

FAQs about the proposed integration of deCordova Sculpture Park and Museum with The Trustees of Reservations

What is the deCordova Sculpture Park and Museum?

deCordova was founded in 1948 and has since grown into a nationally and internationally recognized venue for contemporary art with a permanent collection of over 3,400 objects. The sculpture park was inaugurated in 1966 and quickly became a signature feature of the museum that now ranges over twenty-eight acres. Today, deCordova welcomes some 80,000 annual visitors who come to enjoy outdoor sculpture displays and curated indoor exhibits, enhanced by innovative learning and engagement programs designed for all ages.

Who are The Trustees of Reservations?

Founded in 1891 by landscape architect Charles Eliot, The Trustees mission is to preserve, for public use and enjoyment, properties of exceptional scenic, historic, cultural, and ecological value in Massachusetts. The Trustees currently protects and manages 117 properties across the state, including iconic places like Castle Hill on the Crane Estate in Ipswich, the Fruitlands Museum in Harvard, and World's End in Hingham. The Trustees of Reservations, known as The Trustees, enjoys a stellar reputation of quality property care and public programming, with leading expertise across different technical fields like horticulture, ecology and land management.

How is deCordova connected with the Town of Lincoln?

deCordova is set in the heart of Lincoln on a unique property with great natural beauty. Julian deCordova deeded this property and its buildings to the Town in trust, along with the income from most of his estate. This gift was made with the condition that it would serve in perpetuity as a public museum and public park.

The Town established a non-profit corporation to manage the funds and operations of the museum and park on behalf of the Town. This non-profit, governed by a Board of Trustees and a Council of Overseers, has always served the museum's mission while also maintaining a strong connection to the local community. The Town retained ownership of the land, its rights as charitable trustee with ultimate responsibility for fulfilling Mr. deCordova's wishes, and the right of Town Meeting to approve amendments of the corporation's governing documents.

What has deCordova agreed to do together with The Trustees of Reservations?

deCordova and The Trustees have entered into an agreement intended to lead to the integration of the two organizations. This is a commitment to work together, including critical fundraising, legal due diligence, and support for the Town approval of necessary changes to the deCordova bylaws.

What is the Town's role in this process?

With the integration, the deCordova governing documents would be amended to transform it into a subsidiary of The Trustees, while the Town would retain ownership of the land and its general oversight as the charitable trustee. Amendments to the deCordova bylaws must be approved by a majority of the deCordova Overseers, as well as a majority vote of Lincoln's Town Meeting. deCordova's Overseers approved the proposed bylaw changes by a unanimous vote on May 31. The current plan is to request approval of the bylaw amendments at the Annual Town Meeting in March 2019. Prior to Town Meeting, there will be many opportunities to learn more, share comments, and ask questions, starting with the State of the Town meeting on October 20, 2018.

What will happen to the deCordova Sculpture Park and Museum?

The museum and sculpture park are not going anywhere! deCordova is a treasured institution in Lincoln and across New England. The appearance and the mission of deCordova are not changing. Our goal is to keep on providing inspired art and landscape experiences.

Why do deCordova and The Trustees want to enter into a partnership?

Like many non-profits, deCordova has an endowment that has not grown over time to keep pace with the organization's needs. The endowment currently covers only 7% of the annual operating costs, compared to a national average of 22% for art museums, and up to 70% for some museums in the Boston area. While the Museum has expanded and diversified its revenue sources, it was not enough to support even a dramatically pared down operating budget. As a result, the Museum has come to rely heavily on a small handful of very generous donors, but this is not a sustainable funding model.

Integration with The Trustees will provide deCordova with long-term fiscal stability, but that's not the only reason this integration makes sense. The Trustees, a 127 year old organization, is committing to care of deCordova for the long term. The Trustees is keen to bring its experience in property care and community engagement to support deCordova's mission. In addition, three years ago The Trustees began their "Art in the Landscape" initiative, in which deCordova's experience and curatorial expertise will be very valuable.

What do these two organizations have in common?

deCordova's mission rests on three pillars: art, education, and landscape. The Trustees has always focused on connecting people to nature and culture. Both organizations are driven to provide unique and satisfying visitor experiences involving nature, culture, and history.

Are The Trustees buying DeCordova?

No. Like some other significant properties under The Trustee's umbrella, deCordova will be managed as a reservation but The Town of Lincoln will continue to own the original buildings and twenty acres given by Julian deCordova. Proposed changes in the governance of deCordova would make it a subsidiary of The Trustees, and they would assume the operational role while building support for deCordova's mission through their statewide membership program, marketing capacity, and donor base.

deCordova will continue to cultivate donors to support the museum's mission, and this support will be essential to its future success.

Is deCordova selling its collection?

No. deCordova has built a strong collection of contemporary art with more than 3,400 works, including sculpture, paintings, prints, photography, and multimedia. The collection is a key component of the museum's mission. Items from the collection are displayed in exhibitions at deCordova every year. The collection is also an important historical archive for the region, serving as a unique resource source for artists and educators.

What will be necessary in order to complete the integration?

deCordova and The Trustees are currently engaged in a \$15 million fundraising campaign to increase deCordova's endowment, secure operational stability, and plan for the future. Additionally, there are a number of normal due diligence items. The Town leaders have initiated their own due diligence process and negotiations of appropriate agreements with The Trustees, and eventually the Town Meeting will have the opportunity to vote whether to approve the bylaw amendments that will allow the integration to proceed.

What will the Town's public process be?

The Lincoln Board of Selectmen has formed a Working Group to review the matter and make a recommendation to the Selectmen. The vote is expected to take place at the Annual Town Meeting in March 2019. The matter will be explained at the State of the Town meeting on October 20, 2018. In addition, the Town, deCordova, and The Trustees will cooperate on hosting a series of open conversations for Lincoln residents in the coming months.

How will you ensure that the deCordova continues to operate in a manner that respects Lincoln's small-town character?

There is a strong alignment of values among deCordova, The Trustees, and the Town of Lincoln. This includes the preservation of beautiful open landscape for the enjoyment of the public. In addition, the Town and The Trustees are working to create appropriate agreements that includes accountability provisions and protections. Moreover, The Trustees' long track record demonstrates its commitment to protecting the unique nature of each of the 117 properties in its portfolio. In addition, deCordova's amended bylaws will include a new Advisory Board, with a majority being Lincoln residents, that is intended to enhance responsiveness to the Town, among its other museum support responsibilities.

October 20, 2018