

Good Evening Ladies and Gentlemen:

Thank you for the opportunity to speak here this evening. My name is Ann Witham. I lived on Albemarle Road, which is across from Fernald, for more than 35 years. I have two sons and a grandson who still live there. I had the privilege of working at Fernald for more than 20 years. I am now the guardian of a young man who has called Fernald “home” for more than 40 years and I continue to volunteer with several groups at Fernald and am there frequently. My children refer to the residents as “mom’s other kids”.

For the last meeting of this Committee I submitted a letter to the mayor outlining my vision for the partial use of the Fernald campus. It included a cemetery (1) with biking (2) and walking trails (3), some recreational use (4), the preservation of the library and its invaluable records (5) and the possibility of conversion of several existing, viable buildings for low cost low-density condos managed by the Waltham Housing Authority.

Notes inserted after the meeting: (1) In my original letter, I suggested that the Chapel be retained as part of the cemetery. To preserve it would require installation of a heating and (hopefully) cooling system, as well as bringing electrical power and telephone service to the site and upgrades to the plumbing and modifications to existing public bathrooms to bring them up to ADA standards. The cost for this in all likelihood would be more than 50 thousand dollars. The city would need to ascertain this figure and provide it. The Archdiocese of Boston owns the building itself, but the state owns the land. I suspect that once the state decides to sell the land, the diocese will be informed that they can take the building. This seems unlikely. It would be prohibitively expensive to move that structure, and like the chapel at the Met State, it will eventually be torn down. Councilor Logan informed the Committee that the city could float a 10-year bond to pay for the purchase of the land sought for this use. As an

integral part of the cemetery, perhaps the costs could be included in the bond package. Mr. Logan requested a parcel of forty acres, which he later stated could consist of two separate parcels. I think this is too small as we are uncertain of the conditions that exist. I would suggest at least fifty acres to accommodate any conditions that would be considered incompatible with the intended use. I envision the cemetery as being place along the front of the property on Trapelo Road and including the area known as Owl Hill.

(2) Mayor McCarthy provided an explanation that cemetery use prohibits biking and allows only passive recreational use. Walking trails or paths could be incorporated into the design of the project. Walking trails in another area of the Campus. were proposed by The Waltham Land Trust.

(3) I was not in the roomt for Mrs. McGrath's presentation. Her letter suggested a bowling alley in Howe Hall. That could be accomplished in the basement area of the building most recently used as the copy center for the facility and the entrance allows for wheelchair entry with assistance. The lower entry area has had some flooding problems in the past. The upstairs has the potential to be used as a community performing arts center. There is a stage there that was used for the production of plays. It is my understanding that movies were also shown there. I'm not certain as to its overall condition. The building would require an independent heating and cooling system and there may be other renovation/maintenance issues to be resolved.. However, the present Activity Center ought to be considered for recreation use by the community-at-large. There is a small kitchen in the building, two rooms that can be divided by means of a folding wall, some offices, a greenhouse area and several arts and crafts area. Surely, the City's recreation department could find use for such a building. It would require installation of independent heating/cooling equipment and probably some other repairs as well.

(4) I believe that Mrs. Champion and I were the only ones who addressed preservation of the Library. I did note that a proposal was expected from a Brandeis Professor, but it was not available for the meeting. It is possible that a grant could be obtained for the preservation of the documents and artifacts presently housed in the Library. It is also possible that the university would consider funding and staffing it in the content of their proposal.

(5) My original letter named Farrell and Tarbell Halls as potential candidates for conversion to low-cost, low density condo units. However, if these buildings are outside of the perimeter of the area that the City seeks to acquire, there are other buildings that could serve the same purpose. Those would in reality, probably require more extensive rehabilitation and repair costs. I believe there is the possibility of obtaining funding to develop the low-cost housing from Federal and State sources.

I am here tonight to re-affirm my suggestions, and to acknowledge that I am not an engineer, have no expertise in construction or rehabilitation costs, and am not knowledgeable as to possible sources of funding for any of the suggestions made in my letter. Instead, I respectfully defer to those who are competent in those particular areas.

I also outlined those uses that I vigorously oppose. These include any commercial, industrial use or large-scale residential development. Such uses will cost the City and homeowners of Waltham millions of dollars that will exceed any benefit derived. In addition they will make travel throughout the city a total nightmare and not just in the Northeast corner.

As guardian and member of the Fernald League, I oppose the closure of the Fernald Center and fully support the League's concept of a Village at Fernald. I am also a realist and think that given the political and economic climate of the times, closure is

inevitable. I do not believe the governor and his advisors will consider the Village concept. I also believe they will come to regret that decision - perhaps sooner, rather than latter.

It is what we do not know that causes me concern.

We do not know how long after closure that the property will be declared surplus.

We do not know what the sale price will be, and as citizens of the Commonwealth, where the proceeds of the sale will go. Will any of the funds realized from the sale be set-aside for the future care of those with developmental disabilities? If not, WHY?

During price negotiations, will the City of Waltham receive favorable consideration for all the support and service provided to Fernald, its residents and its guests over the last one hundred and fifty plus years?

We do not know the exact acreage that will be declared surplus, or the layout of those areas.

We do not know how much of the property is already under lease agreement with the U. Mass. Medical Center, or the term of the lease. Are there other entities with leases that will extend beyond the closure date?

We do not know how much space will be part of the Marquardt Nursing Center. Are there now plans for additional parking? If so, what additional space will be required and what area of the existing campus will be utilized? We also do not know the acreage of the Malone Park site.

There is a million gallon water tank on the property of the former Metropolitan State Hospital. What work needs to be done to

eliminate the need for Fernald to continue to pump water there every day? What steps need to be taken to eliminate any water pressure decrease to those living in the area?

I do not believe that any consulting design firm retained by DCAM can realistically draw up a plan for proposed/suggested reuse until all these questions are answered to the satisfaction of the reuse committee. And, there may be more questions that arise as we the process goes forward.

As a homeowner and taxpayer and hopefully life-long resident, I strongly urge the Committee to ask for full answers to all these questions and to make those answers public. The committee and the community need full and transparent disclosure before they carefully examine and evaluate all suggestions and eliminate any and all that will mean hardships for all of our citizens. It is enough that the men and women who are Fernald residents are being evicted from their home. Who will “they” come for next?