

Friends of the Barnes Foundation

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Press Conference November 13, 2009

Today, Pennsylvania State Attorney General Tom Corbett is making news by indicting John Perzel for using taxpayer money for political purposes. Where's he been? Governor Rendell has been playing politics with the Barnes Foundation for years now. Tom Corbett, who would like to take the Governor's place, has repeatedly turned a blind eye and a deaf ear to the obvious, deeply troubling issues with the Barnes.

Talk about using taxpayer money for political purposes, \$107 million appropriated for constructing a fake Barnes on the Parkway, a stupid attempt to recreate what we already have – a mere 4.62 miles away.

This is not only an unconscionable waste of taxpayer money. The plans for the project are deeply flawed and put the extraordinary, world-renowned Barnes Foundation at risk in a way that it has never faced and will never face in Merion.

\$107 million dollars. The state budget doesn't have that kind of money for arts and cultural institutions across the entire state of Pennsylvania, yet Governor Rendell and Attorney General Corbett think the politics of the matter make it just fine to use those scarce resources for this project, which Philadelphia architect Robert Venturi has been called a "ridiculous waste of money".

If Tom Corbett wants to run for Governor, he needs to explain to the people of Pennsylvania why he has not upheld the obligations of his office and why he has betrayed the people of Philadelphia and the Commonwealth by not protecting the Barnes trust and by permitting Governor Rendell to make a pork barrel project of one of the Philadelphia region's most prized cultural possessions.

Governor Rendell and his friends have no right to play political football with the Barnes Foundation. And do stop the pretense and lies about better access, about Barnes's vision, about the problems in Merion. It is all sheer nonsense.

The Barnes is in the book of 1,000 Things You Should See Before You Die. It didn't get there by being a vanity/pork barrel project on the Parkway.

Our public officials and the leaders of our most powerful philanthropies have one obligation to follow with respect to the Barnes: "First, Do No Harm."

Despite attempts to justify it and present it as a *fait accompli*, the Parkway Barnes project has been repeatedly discredited for being reckless, irresponsible, and now -- according to the Barnes's own report -- seriously short of funds. The plans in the works for more than a decade, are in disarray.

Projected construction costs have increased, building size decreased

The Parkway building was to have cost \$100 million for a facility between 120,000 and 150,000 square feet. Last month, it was announced that the costs for the building are fully 50 % higher - \$150 million. That is for a facility scaled back in size to 93,000 square feet, a reduction of more than 30% from what was discussed in the Montgomery County Court hearings in 2004. In other words, the project would deliver less for much more money.

Taxpayer funding for what was to have been a project driven by private philanthropy

In 2004, when the Barnes Board got Court permission – not a mandate – to dismantle the Barnes Foundation, the funding for the project was ostensibly driven by private sources. In 2006, it was discovered that \$107 million was appropriated for “design and construction” of a building in Philadelphia to house the Barnes art collection. Of that, Governor Rendell has already pledged \$30 million toward the building of a replica of the Barnes at a time when state support for many existing cultural entities in the region and throughout the state have been cut to the bone. This is pork barrel politics of a particularly destructive type.

What would the Parkway Barnes provide for \$150 million?

- A diminished value for the Barnes art collection, as it would be removed from its context, lacking both the authenticity and integrity of the original.
- A site of four almost-barren acres on one of the busiest thoroughfares in the City; i.e., about one-third the size of the 13 acre complex in Merion with the purpose-built gallery designed by Paul Cret and an arboretum that dates to the 1880s.
- A cafeteria. Merion could have a cafeteria.
- Classrooms. At the Barnes in Merion, the galleries are the classrooms; the collection itself is the tool for learning.
- Gallery space for roving exhibitions. Would this create a contribution or be an additional drain of resources?
- A gift shop. Merion has a gift shop.
- An auditorium.

The problem of the essential, but unstable endowment

Beyond the cost increases for construction, there is the bizarre story of the facility’s endowment. In 2006, when the Pew trumpeted its successful campaign of raising \$150 million for the project, the endowment was set at \$50 million. In 2007, the Barnes announced that they would raise *at least* another \$50 million “to make certain that the Foundation is properly endowed in the years ahead...” Something has gone wrong because in October 2009, the planned endowment had been slashed from at least \$100 million to \$50 million.

It should be noted that testimony from the 2004 hearings shows that the planned contribution from the endowment to the annual operating budget for the Parkway Barnes was to be 22%, well above the normal contribution of 14 – 16% for museums. If the full endowment required to support the institution is not met, the impact would be severe and the well-being of the institution would be jeopardized.

Fundraising stalled since 2006; no long-term plan; The Art of the Steal

As mentioned earlier, Pew announced in May 2006 that \$150 million had been successfully raised. Last month, it was reported in *France Amerique* that the Barnes has gathered \$150 million for the \$200 million project. In three-and-a-half years, no additional funds have been raised.

On top of everything else, the documentary *The Art of the Steal* to be released in February 2010, reveals the murky origins of the Parkway Barnes plan and is likely to negatively impact fundraising efforts.

The financial picture in Merion

The Barnes in Merion could generate at least \$2,500,000 in revenue with at least 144,000 casual visitors annually that the Barnes is authorized to have.

In the stable Merion environment, the operating budget needs a contribution from its endowment of less than \$1 million per year. The Barnes in Merion could be perfectly secure with an endowment of \$25 million.

The hospitality dollars and their multipliers already accrue to the City without any new expenditure because there are no hotels and few restaurants in Merion.

In general, the Barnes in Merion has never been exposed to the level of uncertainty and risk that is posed by the Parkway Barnes scenario. There is no justification for jeopardizing the Barnes Foundation, unless it is part of a plan for it to fail.

Other factors:

- No detailed study has ever been published of the feasibility, viability, or sustainability of a Parkway Barnes project.
- The Barnes Foundation in Merion is eligible for National Historic Landmark status, the nation's highest honor for cultural sites of national significance. *To remain eligible, the site must remain intact*
- The valuable real estate on the Parkway now being donated by the City of Philadelphia could be used to generate vibrant street life and revenue to the City in ways that a Barnes replica never will.
- The reputation of Philadelphia as a center for culture and steward of our nation's historical legacy has been seriously harmed by the plan to dismantle the Barnes. It has been the topic of countless articles around the United States and abroad.

- A healthy future requires a regional vision for our cultural assets. Support for the permanent preservation of the Barnes Foundation in Merion, would create a remarkable model for the future.

Although it has existed for some 85 years, we are just beginning to understand what the Barnes is, both as a unique art experience and a cultural monument for historic preservation. The very last thing we should do is dismantle it and good practices tell us that we should conserve the authentic and not undertake actions that cannot be undone. We have an opportunity to create a healthy, promising future for the Barnes in Merion in its original, historic setting. Embracing it, supporting its preservation as a unique symbol of American cultural heritage and helping it toward a bright future would bring great honor and respect to our region and celebration around the world.

We urge the Barnes Board of Trustees, Governor Rendell, Attorney General Corbett, the Pew, Lenfest, and Annenberg Foundations to consider the fact that the proposed Parkway Barnes plan will cause irreparable harm to the Barnes Foundation and have unknown consequences for the many valuable institutions in the region. It is time for a big step back to find a resolution that does not kill the patient.