

REUSE OF THE FERNALD CENTER – A COMMUNITY VISION

A Work in Progress, March 2014

The Fernald Working Group arose out of a coalition of Waltham Community members and organizations, who in 2003 joined together to work toward a community-based reuse of the Fernald School site, one of the largest remaining developable tracts in the city. That group, called the Fernald Working Group, focused on sustainable affordable housing, natural open space, and historical preservation.

Overview

The Fernald Working Group proposes the implementation of sustainable development principles – those that are environmentally and economically efficient and that provide long lasting benefit to the entire community - to direct the future use of the Fernald Center in Waltham, Massachusetts. A large site of approximately 190 acres, the Fernald Center contains all of the elements needed for a model sustainable, multi-purpose development:

- A beautiful campus that includes enough acreage to enlarge current open space and counteract a history of sprawl in this community
- historic buildings designed by renowned architects suitable for renovation and adaptive reuse,
- location in a City and region rich in resources, including a wide range of local business enterprises and social service programs, nearby industry on Route 95/128, rail transportation to downtown Boston, and outstanding academic institutions. ;
- and, location in a City with a longstanding, demonstrated commitment to identifying, developing, and supporting new and more effective methods of caring for those in need of assistance and support.

The Fernald campus also offers an opportunity for Waltham to constructively address community concerns:

- Create affordable housing;
- Improve access to the public transportation system which could easily be addressed with minimal effort;
- Reclaim contaminated land;
- Provide economic development opportunities particularly for small businesses using a neighborhood or town center model.

Due to the availability of large tracts of land in recent years, Waltham has been the site or target of a number of large residential projects by private developers. These projects have been viewed by many in the community as having a negative effect on the environment and further increasing sprawl. The community of Waltham is united in wanting to preserve open space and at the same time, increase the stock of affordable housing for its citizenry, but that can be best accomplished by using ideas that come from within the community. Our proposal will show that these two desires are not mutually exclusive, but in fact complementary. We believe that this particular use of the Fernald site will demonstrate to other communities across the state that a balanced development strategy can enable all of us to maintain the character of our communities and provide a spectrum of housing and services without enormously increasing the demand on current infrastructure.

Waltham's Historical Link to Sustainable Land Use:

Many individual reformers contributed to Waltham's history and to the history of the Fernald Center. While the institution only moved to Waltham in 1888, its founding in 1848 by Samuel Gridley Howe was based on progressive values, and it was the first facility in America for people with developmental disabilities. The residence of Robert Morris Copeland, "father" of the Metropolitan Park System and the oldest park in that system (Beaver Brook Reservation) are located nearby. Other reformers with Waltham ties include Charles Eliot, designer of the Lyman and Gore estates as well as Robert Treat Paine, an early proponent of decent affordable homeownership and public open space. Robert Treat Paine was a founder of the Workingmens Cooperative Bank that made low interest loans to build worker's cottages in Jamaica Plain, Roxbury and Dorchester. People with more resources invested in the Bank in order to provide funds for worker's housing, considered a high-risk investment in the late 1800's. The grounds of the Paine estate in Waltham—Stonehurst—were designed by Frederick Law Olmsted, also a proponent of open space for the public. In 2000, the Commonwealth's Community Preservation Act was signed into law at Stonehurst as a tribute to Paine and Olmsted and how they acted on their values.

- 1) The redevelopment of the Fernald Center site presents an important opportunity to accomplish numerous community goals that are consistent with and build on the legacy these men left to Waltham: Restoration of services for the community
- 2) Creation of new mixed income housing
- 3) Preservation of historic buildings
- 4) Restoration of a brownfield
- 5) Stimulation of small businesses
- 6) Expansion of Waltham's open space and greenways
- 7) Transportation linked to the development

1. Restoration of services for the community

The Fernald Working Group has received input and guidance from various professionals in the field. Our Vision for a progressive site with open space and greenways can be matched with an equal vision of integration for individuals with disabilities. Some of the current residents may continue to live at Fernald and we can insure that their housing is integrated as much as possible with our Vision. Furthermore, there are many residents of Waltham with disabilities who need to be considered in our vision and planning.

