

Ad Hoc Committee Proposal

for the use of the Gouveia House, February, 2019

History:

I'd like to start the conversation about the Gouveia House with a little history. The Gouveia House was designed in 1967 and resonates with its famous precedents: Philip Johnson's Glass House in New Canaan, CT and Mies van der Rohe's Farnsworth House in Plano, IL. These homes captured an ideal of an open pavilion in a tranquil landscape. The Gouveia House sits at the western edge of its property, perched on rock, and entered via a lower level-partially underground. The upper level is surrounded by a glass curtain wall, with sliding doors in all directions with a slim deck surrounding the house. The interior features clean-lined wood built-ins, a custom wood circular stair, a round fireplace mass, open spaces on the upper level, and exposed rock on the lower entry level.

In 2011, Laurel Gouveia began negotiating with the Village of Croton-on-Hudson to accept a gift from the Gouveia family, John and Laurel, consisting of their mid-century modern home, almost 16 acres of land and a million dollar endowment. Such a transfer would occur upon Laurel's death. Laurel Gouveia died in 2014, and the gift was acquired in early 2015. Prior to its transfer to the Village, then-Mayor Leo Wiegman created a Committee and charged them with making recommendations for all the potential, compatible uses for the facilities and grounds. The Committee's charter ended with this paragraph, "We believe that Gouveia Park has tremendous potential to become a great public space for gathering and meeting friends and neighbors as well as for quiet reflection amidst the trees and views of the water and sky. We need your help (the committee's help) in putting the potential into writing for the Village to consider". I hope, with this writing, I can do that for you.

The original Committee completed their report in early 2015. The Committee made many recommendations starting with initial open space use of the property all the way to making the house ADA conforming. The report listed possible uses for the grounds, for the residence and for the outer buildings. It also suggested ways to involve individuals and diverse local organizations in planning and creating community projects. First steps to open up the property involved creating a parking area and putting up signage acknowledging Gouveia Park as a gift of the Gouveia family. Those initial steps were taken, and Gouveia Park was formally opened to the public for passive enjoyment in July, 2017.

In the fall of 2017, a welcoming event was staged, and the Gouveia home was open to the public. Quite a few people toured the house and their reactions were unanimously positive. I was fortunate to be there that day and it was wonderful to see their enthusiasm for the beautiful 360 degree views and for the serenity of the unique open space on the 2nd floor. It sparked their interest and immediately captured their imagination. I too was inspired!

In the first report, and since the park has opened, there have been a couple of ideas floated as to possible uses for the Gouveia residence. One idea would put the house in private hands, and another would turn it into a commercial venture. Those ideas weren't as community friendly as the ones I'd heard from the folks who'd been inside the house and were excited about its potential. Additionally,

neither one seemed to reflect the intention or the spirit of the gift. As I understood it, the house and property were given to the Village for the benefit and betterment of the community. When I voiced my opinion to Mayor Pugh, he asked if I would organize a committee to research and explore possibilities for the Gouveia residence's future development. I was thrilled by the opportunity. When I was campaigning for a seat on the Village Board, I made it clear that I believed Gouveia Park could be the crown jewel of Croton's green spaces. And so, with a great deal of respect for the house, and a rather large network of friends and neighbors, I began to form an ad hoc committee.

The Process

The first step was to partner with Alyce Gorch. Alyce had been communicating with the Village Manager. She saw the potential in the Gouveia house and property and brought her own skills and interests into the mix. Alyce and I met and brainstormed ideas. And although at that point we did not have the report from the previous committee, our ideas for the residence and the property were very similar to those that were generated by that committee. We made a list of all the possible uses we could think of for the house and grounds. Piggybacking on the first committee's suggestion, we did extensive networking throughout the Village. We reached out to those individuals and organizations that we felt would be stakeholders in the future development of the house and the grounds. In the past several months, we've hosted many open houses, several of them to groups of 4 or more people. Each time we scheduled a tour, the interest and excitement it generated among participants was palpable. Impromptu brainstorming sessions sprang up between people who'd just met, but who shared an affinity for the space and its many possibilities. We sat on those white couches while ideas literally flew around the room! People suggested ideas we hadn't considered and fed us names of folks they knew who would be interested in participating in the conversations. Our contacts grew, and our network expanded. As did our Committee, which was almost entirely self-selected. People were definitely motivated; they wanted to be involved in creating something special at Gouveia Park.

