school field is demonstrated by this white oak that towers over the historic greenhouse property.*

# Rolling Hill Park Cottage

## Then - a Brief History of the Cottage

In 1892, Irwin N. Megargee, a paper merchant from Philadelphia acquired a 43-acre operational farm in Gladwyne. He then converted this property into a dairy and horse farm, doubling as a seasonal home for his family. The following year, Megargee commissioned Minerva Parker Nichols, the first female solo architect in the United States, to design a grand residence as well as an accessory house for the property. It has been said that the latter, a building we now call "The Cottage," was intended as a home for Megargee's brother.

In 1909, Megargee's sudden passing led to the sale of his estate. During the following years, the property was transformed with the addition of a new estate house, farm buildings, pool houses, and gardens. The estate also grew through the acquisition of neighboring properties and ultimately encompassed 103 acres.



*The Cottage is seen in the background on Earth Day, 1997.*



*In 1997, the Conservancy signed a lease with Lower Merion Township.*



*The Cottage was in a state of disrepair. Fundraising efforts for restoration began.*

## And Now - the Cottage Today

Today the Cottage remains an important space for the Conservancy. It is a hub for community events, school programs, and environmental demonstration projects. We hope to continue fostering community from this historic space.



*The Cottage boasts a vibrant native rain*



*Students enjoy yearly bonfire celebrations.*

In 1994, Lower Merion Township purchased the property (at that time owned by members of the Pew family) and preserved it as Rolling Hill Park. Shortly after the purchase, the Township offered local non-profits the opportunity to rehabilitate the historic but deteriorated two-story frame cottage - the only remaining inhabited building on the property after a devastating fire in the 1950s destroyed the main house. The Township offered demolition as an alternative to this scenario.

Fortunately, the Conservancy sprang at the chance to save the Cottage and make it the permanent home for our programs and operations! The photos below document the transformation of the Cottage.

*The background image on this page shows a partial piece of wallpaper that once hung in the historic Cottage.*



In 1998, LMC commissioned the architectural firm of Atkin, Olshin, Lawson-Bell and Associates.



A feasibility study of the Cottage's structural soundness and its ability to meet our office needs was conducted.



In 2001, the Cottage officially opened as headquarters of the Lower Merion Conservancy.



StoryWalks are set up outside the Cottage.



Philly Myco Club co-hosts mushroom walks.



Birding enthusiasts meet for the Annual Bird Count.

# Historic Preservation

## If These Walls Could Talk

Did you know that a majority of houses in Lower Merion and Narberth were built before 1945? These houses, which lend character to our neighborhoods, are distinctive in their style, plan, and design. Yet, they share one thing in common: most were built using sustainable and often inimitable materials, including old growth timber, plaster, and natural stone or brick. Unlike building components used in much modern-day construction (which need to be disposed of and replaced when broken or deteriorated), older materials can be maintained and repaired. This past spring, the Conservancy, in partnership with the Narberth Borough and Lower Merion Township, ran a three-part series called "The Care and Repair of Historic Homes." These free workshops, which were led by Ray Tschoepe, a historic preservation professional and restoration specialist, and Andrew Staples, Conservation Supervisor for the Fairmount Park Conservancy, introduced property owners to methods for repairing their historic wood windows, plaster walls, and masonry foundations. The series was immensely popular – attracting nearly 200 people over the course of the three workshops – and demonstrated the enthusiasm that local homeowners have for preserving their historic homes. The Conservancy, Township and Borough hope to be back for another round of workshops this spring!



Ray Tschoepe demonstrates proper mortar repair technique.



