

## **Briefing Statement**

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**Topic: Leasing of the David Walker Farmstead**

**Date: November 14, 2008**

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The National Park Service has signed a lease with the Montessori Children's House of Valley Forge, a not-for-profit 501(C)3 organization for the David Walker Farmstead, a 3.7-acre site located on the southern boundary of the park. The park's purpose for the lease is to preserve and restore existing historic buildings through the use of non-federal funds.

### Leasing authority

36 CFR Part 18 gives the National Park Service authority to lease buildings, provided certain criteria are met. (These criteria are noted at the end of this paper\*.) The law recognizes that national parks are responsible for maintaining a large portfolio of historic and modern buildings, and that some of these buildings are not necessary or suitable for visitor services or park operations. Exercise of the authority enables a park to work with partners to rehabilitate and keep these buildings in good condition.

### Plan

Valley Forge NHP will lease the park's David Walker Farmstead and Evans property to the Montessori Children's House of Valley Forge (MCHVF), an established community-based pre-school. At its own expense, MCHVF will rehabilitate the structures and property and relocate the pre-school to the site. MCHVF will invest over \$4million. New construction will be outweighed by demolition of non-historic structures, resulting in a net decrease in overall square footage.

The MCHVF plan will provide the following advantages to the park:

- Historic structures on the site will be brought into good condition using non-federal funds.
- The structures will be removed from the park's backlog list of deferred maintenance, since the school will be responsible for maintenance following restoration. Maintenance will be performed in accordance with a maintenance and preservation plan approved by the National Park Service.

The plan will provide the following advantages to the community:

- A highly visible and dilapidated eyesore for which there is no likelihood of federal funding will be rehabilitated and brought into good condition.
- A pre-school which was part of the neighborhood for four decades will be returned to serve families in the community.

### The David Walker Farmstead and the Evans Property

- The 3.7-acre site is located on the southern boundary of the park.
- The site is bounded by a residential neighborhood (Glen Hardie) on the east, the Pennsylvania Turnpike on the south, and by park meadows on the west and north sides. (Please see attached map.)

- The David Walker Farmstead comprises a National Register-significant main house and root cellar, and a non-contributing barn, tenant house, and several small outbuildings.
- None of the buildings was present during the 1777-78 encampment and the property does not relate to the central theme of the park.
- The property was acquired by the federal government in 1978 but remained in a use-and-occupancy permit until 2003. The tenant did not maintain the property during the use and occupancy period, and it is in poor condition.
- The buildings have been vacant for five years and are increasingly a target for illegal activities.
- During the park's recently completed General Management Planning process, it was determined that there is no necessary or feasible visitor services or park operations use for the property, and that adaptive use is appropriate.
- The adjacent Evans property comprises a 1958 concrete-block house and garage, which will be demolished as part of this plan

#### The Montessori Children's House of Valley Forge

- The Montessori Children's House of Valley Forge Inc. was established as a not-for-profit, parent-owned corporation in 1964.
- The school is affiliated with the American Montessori Society. The Board of Directors comprises parents elected from the parent membership. The school serves pre-school through kindergarten, and enrolls 76 children, with plans to grow to 135 children.
- The school has served the Valley Forge community for 40 years. It previously occupied space in St. Matthew's United Methodist Church, located about 3500' from the David Walker Farmstead. Since 2006 the school has occupied space in a church located several miles from the park.

#### Other Alternatives Considered

- Some community members asked whether other potential uses for the buildings were considered. During the park's recent five-year long General Management Plan public process, a key inquiry was which of the park's almost 200 buildings are necessary and suitable for visitor use or services. It was determined that there is no feasible visitor use or internal use for the David Walker buildings, and that adaptive re-use would be considered. This topic was included in the public meetings held during that planning process, and I note that only positive comments were received regarding the potential of leasing as a means for preservation.
- The park considered the potential for lease of the buildings to an individual for residential use, or to a for-profit entity for office or commercial use. The requirement for such a tenant to invest several million dollars in stabilization and restoration, to bear the extra cost to rehabilitate the buildings according to the *Secretary of the Interior's Standard for Historic Preservation*, to be able to amortize the costs over a long period, and to enter into and successfully sustain a forty-year lease with the federal government was considered to preclude a successful outcome.