A. Preserve and enhance public services on site

The therapeutic pool and gymnasium, as well as programs for physical therapy, dental and medical services currently serve residents and non-residents. The chapel on the site is also an important part of the Center's life. All of these services could become part of the community and economic life of the Fernald redevelopment. The creation of a public theatre and meeting space, perhaps in the historic Howe Hall, would enrich the resources available to the community.

B. Provide housing and services for people with developmental and physical disabilities

We foresee creating or maintaining a range of housing types including fully supported housing, and assisted living group homes for people with developmental and severe physical disabilities. Unmet needs for hospice care could also be a part of the re-use plan. We foresee the

development happening in stages, which could enable current residents and staff to remain on site continuously.

C. Restore shelter beds for homeless and transitioning families

The site, until recently, was home to 144 shelter beds for homeless families operated by Middlesex Human Service Agency. These families benefited not only from the shelter itself, but from other services provided by MHSA to support adults and children in regaining self-sufficiency. We envision creating permanent housing for formerly homeless individuals and families with appropriate supportive services to help these folks successfully integrate into the community..

D. Emergency and Transitional Housing for Women Veterans:

Currently, on any given night, there are an estimated 131,000 homeless veterans in this country. The VA estimates that about ten percent of homeless veterans are women, or, about 13,000. Women veterans are four times as likely to become homeless as their civilian counterparts. Of 500 veterans' shelters, about 300 accept women, but only a very few accept veterans with children. Since an estimated 20 percent of the women who access the VA health care system screen positive for what is called Military Sexual Trauma - i.e., rape or sexual harassment by fellow soldiers – the solution is not to simply house these women in facilities that run programs focused on men. The Fernald campus provides an opportunity to include emergency and transitional housing for women veterans, and to establish partnerships with local programs to not only support them and their children, but to heal and renew them.

E. Build a new model of an ecosystem of complementary enterprises and community services:

The site's existing services provide an opportunity for innovative economic development and land use that would be inclusive to people with intellectual and other disabilities as well as other residents whether they live on or off-site. Potential ideas should focus on real job possibilities or on the job training as opposed to setting up an isolated workshop or training center.

2. Creation of New Mixed Income Housing

A. Utilize a clustered housing model to expand open space areas

Applying sustainable growth principles to housing development for the Fernald site would include planning for clustered housing development. The typical suburban formula of creating open space through large lots with well-separated homes is inefficient. Clustering homes within the development zones of the parcel would allow for housing development while preserving open space. It is well documented that open space set-asides increase land values more when the housing is clustered rather than spread throughout the greenspace as is common in the typical suburban development. Waltham's zoning supports this concept with Section 8.2, Planned Residential Incentive Zoning which allows clustered multifamily in the most restricted single family zones.

B. Meet existing community needs for affordable housing

We see the creation (through new construction or rehabilitation of existing buildings) of mixed-income housing to reflect the current make-up of the Waltham community: a significant number of both rental units (54% of Waltham households are renters) and homeownership units, as well as support service units and transitional units for the formerly homeless. According to the City's

2007 Community Development Plan, 46% of Waltham households earned less than 80% of the Boston area median income; meaning that almost half the City's households qualify for low-to-moderate income status under federal guidelines and the state's Chapter 40B housing law. The proportion of market rate and affordable units should reflect the needs indicated by this community profile. Given that this land is publicly owned and should be used to address community needs, the proportion of housing built that is affordable should be higher than the minimums established by complying with the City's Inclusionary Zoning Bylaw (10%) or the Commonwealth's Chapter 40B requirements (25%).

C. Provide housing for a range of abilities, incomes, and family sizes; use varied architectural styles and sizes of housing to create a healthy neighborhood

Supportive service units would provide housing for individuals with a range of abilities and cognition and could include hospice care. Should they still live on site, current residents could be transitioned into these supported units, as well as the elderly and others facing disease or disability. These units could include group homes for the residents of Fernald who could adapt to this style of living, as well as full time care facilities.