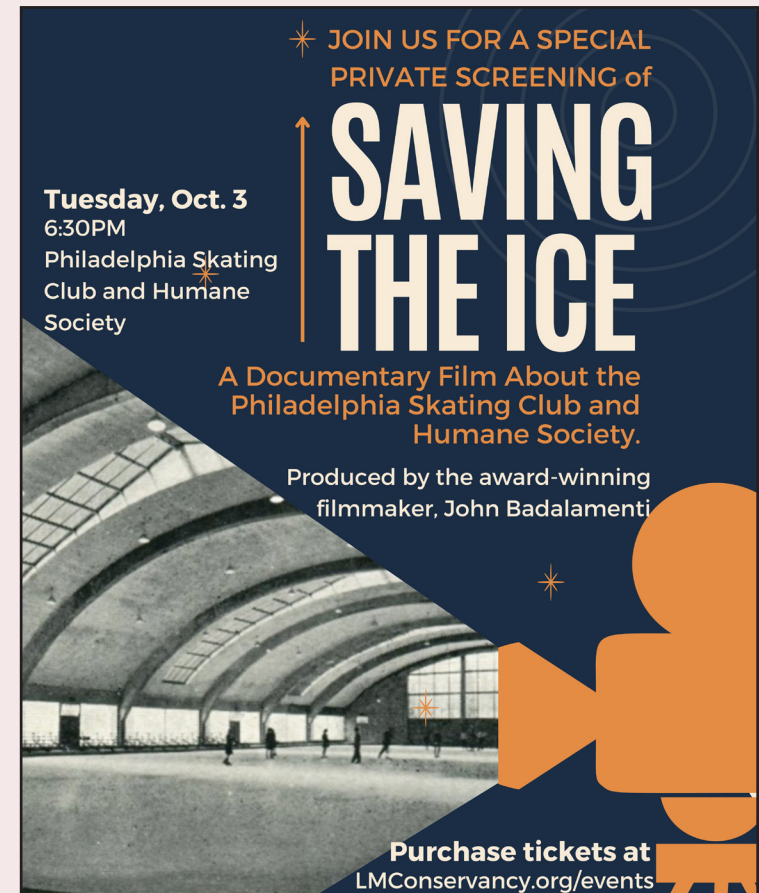
Ray Tschoepe and Andrew Staples address a full house at the Mortar Repair Workshop.



A flyer for the Window Repair Workshop highlights the historic window restoration work of Kathleen Abplanalp.

## Saving the Ice

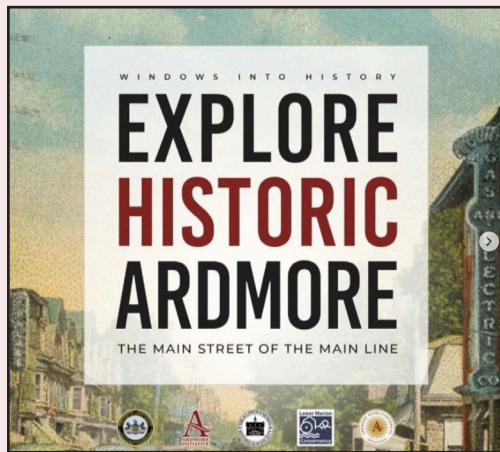
On September 28, "Saving the Ice," a documentary about the story of the Philadelphia Skating Club, had its premier at the Bryn Mawr Film Institute. The film, which was produced and directed by John Badalamenti, chronicled the history of the club from its founding on the banks of the Schuylkill River in Philadelphia in 1861 to the present day. The club's Ardmore building, a technological marvel constructed in 1937, takes center stage in the film! The Conservancy, which participated in the film, is grateful to Mr. Badalamenti and his team for spotlighting this Lower Merion treasure.



The Conservancy hosted a private viewing for members at the Skating Club in October.

## Ardmore: The Main Street of the Main Line

At the Conservancy, one of our greatest pleasures is partnering with local organizations to offer programming that supports our mission areas. This year, we had the pleasure of working with Ardmore Initiative, Lower Merion Township, and the Lower Merion Historical Society to produce an interactive, GIS-powered "StoryMap" program called Ardmore: The Main Street of the Main Line. The online program, which can be used on a mobile device, tablet, or computer, employs images, interactive maps, and other historical sources to document the development of downtown Ardmore over a period of approximately 125 years. The StoryMap complements "Windows into History," a project (envisioned and executed by Jane Murray and Jeff Mellin of Ardmore Initiative) that has placed historic images of downtown Ardmore in unoccupied storefront windows. During the coming months, the Conservancy will collaborate with Ardmore Initiative to turn the Ardmore StoryMap into a podcast! Stay tuned!



Cricket Avenue, looking north toward Lancaster Avenue and Station Road, ca. 1930.



L to R: Title page of Ardmore Story map, Screenshot of Story Map featuring a view down Lancaster Avenue, Windows into History installation near Tired Hands Brewery.

