

Welcome, everyone, and thank you for coming this evening! This is the seventh in a series of Community Information Forums that the Township Committee has been conducting regarding the NPDC property.

To begin the meeting tonight, I want to review briefly the history of the site and the status of the environmental remediation and building demolition plans. Following my remarks, I will ask each of the Township Committee members to comment. Finally, we will open the meeting to questions from the audience.

In addition to the Township Committee members, we have with us Montgomery Township staff and outside consultants to assist in responding to any questions of a technical or legal nature. Those people are:

Donato Nieman, Gail Smith, Lori Savron, Randy Bahr, Stephanie Carey, Tammy Garaffa, Donna Kukla, Chris Daggett, Joe Sorge, Rich Crooker, Jay Motwani, John Fitzgerald, Harry Booth

Background

NPDC was formed by the State acquiring six farms in the area between 1898 and the late 1920s, including today's Skillman Village, the Village School, the high school property and all the land surrounding it, the Selody Farm, St. Charles Catholic Church and the Skillman Dairy Farm.

For the history buffs in the audience, the oldest building is called Maplewood, which is the original farmhouse on the site and which is currently listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The landscape was designed by Charles Levitt, an apprentice of Frederick Law Olmsted, the landscape architect who designed Central Park in NYC. Levitt went on to become a world-renowned landscape architect in his own right.

Over the years, under NJ state ownership, the property has been used variously as a self-contained Village for epileptics and then a psychiatric institute, before finally being shut down and designated as “surplus” state property under the Whitman administration in 1995.

In 1997, the Montgomery Board of Ed acquired 12 acres of land within the NPDC site for the Village Elementary School, anticipating that the state would soon sell the rest of the property to the township.

The State, however, began instead to drag its heels in the negotiations with the Township, while at the same time allowing the site to fall into serious disrepair and ignoring the State DEP’s directive to address the environmental conditions on the site.

Though the state reported that they budgeted between \$1 and \$2 million annually for the security and maintenance of the site – the property was left wide open – with virtually no State maintenance or security whatsoever. Buildings that were in good condition 10 years ago have been

vandalized and in most cases have deteriorated beyond the point of feasible restoration. Virtually every building is open and exposed to the elements, and the asbestos wrapping on the above-ground steam lines in a number of areas has been torn or otherwise deteriorated to the point of concern to all of us.

Through both Democratic and Republican administrations, the State's focus was plainly (and infuriatingly) more focused on how the State could best financially profit from the site than on either historic preservation or, more importantly, ensuring the health and safety of Montgomery residents and school children in and around the site.

Without accusing the State of *willfully* and cynically allowing NPDC to fall into such disrepair, it does not take a stretch of imagination to see how the continued deterioration of the site worked to the State's benefit over time in its negotiations with the Township.

But whatever the State's motivations, it is safe to say New Jersey's stewardship of the site over the past 10 years has been incompetent at best, with blatant disregard for the well-being of Montgomery residents.

In 2004 the township sued the State of New Jersey, and also sued the State Treasurer and the Director of Property Management personally. In the meantime, grass-roots efforts -- led by Valerie Smith and others who helped organize a letter-writing campaign to then Governor Codey, and by Sue Repko, who peppered the state with countless

formal requests for information, and by Brad Fay and the Van Harlingen Historical Society who lobbied for NPDC to be included on the list of New Jersey's 10 most endangered sites, and by people of influence who quietly but persistently kept raising the issue with Governors and lawmakers in Trenton – all of these efforts helped to pressure the State to abandon its development plans and move forward with the long-anticipated sale of the remainder of the NPDC site to Montgomery Township. The Township and State signed a contract last December, and Montgomery finally took title to the property last month on January 23, 2007.

The story of the NPDC acquisition is truly a story of sustained community effort. We have been able to take control of this land only through combined efforts over a number of years by successive Township Committees and the many residents who volunteered time and energy. Even the Village Elementary School kids played an effective part in writing letters to the Governor.