We envision a mix of models and building styles that will provide permanent affordability and top quality, environmentally efficient housing for individuals and families. Ideas include adaptive re-use of older buildings, single family and two-family homes, resident owned co-operatives and co-housing, as well as the more traditional condominiums and apartment buildings. Some housing could be incorporated into mixed-use buildings with commercial space on the first floor. Housing costs could range from costs that are affordable to those with very low incomes to costs that are at market rate and many levels in between.

D. Employ the latest technology in the design and construction of housing

As with the other components of the Vision, housing at Fernald will employ energy efficient and environmentally sound materials and practices in all stages of development. This could include on-site energy generation, the use of energy efficient heat and cooling systems, recycled building materials and innovative designs. All construction, new or rehabilitated, should strive to be LEED-certifiable. We will seek out designs that use space wisely to create homes that feel spacious and private and take advantage of site-specific features, and those that employ energy efficiency and preservation of the environment in the design of the building as well as in the surrounding landscape.

3. Preservation of Historic Buildings and Landscape

A. Maintain the historic landmark status of the Fernald site through development that respects this status

Fernald gained the status of historic landmark in 1992. Any development we propose would respect this status in every way possible. One historic aspect we would propose is to honor the individual reformers who founded Fernald by incorporating their names into the site, through renaming the roads, buildings, and parks, being cautious however due to some of the less desirable legacies of some key people in the history of the institution. Perhaps one of the buildings could house a small exhibition of the history of the site, to acknowledge the positive and negative history of the institution.

B. Adaptively reuse historic buildings

One of the key ideas of the Commonwealth's Smart Growth Principles is the concept of "redevelop first," that we should seek to rehabilitate existing structures rather than build new entities. Adaptive reuse provides the impetus to rehabilitate and adapt the older buildings that are no longer needed for the use for which they were first built. Adaptive re-use would rehabilitate the buildings which could be rehabbed thoroughly, while others which could not sustain a full rehabilitation could support part of a new building, thus preserving the character of the campus through the facades of the buildings. There are several buildings on the campus that can be converted to active use and that should be preserved, particularly those built during and before the 1920's and 1930's, including those designed by important architects such as William G. Preston, the original Trapelo Road houses, and other historic structures that have been renovated already in the last several years. Structure rehabilitation will employ energy efficient and environmentally sound materials and practices. This could include on-site energy generation, the use of energy efficient heat and cooling systems, recycled building materials and innovative designs.

C. Maintain a campus-like community that does not disturb natural features

The Queen Anne buildings have been sensitively placed on the fabric of the center. Sight lines were carefully considered so that the natural light would enhance the buildings. The human scale of the buildings made many of them warm and welcoming. Exits and entrances are staggered so that there is no place that seems congested. William Preston used red brick, slate roofs and extensive copper gutters and downspouts to outline his buildings. Some of the newer buildings size, shape and placement disturb the studied calm which the original architect intended.

D. Reinstitution of agricultural use

Farming has always been a part of the landscape of Waltham. In fact, aerial views of the Fernald property show the rows of produce that were once grown there. The historical land that has since lain fallow, can be reclaimed and turned back into a working agriculture operation which produces food for consumption, while creating a sense of community. Growing food can create a beautiful landscape and also provides ecological benefits to the land and water supply. There are vernal pools that are located near the back edge of The Fernald Property. By operating an ecological sensitive agriculture on the Fernald land, it is expected that this will prevent further contamination of the waterways that exist on the property. Farming maintains open space while also being productive. The University of Massachusetts has operated an Agriculture Extension for many years, on land that was once farmed by the Warren family on nearby Beaver Street. Cornelia Warren donated the land to be used for educational purposes, much of the land, near the Girl Scout camp, also abuts Fernald. Waltham Fields Community Farm needs more space to teach farming interns, to educate children about agriculture and to provide fresh food to local families of diverse incomes.