## Lower Merion Sustainability Plan

This year, the Conservancy was able to see multiple sustainability projects through to completion. We celebrated one of our proudest moments on June 7th, when the Lower Merion Board of Commissioners (BOC) approved the Township's first-ever Sustainability Plan, an effort the Conservancy had been actively steering since the beginning of 2022. The plan provides a comprehensive outline of more than 50 sustainability initiatives the Township can adopt to promote the transition to cleaner energy, improve resource stewardship, and benefit the overall design of the community.

Progress on initiatives recommended in the Sustainability Plan has already been made. On June 21st, the BOC voted unanimously to adopt the Single-Use Plastic Carry-Out Bag Ordinance. The ordinance, which takes effect on January 21, 2024, places a ban (with exceptions) on the distribution of single-use plastic bags by businesses located within Lower Merion. Retailers will also be required to charge a \$0.10 fee for each "compliant bag" they provide to customers. Compliant bags are either reusable bags made from durable materials or paper bags that consist of at least 40% post-consumer recycled material and say "recyclable" or "reusable" on them. The ordinance permits customers to bring and use any kind of bag. The Conservancy worked for more than four years (conducting research, consulting experts, and engaging community members) to get the ordinance created and adopted. Ahead of the January 2024 effective date, the Conservancy has been serving as a leader on education and outreach for the ordinance. An effective implementation of the ordinance has the potential to significantly reduce the volume of plastic material that pollutes the Township's waterways and green spaces.

*Plastic bags are a common sight along Cobbs Creek. The plastic bag ban will help reduce the amount of plastic waste in our communities, which is a crucial step in keeping the waste out of our waterways.*



# Education

## Tangible Lessons in Environmental Education

As we reflect on another great year of environmental education, the Lower Merion Conservancy takes pride in our partnerships with public and private schools and is grateful to be fostering a connection between students and the natural world. Our educational journey included the Shipley Lower School, Overbrook PreSchool and Kindergarten, Phoebe Anna Thorne Kindergarten, Inquiry Charter School, Narberth Presbyterian Preschool, as well as the entire fourth-grade of the Lower Merion School District.

For our younger students, the year was marked by seasonal outdoor education, where topics ranged from migration and hibernation to animal tracking and the water cycle. The aim of these lessons is to nurture a sense of wonder and connection to the natural world. Through our watershed education curriculum, our older students delve deeper, learning about the interconnectedness of our ecosystem and understanding the impact and responsibility we have towards our natural surroundings. This year, we were privileged to receive a grant from the PA Department of Environmental Protection for Environmental Education to expand on our watershed education program.

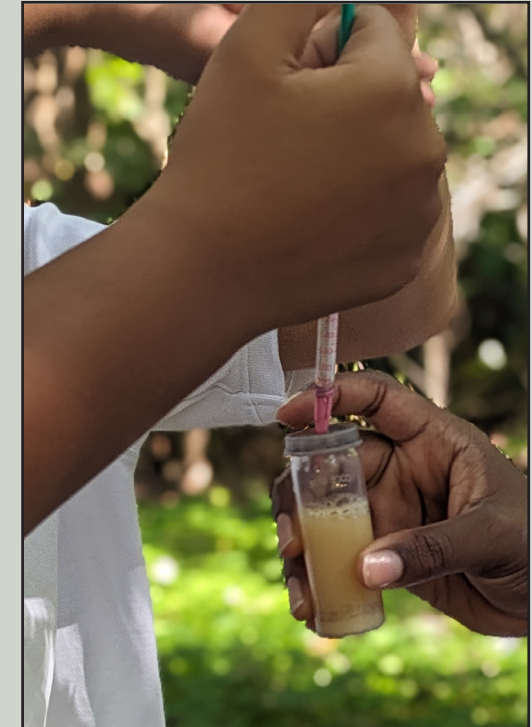
In our watershed program, students learn first how human development of land alters the natural water cycle. When impervious surfaces like streets and parking lots cover our landscapes, rain cannot seep into the earth. Rather, it becomes stormwater runoff, picking up pollutants as it makes its way downhill into sewers via the storm drains. Students are often shocked to realize these sewers empty directly into our local waterways, unfiltered. Everyday activities like salting sidewalks in winter, using pesticides in gardens, and disposing pet waste become points of discussion, highlighting how pollution originates from communal sources and travels through our watershed. This type of collectively-created pollution is called "nonpoint source pollution." Through hands-on approaches, including trips to local creeks, students witness firsthand the impact of this kind of pollution on our waterways. Shipley Lower School students, for example, engaged in "citizen science" by conducting chemical tests on water samples to assess pollution levels of local creeks. In addition, both Shipley and Lower Merion School District students learned how to assess the real-time health of streams by identifying the presence or absence of macroinvertebrate life.



