

MINUTES: Waltham Historical Commission Special Meeting  
November 7, 2016 3:00 PM  
119 School Street, Community Room

1. Meeting called to order at 3:00 PM.

2. Call of the Roll:

Present: Commissioner Green, Commissioner Richardson, Commissioner Isaacson, Commissioner Dufromont

Absent: Commissioner Wilson, Commissioner Cox, Commissioner Daly

3. Chair: Public hearings: Potential Construction of New High School at the Fernald

a. Update from Alex Green

The Fernald was purchased in 2014, it's a National Register Historic District consisting of two campuses East and West. The East campus was used for daily education, while the West campus housed the custodial population. The West campus is the older of the two (which is where the new high school will be located). The city signed a memorandum of agreement with the state (Alex was one of those signatures), which included a set rules for what was allowable, and a list of noted buildings that are contributing to the history of the site. There are no current preservation restrictions on the CPC land that was purchased.

b. Hear from the applicant/building committee with a (non-voting) presentation on the context.

Dr. Drew Echelson, ED.D Superintendent of Schools spoke briefly, saying the school board is willing to consider options for preservation at the site, if the Mayor were present she would be able to speak further about the vision of the site, however did state that the Mayor would like to know what the WHC priorities are on the site based on the information given. Dr. Echelson introduced Brian Black, SMMA Architect who produced the Fernald Site Context Plan.

c. Discussion of general use preferences for non CPA land at the Fernald.

Brian Black, Architect at SMMA: 100 Massachusetts Ave Cambridge MA

A feasibility study was conducted at the Fernald Site focusing on the lower 50 acres of the campus. The site plan showed the footprint of a conceptual outline, and contributing resources affected by the overlay. The site plan allowed for outdoor classrooms and a Pre-K outside play space (West of the stream 18 acres). Floor development, 600 parking spaces, 2 structured parking facility below, also shows East campus buildings that would stay. Page 5 of the plan shows the fields that would be encompassed, the athletic field space would be shared with the CPA land as well as parking on the CPA land. There will be a challenge building fields.

**Public Comments:**

*Diana Young* 147 Bishops Forest Drive, Chair of the CPC- Consider the library, could be used for educational purposes; find a way to maintain and use that building not let it get destroyed by parking.

*Brian Black*- refer to page 4 of the plan it shows minimal invasion on the west campus.

*Paul Centifani*: Waltham City Auditor – I grew up across the Fernald Field and my memories are not the buildings but the people who are there.

**WHC Comments:**

*Commissioner Isaacson:* We have been seeking to get a proper survey of the buildings up there by a professional preservationist, and we don't have that information, we are being asked to make a decision with insufficient information, the time tables have not been set and stuck to by the city. I'd like to see some of facades incorporated into the design so the students have some idea of the history here. I'm not in a position to make any decisions.

*Commissioner Richardson:* The problem is we don't know what we have so we can't prioritize the site for you. We don't know what conditions the buildings are in and what we have to prioritize. Asked about submission to mass historic.

*Brian Black:* Engage in consultation with Mass Historic regarding moving forward with the Fernald site. Using existing facades has been discussed; we have had productive sessions on how to go about doing that and using facades. Reuse pieces of the buildings in a meaningful way.

*Commissioner Richardson:* Questions for Commissioner Green regarding the current CPC application to survey the buildings. It's a documentation survey, taking almost 8 months, it's in the final stages of the application. Digital photos, anything that we are going to demolish, needs to be documented. Dolan Hall Building built in 1906- men's dormitory, expansion.

*Commissioner Richardson:* Dolan isn't affected from the creation of the high school but removed when the road is drawn. Do you want specific details from the commission as to our thoughts on where the road should be placed?

*Commissioner Green:* The state's letter asks us to avoid doing anything at all, and if we can't do that, try to avoid putting anything there at all.

*Commissioner Richardson:* The fields would be on the steepest parts of the property, it seems like if we are going to put fields there, it would be more challenging to level that land. What is the cost for putting the high school on the East side?

*Mat Rice Architect at SMMA-* Somerville and Andover are two sites that historic properties were demolished to make way for a new school. We just want to make sure that WHC is comfortable with the approach we are going to take moving forward with the state.

**Priorities from WHC**

*Commissioner Dufromont:* Wetlands near the "possible fields", what is the issue with that? Hard to determine anything without knowing the historical significance to the buildings.

*Brian Black:* Challenges in terms of wetlands ;( assumptions are conservative) the wetlands are smaller than what is depicted. The buffer zones will shrink and will be less of a challenge. Try and steer clear of them.

*Commissioner Richardson:* On the fence about the high school going there. I definitely don't want the fields where they are, they take up 2/3 of the land. If the fields go on the CPC parts that's fine, but still a concern. There is no advantage of having the building there if the fields aren't close by. I want to see the majority of the contributing buildings kept, if they can't be kept, I want to see some aspect incorporated in the new buildings. Biggest concern is timing, there are deadlines to get state funding. There seems to be a disagreement between the Mayor and the state, which may end up in litigation which is very time consuming.

*Commissioner Isaacson:* I'm not totally opposed to the demolition of buildings, but I don't know. There are problems with the current high school and a real need to move forward, however I can't make any priorities.

*Commissioner Green:* We don't need to save every building, but the worry is this site was handled in an ad hoc way by the state for years. I've been having this conversation since August, and I'm out of options with what I'm comfortable commenting on. The board is willing to talk this through, but the pressure with your deadline coming, I can't prioritize.

*Commissioner Richardson:* Zoning may be another time consuming issue. The cottages came down for wetlands which was needed, but what will be left when we are done if we knock more buildings down for the High School. We need a definite plan of what would be coming down, and we need a survey of the structural integrity before we can say.

*Greg Demeo:* What happened to the Epsilon study done for the property back in 2009?

*Commissioner Green:* The study was done and the information we have now is based on the Epsilon study and there is some dispute with that report, because the report was compiled without entering the buildings. The majority of that report should be redone. Nothing moved forward with tear downs because of the shift in control over the site.

*Don Cusano:* I'm up there every day and the site is deteriorating. Something needs to be done.

*Informal Poll:* At the WHC September 2016 meeting the commissioners made a decision to renovate the current location because we don't know what we have at the Fernald.

## 10. Adjournment

Motion to adjourn by Commissioner Green

Second: Commissioner Dufromont

In favor: All Against: None Abstain: None Recuse: None

Respectfully Submitted



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Marie Daly, Secretary

Prepared by Pamela Lyons