4. Restoration of a Brownfield and General Environmental Preservation

A. Reclaim land and buildings that are unused because of contamination

Instead of abandoning polluted parcels and moving on to develop (and thus pollute) raw acreage, we propose cleaning up and re-using the sites by removing asbestos and other hazards that exist in the grounds and in some of the buildings. State funds may be available to remediate land for projects that meet certain criteria. Excavated areas can become detention ponds to reduce flooding.

B. Restoration of Degraded and Filled Wetlands and Daylighting of Culverted Streams

Prior development of the Fernald site has allowed important wetlands to be filled or otherwise degraded. We would attempt to restore these wetlands. Also, the stream running from the northwest corner of the property, has in many places been covered. We would daylight the streams, allowing them to run through the property to the southern border. Daylighting streams will provide flood mitigation, ecological restoration, pollutant removal and priceless amenities.

C. Develop sustainable and efficient infrastructure to support the entire development

This plan ensures that new development and re-use of the site minimizes strain on services and the natural environment. Technologies that only years ago were considered experimental are now forming the basis of new energy efficient compliance standards, for example as seen in the LEED Certification systems. We would employ on-site waste water treatment and grey water re-use for irrigation and sanitation. Surplus paving would be removed to reduce runoff and promote infiltration. The use of wind, which could provide a major energy source, will be evaluated for feasibility. Buildings being retrofitted with solar panels, the use of geothermal heating, and other local energy conservation infrastructure would be employed for any development. This reduction of energy use will make development at the Fernald comparatively self-sufficient.

D. Reclamation of Environmental Sustainability

Environmental sustainability is the ability to maintain the qualities that are valued in the physical environment. “Best and highest use” has too long been translated into strictly monetary profit instead of considering the best use to serve all of the community. North Waltham is plagued by traffic and flooding. Proper use of Fernald land will take a step towards mitigation, not further irritation. Daylighting the covered stream and reclaiming wetlands will provide flooding relief to surrounding areas by providing water a place to go. Open space and tree maintenance provide biodiversity, clean air and walking trails. The provision for alternative public transportation and land use would go far in assuring development at the Fernald does not put a heavier burden on the roads, while providing an improved quality of living for those on or near the site.

5. Stimulation of Small Businesses and Job Creation

A. Preserve and create jobs

The vision for the Fernald Center contains small retail establishments and other business that provide goods and services as well as sources of jobs. We envision incorporating the green energy component of the plan with economic development, for example by developing a small bio-fuel refinery or other alternative energy on site that would provide energy and “green jobs” on site.

B. Develop small retail establishments to meet on site and local needs

The development of commercial activities would create new jobs, but the new retail

establishments would also be an amenity to the residents, employees and those in the surrounding neighborhood. Likely establishments would include mini-marts, childcare centers, barbershops and hairdressers, restaurants and pubs, coffee shops, “green” dry cleaners, laundromats and bookstores. The retail establishments would give Fernald the charm of a small, self-contained neighborhood.

C. Create public meeting space and civic activities

An important component of the non-residential space is the creation of a public meeting space, perhaps housed in Howe Hall. This space could be used for meetings of Fernald residents, such as members of local tenants associations or condominium boards, or for parties or events of the general public. Such a facility could offer tours of the Fernald Center’s historic buildings and host an exhibit on the site’s history and re-use. Other ideas along this vein include theatre space, an amphitheatre, and space for rotating art exhibits. Such a facility could also be used for summer day camp or for after school programs for children and teens.

6. Expansion of Waltham’s Open Space and the Western Greenway

A. Remove buildings to significantly widen and preserve open space corridors

Several waves of development on the site of the Fernald Center have eroded the buffers of open space the campus originally enjoyed. A careful study of the buildings on the site will identify those that should be removed in order to provide more open space and better connectivity of the natural areas. This would expand natural areas for enjoyment by the residents, habitat for local fauna, and the buffer of abutting properties including the University of Massachusetts’ Lawrence Meadow, a sensitive wetland environment, a Girl Scout camp, and the City’s Forest Street Park planned self-guided nature trail.