*Overbrook Preschool students decide to work together to carry a long log through the Fairy Forest.*



*Lower Merion students look closely for macroinvertebrates on rocks in Mill Creek.*



*Shipley students conduct chemical tests on creek water to determine pollution levels.*



*The Enviroscape allows students to simulate stormwater runoff in a model watershed.*



*Students observe a variety of macroinvertebrate life found in Mill Creek.*



*Conservancy staff assists Lower Merion fourth graders in planting native perennials next to impervious surfaces at Penn Wynne Elementary School.*

By understanding how pollution gets into our streams and how it is part of our everyday lives, students become empowered to make changes and embrace problem-solving solutions. In the “Pollution Solutions” area of our lessons, we teach students that they have the power to advocate for change, whether by rejecting the archaic standards that favor “perfect” turf grass lawn over native plants or by urging the implementation of green solutions on public land. This year, our Environmental Education grant allowed us to make powerful connections to these concepts. DEP funding helped us create sustained green initiatives with our partner schools, including supporting environmental clubs and student-led implementation of green stormwater solutions on public land. Students were able to plant trees and rain gardens on school grounds, make native seed bombs to disperse at home, and supplement native pollinator gardens. By involving students in the process of problem solving stormwater issues, they will remain connected and engaged with the health of our watershed.

A final highlight of our watershed education curriculum was being invited to lead a teacher training session with Lower Merion School District STEM teachers. The training included an in-depth exploration of our watershed education curriculum, with a special focus on using the “Enviroscape” model. This interactive model, representing a watershed with various land uses, provides students with a powerful visual aid by simulating stormwater runoff and nonpoint source pollution. The training not only equipped teachers with valuable knowledge, but also ignited excitement about incorporating these lessons into their classrooms. We are grateful for the opportunity to collaborate with educators and look forward to bringing the Enviroscape model to life with many more children in the future. As we celebrate the successes of this year, we anticipate a future where environmental education continues to inspire positive change and a deep connection to our natural surroundings.

# Donors

## Thank you!

We are sincerely grateful to our wide circle of donors. With your support, we look forward to our next year of local conservation.

## Donor List

The Conservancy appreciates its wide circle of generous members. Below is a list of those who gave gifts between July 1, 2022 and June 30, 2023.

### \$10,000 and above

Deborah and Tim Callahan  
Tom and Megan Duncan  
The Austelle Foundation  
Martin and Ro King  
Lower Merion Township  
Melissa Morris and Miguel Perez  
The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation  
PA Department of Environmental Protection  
Bruce D. Reed  
William Penn Foundation

### \$5,000 to \$9,999

Anonymous  
David F. Hoffman

Shreiner Tree Care  
Linda K. Stone and Mary Kay Liptak  
Philadelphia Dozen Friends of Bob Gray  
Henderson Supplee III  
Connie and Sankey Williams

### \$2,500 to \$4,999

Alex J. Ettl Foundation  
The Friends of the Cynwyd Trail  
David and Susan Hoog  
John B. Ward & Co. Tree Experts  
Jane Koppelman  
Manko, Gold, Katcher and Fox, LLP  
Michael McCann and Karen Snetselaar  
Mike and Nancy McLelland  
Shivane and Saideep Raj  
Gail Seygal  
Mark Taylor and Ilene Wasserman

### \$1,000 to \$2,499

Dee and Nicholas Adams  
Kathleen Abplanalp and Charlie Douglas  
Tania and Mark Alexander  
Julie and Jim Alexandre  
The Christine and Michael Angelakis Foundation  
Laurie M. Beach  
William and Debbie Becker  
Marie Benz  
Christine Berrettini  
Fred Bissinger, Jr.  
Charles and Susan Davidson  
Michelle and Eugene Dubay  
Pearl Elias  
Tom and Beth Gadsden  
Bob and Carol Gray  
Dr. Doris and Dr. Dana Greenblatt  
Larry Guy and Pam Duke  
Hanson Fine Building  
The Historical Society of Lower Merion  
John and Anne Iskrant  
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