Remediation

Some are now quick to criticize the Township for taking control of the site with the environmental issues still unremediated. However, with the State's awful record over the past ten years of maintenance and security at the site, just about the *last thing* Montgomery needed was to leave remediation in the hands of the State bureaucrats with such a poor record of caring for the site, and with little or no accountability to the people of Montgomery. I believe we

can all agree that Montgomery Township is better served by taking control of this process and seeing that it is done properly.

And the differences between our own management of the site and state's previous management are already apparent. Immediately after we took title to the property, the Township began police patrols on the site and boarded up windows and doors throughout the site up to eight feet. We managed to do in two days what the State had been unable or unwilling to do for the past 10 years.

In the past few weeks, the Township has conducted six Community Information Forums for parents of Village School and Orchard Hill school children. We were assisted in those meetings by Township staff, our remediation contractor, Weston Solutions, and our outside environmental consultant, JM Sorge. We explained to residents what the hazards are on the site and the processes and safeguards that will be put in place to ensure that the remediation is done in a thorough and safe manner to eliminate all potential risks to residents.

We have approached the issue of remediation from the very beginning and at every step in the process with the health and safety of Montgomery residents as our foremost concern, particularly the children attending the Village Elementary School.

Accordingly, the process of inspections and remediation and the safeguards being put in place all go *well beyond*

what is mandated by the State DEP and other state and federal regulatory agencies for safe remediation. For instance, we will be requiring multiple layers of dust monitors between the work zone and the school property and will have third-party expert oversight of the work.

Without minimizing the seriousness of the issue, it is worth noting that because asbestos was used in many, if not most, buildings constructed over a fifty/sixty year period ending in the late 1970s – the procedures that have been developed for safe asbestos abatement are well-proven in urban, suburban and rural environments, including in and around schools.

This is a long way of stating that we are fully confident that the procedures we are implementing will ensure the clean-up of the site will be safe for Montgomery residents and the children at Village School.

Nonetheless, we are sensitive to the concerns, voiced in particular by many of the parents of Village School students, that no demolition or asbestos abatement work in buildings be conducted while the Village School is in session.

Our consultants and staff have worked very hard in trying to find solutions to meet those goals. Many, many options have been explored. Some were viable; others not. Some that were off the table came back onto the table.

The result of those efforts has led to the following revised approach to the asbestos abatement and demolition of buildings on the NPDC site.

1. First, the Township will issue an addendum to the demolition specifications that requires the demolition and asbestos abatement inside the buildings be performed when school is not in session.
2. Second, as already announced last week, the Thompson building, the large brick building next to the parking lot behind the Village School, will be included in the list of buildings to be demolished.
3. Third, the Township will work with the school board to address all remaining issues that the Township Committee cannot address on its own, including the future of the Kay building right next to the school playground; additional precautionary measures for the Village School such as cleaning playground equipment, cleaning the HVAC system and replacing filters, indoor air monitoring at the Village School and also the possibility of delaying the start of school in fall 2007. We will meet with the school board in March and we look forward to a productive, problem-solving public session.
4. Fourth, the Township will completely board up all buildings not slated for demolition at this time, and will complete any future asbestos abatement or demolition of those buildings when the Village School is not in session.
5. Fifth, the removal of the above-ground steam pipes will begin in March, starting with the pipes on the

southern portion of the site. The steam pipes that cross Main Boulevard east of the Village School will be removed during the week of spring break.

Some of you have heard me say this many times, but it bears repeating: With respect to the remediation and demolition of the site, at every step of the way, public health and safety – with particular attention to the Village Elementary School and the neighbors in the immediate vicinity – has been Montgomery Township's highest priority. Nothing will change that.

The remediation project will bring to an end a sad chapter of state neglect in the history of the site, and will allow us to begin to write a new narrative based on civic pride and community participation. As we turn this page of Montgomery's history today by transforming this Brownfield at NPDC to the Greenfield at Skillman Village tomorrow, like many of you here today, I, too, have full confidence in our community that we will be able to do it; we'll be able to do it responsibly and we'll be able to do it right!