

A MESSAGE FROM THE TOWNSHIP COMMITTEE

Less than a month after taking ownership of the former North Princeton Developmental Center property on January 23, Montgomery initiated a public bidding process to find a contractor to remove nearly 90 structures on the site, many of which are unsecured abandoned buildings. The clean up of NPDC is a critical next step on a path toward turning an unsightly ghost town in the middle of our township into a valuable community asset known as Skillman Village.

The path forward will be challenging. Throughout the last few weeks, we have heard strong public concerns about the process by which the site will be cleaned up. Parents of children of the Village Elementary School, which is located in the middle of the site, understandably question whether the removal of steam pipes and buildings that contain asbestos and lead paint will pose a risk to the school community. Residents of nearby neighborhoods share similar concerns. The Township Committee, Township staff, and our environmental remediation consultants hosted seven meetings with teachers and parents, and a large open public meeting in mid-February, at which time we listened to concerns and answered questions.

While we have confidence in the safeguards that protect workers and the public during remediation and demolition projects, we are making some changes in response to public concern. These are: (One) The demolition bid specifications have been amended to require that all active building demolition and the associated asbestos abatement will be done this summer when the Village School is closed; and (Two) The Thompson Building, an old brick building located directly behind the Village School, has been added to the demolition list. Details related to the school property are being worked on with the school board as we go to press.

We are willing to make changes to our plans because the success of this project ultimately depends on public confidence. This is true not only at the clean up phase, but also when we turn our attention to creating a redevelopment plan and ultimately a choosing a redevelopment team, which we will do with public engagement and participation.

The Skillman Village project represents so much time and energy that some have asked why a municipality of our size would take on such an endeavor. There are two key reasons—first, it is imperative to control the clean up, ensuring that it meets the highest standard and is conducted in a timely manner by qualified contractors with excellent safety records who answer to the Township; secondly, the Township wants to make sure the community, not the state or a developer, determines the future of this extraordinary property in the heart of our township.

The State of New Jersey proved itself to be a poor steward of the site, as it allowed conditions to decline so precipitously despite the presence of school children and neighborhoods nearby. The State saddled our community with a health and safety hazard that must be cleaned up promptly. Had Montgomery not purchased the site, it would have been sold to a developer we did not select, quite possibly resulting in an unsatisfactory clean up and undesirable development.

We now have control of this valuable and sensitive piece of property. But this project's success will depend on constructive engagement from the entire community. We encourage your active and positive participation. If you have concerns or ideas, we hope you will share them directly with us. We can make this project an enormous source of community pride by working together. Please join us in this endeavor.

Cecilia Xie Birge, Mayor

Louise Wilson, Deputy Mayor

Mark Caliguire, Committeeman

John Warms, Committeeman

Brad Fay, Committeeman