

"Federation Corner" column

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### **A violation of the Potomac Master Plan and the public trust**

by Peggy Dennis  
MCCF President

I'm sad to report that the hard-fought lease of the Brickyard Road School site by County Executive Isiah Leggett to Montgomery Soccer Inc. (MSI) will likely go forward within the next two weeks. Members of the County Council appear to accept the coming "train wreck" which will result in the destruction of Nick's Organic Farm. This is no surprise to those of us who have been watching this debacle founded on a series of lies.

The plot began in early 2009 when MSI, according to their Board of Director minutes, allocated \$350,000 to be used for lobbyists to secure soccer fields. In a letter dated November 10, 2009 Leggett requested the Board of Education to lease the 20 acre Brickyard site to the County. He described the site as "largely vacant and underutilized." Was this simply erroneous information or a blatant lie?

Nick Marvel has been painstakingly husbanding the soil and farming this land organically for 31 years. "Nick's Organic Farm" has become the "keystone" enterprise for organic farmers. As the only organic seed stock farm in the region (not just Montgomery County) that is completely surrounded by suburban homes, it is the only farm capable of providing seeds that are guaranteed to be uncontaminated by pollen from genetically modified organisms. For all these reasons, Nick's Organic Farm is unique and irreplaceable.

The second lie came in the County Executive's justification for the land grab: the wish for "expanding and coordinating after-school programs – especially for those students most at risk." First, Potomac has very few students who could be characterized as "at risk". Second, the Brickyard School Site is far removed from those MCPS middle and high schools where more robust "after-school programs" are needed.

More lies shed further doubt on Leggett's motivation. Correspondence has come to light showing that Leggett had been in negotiations for some time with board members of Montgomery Soccer Inc., showing his determination to find them land to build playing fields. These conversations may have been bolstered with financial considerations. At a public meeting, Leggett stated that he had not received any contributions from any MSI Board member for five years. Yet Leggett's campaign finance reports show that he received multiple campaign contributions between 2005 and 2010 totaling \$7,500 from Barry Gudelsky, an MSI Board member

The local community is justifiably outraged by the County Executive's backroom dealings. Potomac residents who put in hundreds of hours working on the Potomac Subregion Master Plan Advisory Group in 1999 felt betrayed. They had discussed two future school sites on Brickyard Road, and agreed that if MCPS were to declare them as "surplus" then they could possibly be developed "as local parks." This was reasonable given the fact that Potomac has relatively few local parks which are, by definition, intended for use by the surrounding community.

Thus, the Executive's argument that the MSI soccer complex is in accord with the language of the Potomac Master Plan is a gross distortion of both the language and intent of the Plan. As Ginny Barnes recollected, "Unfortunately, it never occurred to us they would be developed in any way without first going through the surplus process. And of course, we never envisioned in our wildest nightmares a private

club building a commercial sports complex on a narrow open section road in the middle of a residential neighborhood."

The Request for Proposals (RFP) process was a sham, too. MSI was the only organization to submit a proposal. MSI is a not-for-profit organization run largely by volunteer coaches and parents and supported by the registration fees that parents pay. If MSI has so much money in the bank that it can afford to pay upwards of 3 million dollars to develop land on which they hold only a 9-year sublease, perhaps its tax-exempt status should be investigated. Or parents should be demanding that the fees be reduced. Or MSI should enter into a real public/private partnership with some of our MSPC schools which truly need playing fields rehabilitated and more robust after-school programs for their "at risk" students.

Other lies surround the issue. Mr. Leggett stated early on that he would find "other land" on which to "relocate" Nick's Organic Farm. There is no other land remotely similar in Montgomery County or in the region. Leggett promised that he would look for a "dual use" scenario in which only two soccer fields would be built with the rest of the site remaining an organic farm and outdoor education center. This too is impossible under the accepted plan for four soccer fields and a large parking lot. To add insult to injury, Leggett's promises that there would be no artificial turf, no lights for night playing, and no public address system were all left out of the MSI lease. No wonder that the community feels it has been lied to and betrayed by an overreaching and duplicitous County Executive.

You can help fight this travesty! Visit the Brickyard Coalition website at [www.brickyardcoalition.org](http://www.brickyardcoalition.org) and click on "civic action" before April 11.

*The views expressed in this column do not necessarily reflect formal positions adopted by the Federation. To submit an 800-1000 word column for consideration, send as an email attachment to [theelms518@earthlink.net](mailto:theelms518@earthlink.net)*