The proposed Western Greenway, with miles of hiking trails through open space in Lexington, Belmont and Waltham would enjoy a protective easement where it crosses the Fernald site. Without the Fernald link, the proposed circular Greenway would be fragmented. Fortunately, many of the buildings that are currently within the proposed open space set-asides are minor structures that don’t lend themselves to reuse or reinvestment, for example, the “cottages” that sit in a small valley (the “bowl”) on the north side of the campus.

B. Enhance the original design of the campus to highlight natural beauty and provide outdoor recreation

In designing the site for the Fernald Center, landscape architects arranged buildings around the hillocks and valleys of the land. Roads encircle the bases of hills, and specimen trees are located for their fullest development and for our enjoyment. We propose that any development continually enhance these aspects of the campus, which would provide the public with more and better access to outdoor recreation, like playgrounds for young children. We envision the restoration of the wetlands and streams near the “bowl” as well as the creation of new walking and bicycle trails, including some that would guide walkers with educational signs about the surrounding habitat. Open space areas could also include cross-country skiing trails. The creation of a community garden and public parks on site would also enhance open space while providing community centered recreation, like the existing ballpark and soccer field.

We propose to light open spaces with a minimum of light pollution. New lights would be

installed on campus only as needed, using fixtures that reduce or eliminate light scatter.

A. Build underground to preserve green space on the surface

We envision the development of an underground parking lot with an infiltration chambers below (like the Harvey building on Main Street) to mitigate pollution. Other underground spaces could meet various needs such as storage or utilities etc., thus preserving more green space.

7. Transportation linked to the Development

A. Reconfigure entrances on both Waverley Oaks and Trapelo to ease traffic congestion;

The site is blessed with egresses onto two major roads in Waltham, splitting the traffic load and lessening the burden on either Trapelo Road or Waverley Oaks Rd. (Route 60). The long frontage on Trapelo Road provides space for turning lanes to be added. The roadway through the redeveloped site would also serve as a thoroughfare for some of the existing local traffic, reducing the impact on nearby neighborhoods while serving the new residents of the site.

B. Reduce and mitigate traffic with expanded public and private transit services

By combining current innovative ideas in vehicle trip reduction with the existing assets of the site, the project should limit the impact of traffic on the area. We propose, at minimum, a micro-bus connection to Waverley Square where riders can transfer to an MBTA bus or the commuter rail and travel to Cambridge or Boston, and another bus connection to the Alewife T station. However, we prefer a circular bus route connecting Waverley Square to Lexington Street that would include a stop at Fernald, so that both Fernald and other Waltham residents would have access to transit connections to Waltham, Boston, Belmont and Cambridge. Such buses would give residents and employees access to shopping, banks, supermarkets, schools and churches.

We also envision a shuttle bus that would loop through the site itself, to bring people from one part of the property to another. This shuttle could also take riders to nearby, commonly visited destinations, such as the Star Market on Route 60. We propose that any new bus route use electric buses. Our plan would also employ Zipcar, hourly, low-cost rental cars available on site, to augment public transit for one-car or car-less families.

C. Develop pedestrian and bicycle-friendly infrastructure

We propose the development of sidewalks on the portions of Trapelo Road now lacking them, bike paths in the development and along adjacent roads and bike racks near housing and commercial space. We also envision pedestrian infrastructure throughout the site – the installation of sidewalks (now lacking) on the “Main Street” through the site, especially if this road takes a portion of the through traffic from Trapelo Road. Another option is community bicycles, like the program found in Madison, Wisconsin and The Netherlands. Residents or employees of the site could ride a specially marked bike within the property and leave it wherever their on-site destination is.

By incorporating Zipcar, local shopping access and good mass transit connections into the site, residents with few and even no cars will be attracted to live and work at Fernald.