## Public Involvement

- The park recognized the interest the neighborhood would have in the proposal and designed a process of public involvement that exceeded the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act.
- Public scoping took place in spring 2006. Scoping is an opportunity for interested parties to raise concerns and identify ideas and issues that should be considered. Notices of scoping were placed on the park website and Tredyffrin Township's website. Letters announcing the opportunity to comment were sent to 143 neighboring households. The name, e-mail address, and phone number of the park's chief of planning were provided to the public. Scoping also included meetings with township officials and staff, other elected representatives, and consultation with the Pennsylvania State Historic Preservation Officer, the US Fish and Wildlife Service, the Pennsylvania Natural Diversity Index, and relevant tribes.
- Twenty-four letters, emails, or phone calls were received from the public in response to scoping. Scoping comments from the public included questions and concerns about additional traffic, additional storm water runoff, the potential visibility of parking, and the lack of availability of federal funds for the buildings.
- Conceptual plans for the re-use project were developed and impacts assessed. These were documented in an Environmental Assessment / Assessment of Effect, which was published in July for public review and comment. The document contained a no-action alternative and two action alternatives for site development for re-use of the structures by the school.
- Hard copies of the Notice of Availability for the Environmental Assessment / Assessment of Effect was sent to the same households, as well as by email to those who had requested this mode of communication, and published on the park website and the township website. Hard copies of the document were sent to those people who requested them and also placed at the park Visitor Center, in local libraries, and at the township building. The document also was available online.
- A 30-day public review of the EA / AoE took place during August 2006. Tours of the buildings and property and two public meetings were held during the review period. Fifteen letters of comment were received, containing both positive and negative comment. Positive comments centered on the fact that the buildings will be restored and also that the school will be returned to the neighborhood. Negative comment included concerns over the increase in traffic, potential visibility of the parking, potential visibility of fencing and lighting, and what was described as a lack of opportunity for public involvement regarding the proposal for re-use. Responses to comments are discussed in the document, which is available at <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/>
- One action alternative was selected and plans were modified in response to public comment. Modifications included moving restoration of the house, which is the most visible portion of the property, to Phase I from Phase II, and increasing vegetative screening of the parking lot.
- A Finding of No Significant Impact was signed by the Regional Director of the Northeast Region of the National Park Service in March 2007. The document is available at <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/>
- Individuals have continued to contact the park to discuss the plans and are welcomed and encouraged to do so.

### Site Development

- The David Walker main house will be restored and used for school meeting space and a residence for one teacher and family.
- The three-story portion of the barn will be rehabilitated. An addition to the barn in the space currently occupied by the single-story portion will hold classrooms.
- The 1958 concrete-block Evans house and garage will be demolished. The demolition area will be the location of a parking lot, which will be screened from view from the neighborhood and the park.
- Storm water management facilities will be constructed underground.
- The playground will not be visible from the street, nor will the fencing which will enclose it.
- Site lighting will be chosen by the National Park Service and will not cause glare beyond the site boundaries. It will rarely be used at night.
- The township permits a sign of a maximum size of 4' by 6'. The National Park Service will control signage, which sign will be smaller than the township permits.
- Dead and dying vegetation will be removed and replaced with new vegetation appropriate to the site and for screening.
- The driveways into and exiting the site will occupy the same location as the current driveways. There is sufficient space on the site to accommodate drop-off and pick-up of students. 310 additional trips would be generated daily, a 14.5% increase over 2006 Thomas Road traffic; and a 5.4% increase to projected Year 2030 Thomas Road traffic.

### Status

All reviews are completed and permits are in hand. Construction will begin in November 2008.

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\* The Code of Federal Regulations (36CFR part 18) established criteria that must be met in order to make a park building available for lease. Upon examination of the proposed lease with the MCHVF, the National Park Service determined that the terms of the lease met all the criteria:

- The lease will not result in degradation of the purposes and values of the park area.
- The lease will not deprive the park area of property necessary for appropriate park protection, interpretation, visitor enjoyment or administration of the park area.
- The proposed lease contains such terms and conditions as will assure the leased property will be used for activity and in a manner that are consistent with the purposes established by law for the park area in which the property is located.
- The lease is compatible with the programs of the NPS.
- The lease is for rent at least equal to the fair market value rent of the leased property.
- The proposed activities under the lease are not subject to authorization through a concession contract, commercial use authorization, or similar instrument.

- If the lease is to include historic property, the lease will adequately ensure the preservation of the historic property.