

Remarks for February 20

Thank you, Mayor Birge.

I hope we have enough copies of handouts for everyone. We have maps that were simplified from the earlier versions that many of you saw, that had writing so small that it was basically unreadable. We also have a 20-page handout with a fair amount of information in it, including some background, timelines, information about the Community Advisory Board, organizational charts, etc.

If what you see or what you hear tonight raises questions or otherwise inspires you to speak, please don't hesitate to do so.

Before we go to questions and answers, we will hear briefly from a couple of the people Montgomery has been working with on this project. But first, I'd like to take a few minutes to share some thoughts.

In her remarks a few minutes ago, Cecilia signaled some significant changes that are being made, the most important to many of you being the amendment to the demolition specifications to mandate that all active building demolition and associated asbestos abatement must be done when Village School is closed.

I am under no illusions that even this big change will satisfy everyone. It will not.

But in these many meetings over the past month or so, we have listened carefully and have heard an earful.

All of us on the Township Committee want to be as responsive as we possibly can be to the public. We respect your concerns, but we also owe it to all of you, to all the people we serve, to seek advice and guidance from the people we have hired for their exceptional skills and expertise, whose professional judgment we value, and whose job it is to help us protect the interests of this community. So if it seems like we take a long time to react, or to answer questions sometimes, it's because we don't want to make a commitment that we later regret or cannot keep.

In any event, I hope that knowing the demolition and asbestos abatement in the buildings will be done when people are not in the school, will be reassuring to most of you.

It was my great privilege to serve as mayor in 2002, 2003, '04, '05, and '06.

I am not usually the smartest person in the room at any given time – certainly not tonight with a bunch of teachers here – and I am not the smartest person on the Township Committee, which is probably how I ended up being the mayor for five years.

And so, given my limitations, my approach to public service and problem solving is to harness the energy of people smarter than I am -- people who are honest and diligent and at the top of their profession.

I will tell you, Montgomery – unequivocally – you have the best team of staff, professionals, advisors and practitioners working on this project, on your behalf, that you could hope to have.

This team has stayed focused, has managed a staggering amount of work, and never wavers from its commitment to do this thing right. And we have done it right, from financial planning to contract negotiations to information gathering and data crunching, RFP's and RFQ's. We have done our homework. We know what is on this site. It is not a toxic waste dump, it is in no way comparable to Ground Zero or Love Canal. It's an old abandoned psychiatric facility, and these people are fully prepared to answer technical questions that you might have tonight about the site and how they will go about cleaning it up.

Cecilia introduced Chris Daggett and Joe Sorge from JM Sorge. We hired Chris initially to help us evaluate an early proposal for a fixed price clean-up contract, and he then helped us through the entire process of attracting a number of competitive proposals for clean-up, and then negotiating an excellent contract with the company we

selected. JM Sorge's role now is to help us manage these big contracts, and to oversee the remediation work and demolition work. Between them they bring a great deal of technical knowledge, decades of experience in environmental remediation and redevelopment projects, and a keen understanding of the state and federal regulatory framework.

Cecilia also introduced the folks from Weston Solutions, the company we selected to handle the environmental remediation. Jay Motwani will be up here in a few minutes to give a very brief overview of their work, which is expected to take up to two years when you factor in the restoration of Sylvan Lake.

While the demolition and asbestos abatement will not begin until school is out for the summer, and will be completed while school is not in session, Weston will start some of its work on site next month. (show steam pipes) Jay will tell you a little more about that.

The other members of the team include our Township engineer Gail Smith and Township Health officer Stephanie Carey. Gail and Stephanie have a lot of experience that is relevant to this project; they are terrific people and are excellent at what they do. Another key member of the team is our Township Administrator Donato Nieman – a man of unsurpassed integrity and a great judge of talent, as you can see from his senior staff.

My friends, we are all in this together. Montgomery Township has an extraordinary property that we worked very very hard, side by side, to wrestle away from the state. We must continue to work together toward a common goal – the transformation of that blighted old eyesore called NPDC into a place that reflects the wants and needs and values of this community. A place called Skillman Village.

We must not break down into camps of Us and Them. This Township has a strong tradition of hanging together when confronted with big challenges. In that fine tradition, we must find common ground and make intelligent choices. As we make those choices, with our feet on the ground and our eyes on the horizon, let us be guided by the truth and by the facts.

Throughout this project the Township committee and our NPDC work group team has adhered to these principles:

- Number 1, that Public health and safety comes first. Always. Nothing will change that. Not financial formulas, not tax pressure, not political pressure, nothing.
- 2. we bring top-knotch talent to the table, challenge them to do their best and give them the resources they need to succeed.
- 3. That we understand the conditions and problems on the site, and systematically eliminate them as quickly as we can responsibly do so.
- 4. that we Plan, plan, plan, but also expect the unexpected and be ready to deal with it.

We on the Township Committee know that you will hold us accountable. We expect that and we welcome it.

We will try never to make commitments or promises we cannot keep, and we will do everything we possibly can to address public concerns responsibly, and keep this project moving forward.

Because when all is said and done, Skillman Village is going to be a wonderful place.

Thank you again for being here tonight, and for listening.