Proposal:

What emerged in the months-long process I just described is a vision of a multiple use of the Gouveia House. The Committee proposes that the Village of Croton on Hudson would be best served if the Gouveia House were to become a Center for Art and Culture, in all its diversity, a place where artists can create, can showcase their work and can support and inspire each other, and a place where the community can gather to connect with friends and neighbors and relax in the beauty and peace of the natural environment. The house itself is magical and unique. Its unparalleled 360 degree view, through floor to ceiling windows, looks out on 16 beautiful acres of parkland, meadows and stone outcroppings. It is a view that is deeply satisfying in all seasons and at all times of the day. It inspires, it relaxes and quiets the mind, it soothes the spirit. This then, is the gift that the Gouveia family gave to the people of Croton. Add art to the mix and you have an unbeatable combination. Art, in all its forms, enriches our lives enormously. It speaks to us in humorous and profound ways, connecting us to our own experience and the experience of others. It's a natural fit for that extraordinary setting. Just imagine, if you will, relaxing in a comfortable arm chair, on a cool and foggy day, enjoying a jazz trio, or a memorable art exhibit, or a bunch of teens performing Macbeth. It can, and should, definitely happen here!

So, let's get down to particulars. Inside the house, the Committee proposes the following activities: art exhibitions, musical events of all kinds, including group singing, solo performances, rehearsals, recitals and concerts. Play readings, comedy improv events, poetry slams, performances, open mic nights, stand-up comedy. Pop-up events highlighting particular artisans' works or seasonal type boutiques where items can be purchased. Classes, seminars, workshops in photography, painting, music, literature, film-making. Book clubs, lectures, special fundraising events, writers/artists/actors retreats, auditions, meditation retreats, mindfulness classes, community meetings of all kinds, including grass roots organizations, Scouts, Board meetings, School district meetings, and private parties like weddings, reunions, showers, etc.

Outside activities would include restoring existing trails and extending them, establishing a sculpture garden, constructing a natural playground, planting the meadow for bird/butterfly/bee habitation, farmer's markets, concerts, theater readings and performances, seasonal fairs, landscaping workshops and demonstrations, outdoor films, and a possible dark sky destination. In the warmer, summer months, classes and workshops could also move outdoors. Some of these activities will be free to the public, others will be paid events. Paid events will help to meet financial obligations.

If the outdoor buildings are developed, they can be used as art studios and/or performance spaces housing art classes, art exhibitions, scenery building workshops and experimental theater events. The Committee also proposes that some outdoor projects can be undertaken by the community - providing yet another opportunity to connect with friends and neighbors in a deeply satisfying way. Clearing and creating trails, constructing a natural playground and planting a sculpture garden are all such opportunities.

The Committee proposes that local arts organizations and individuals come together to legally establish a Friends of Gouveia Foundation. This is apparently a fairly common model for public/private initiatives and many communities have similar arrangements with not-for-profits to assist them in managing community driven projects like the one the Committee is proposing. Obviously, legal counsel would need to be consulted to determine the relationship between the Village and the not-for-profit. But the Committee believes that the Foundation would be empowered to hold fund raisers to help defray costs and expenses. It would also be able to apply for and administer grants. A beginning search for public arts grants yielded quite a few granting organizations in Westchester County and New York State. Such grants can be used to support emerging artists, to deliver creative arts programs, to support educational art programs, to establish summer arts internship programs, etc. There are also grants available for preserving special and unique houses and for conserving green spaces, both of which we would be doing. Again, more research needs to be done regarding these legalities.

The Committee proposes that the Village hire an architect to plan the conversion of the Gouveia residence to a public use building. The project would include assessing the building's structure and its mechanical systems as well as planning for accessibility, which might include adding an elevator, reworking the stairs, and developing a flexible base plan for the whole building. A goal of the renovations would be to execute these changes while being sensitive to the character and the unique qualities of the home/building. Also, perhaps at some point, the Visual and Environment Board could be

involved in the renovation process, as all changes need to be sympathetic to the house, and in keeping with its spirit!

The Committee proposes that while the above plans are proceeding, the same process of inviting people inside the house be continued and expanded. At this point in time, perhaps several dozen people have had the good fortune to have toured the residence. The Committee proposes that the Village set aside several weekends when residents can sign up to take tours. Since the Gouveia family gifted THE PEOPLE of Croton, it is incumbent on the Village to allow/encourage public viewing. Residents need to be made aware of the house and grounds so they can participate in the decision-making process.

END OF REPORT