Existing Resources

The City of Waltham has received federal HOME and CDBG funds that it could commit to this

project. In 2005 the City passed the Community Preservation Act, providing funds for affordable housing, historic preservation, open space preservation and recreation. The City could also use its Affordable Housing Trust Fund and Open Space Acquisition Fund for development, as well as the set aside of Hotel Taxes for open space preservation. We hope that the City uses each of these sources aggressively to help create this community vision.

The Fernald Working Group is:

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Special Thanks for the following individuals and organizations, each of whom have provided valuable insights at different points in this process.

Michael Barrett, State Senator
Arthur Bennett, Historic Preservation Consultant
Thomas Curtin, former Waltham City Councilor
George Darcy III, Waltham City Councilor
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Belmont Citizens Forum
The Community Day Center of Waltham
CEDAC
CHAPA
Conservation Law Foundation Ventures
Covenant Congregational Church
Fernald League for the Retarded
First Evangelical Lutheran Church, Waltham
First Presbyterian Church, Waltham
First Unitarian Church, Newton
Friends of Samuel Gridley Howe Library
Goldencrest Hobbes-Brook Association
Greater Boston Interfaith Organization
Greater Waltham ARC (GWARC)
Hardy Pond Association
Marist Missionary Sisters
Massachusetts Audubon Society
Massachusetts Coalition of Families and Advocates for the Retarded (COFAR)
Mass Coalition for Healthy Communities
National Archives
Neighborhood abutters of Fernald (leading to

formation of Trapelo Neighborhood Association)
New Ecology
REACH Beyond Domestic Violence
Smart Growth Alliance
Stonehurst, Robert Treat Paine Estate
Tufts University Urban and Environmental Policy and Planning
Trustees of Reservations
Trust for Public Land
Waltham Arts Council
Waltham Council of Neighborhood Advocates (WCONA)
Waltham Council on Aging
Waltham Democratic City Committee
Waltham Disabled Veterans
Waltham Fields Community Farm
The Waltham Historical Society
Waltham Affordable Housing Committee
Waltham Alliance to Create Housing (WATCH)
Waltham Kiwanis Club
Waltham Land Trust

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Glossary of Acronyms

- CDBG: Community Development Block Grant, federal program that provides funds to qualifying municipalities, for development to benefit areas with low-income populations.
- CEDAC: Community Economic Development Assistance Corporation, quasi-public state program to fund community development.
- CHAPA: Citizens Housing and Planning Association. Non-profit umbrella organization supporting and promoting affordable housing and community development activities in Massachusetts.
- DHCD: State's Department of Housing and Community Development.
- DDS: Massachusetts Department of Development Services
- GWARC: Greater Waltham Association of Retarded Citizens, provides community based services for developmentally disabled children and adults in Waltham.
- HOME: Federal "home investment partnership" program to fund affordable housing development
- League of Women Voters: Waltham's chapter of the organization to educate voters and encourage participation in democracy.
- MassHousing: "the state's affordable housing bank", offers below market loans to fund affordable housing development.
- MAPC: Metropolitan Area Planning Council. Quasi-public agency that support, promotes and aids in land use planning in 101 cities and towns in Greater Boston.
- MBTA: Massachusetts Bay Transit Authority, regional transportation authority
- MHP: Massachusetts Housing Partnership, quasi-public state agency that funds the preservation and development of affordable housing.
- MHSA: Middlesex Human Service Agency, non-profit organization.
- MWRA: Massachusetts Water Resources Authority
- OCD: Office of Commonwealth Development. State agency composed of and coordinating work in the departments of Transportation, Housing and Community Development and Environmental Affairs in order to promote sustainable development.
- TNA: Trapelo Neighborhood Association, formed to monitor and influence municipal decision regarding development in northeast Waltham to ensure good local planning and minimum community burden.
- WATCH CDC: Waltham Alliance to Create Housing community development corporation, non-profit grassroots organization to support local residents in creating community change, also provides adult education classes and is an affordable housing developer.
- WLT: Waltham Land Trust, non-profit organization dedicated to protecting and preserving Waltham's open space and natural resources.