

I am asking you not to approve the “declaration of no further need” for any part of the Warner Circle property in Kensington Park.

More than eight years ago someone in Kensington told me that there was a developer looking at building condos inside of the Warner Mansion and the neighborhood “kind of liked that idea.”

In the late nineteenth century a curious wave of philanthropy began from people we now call robber barons—often born poor or working class, self educated, ruthless in business, and without much sympathy for their own workforce or anyone else who stood in their way—these folks began to “give back”.

Enoch Pratt of Baltimore was one of them but in later life he donated money to create the Baltimore public library system to benefit common people “regardless of class or color.”

Pratt’s story inspired others, notably Andrew Carnegie, to do the same and to convince others to do more.

The Carnegie Libraries, Carnegie-Mellon University, Huntington Library and Gardens, Stanford University were all donated to the public by rich people who wanted to improve the lot of others in the human community.

Griffith Park, the Griffith Park Observatory, and the Greek Theater in Los Angeles were “Christmas presents” to the city from G. F. Griffith who made his fortune in mining.

In Montgomery County the Hecht Co donated the land for the old Silver Spring Library and the park adjacent, the Chevy Chase Land Co donated the parcel where the Chevy Chase Library and the Chevy Chase Fire Station stand, and the Davis family donated land from their family farm for the Davis Library.

Sometime in the late twentieth century that flow from the rich to their communities began to falter and many municipalities now seem to think it is acceptable to build arenas for sports, to give tax breaks and public resources to private entities who develop them for profit and for private companies to build, and then control the future of, public projects—also for profit.

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Projects like these (the Fillmore in Silver Spring, the Forest Glen National Seminary development, the long-term lease of public school buildings and other county structures to private schools or other entities) transfer public property to private uses without fully taking into account the price that the public has paid for them in the past and the price the public will pay in the future.

Paying for the Fillmore's three million dollar cost overrun with Department of Recreation dollars was a choice that still reverberates through the system—leaving little or no money to repair or renovate other park and recreation structures. The Warner Circle property is one of those which lost out on funding.

When the Forest Glen National Seminary was developed there was a loss of green space, of walking trails, and loss of access to the Rock Creek Park below the development.

Following the original intent of public use, Warner Circle Special Park has been looked after and maintained for years with public dollars.

I think it is wrong to imagine that public buildings have to earn their keep and that if they don't we should offload them, usually for nothing or for far below market value, to someone who can "follow through" with a private project that benefits few and enriches few.

So again I ask, please vote no to the "declaration of no further need" for Warner Mansion and Warner Circle.

Thank you.