

The Bulletin

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“It's A No-Brainer”

by Aram K. Jerrehian

It was an aside voiced by a member as City Council deliberated leasing the land formerly occupied by the Youth Study Center (YSC) to the Barnes Foundation for a dollar a year. This prime real estate was the final piece in the puzzle to relocate the fabulous Barnes art collection five miles and fifteen minutes from its ancestral home in Merion. (Ironically, it presently exists only a few hundred feet from the city's border). So controversial is the concept, that the new executive director of Barnes, Derek Gillman said in reference to its creator, Dr. Albert C. Barnes, "I think he's probably rotating in his grave."

The move to the Benjamin Franklin Parkway in Philadelphia has been huckstered as being at no cost to the city. This public relations declaration is a misrepresentation of the facts; the purpose of this writing to disabuse the notion. To quote Aldous Huxley, "facts do not cease to exist because they are ignored." Here are facts that prove that the city, through its taxpayers, has and will pay for what has been described as the greatest theft of art in American history, to say nothing of the patent disregard of Dr. Barnes' carefully crafted estate planning.

Fact: In its 2002 capital budget, the Pennsylvania legislature earmarked \$100 million for the construction of a new Barnes in Philadelphia. Called the "immaculate appropriation" as its genesis has been a well concealed mystery, its existence was not disclosed at the court hearing by the proponents of the move. An inference had been created that all funds would be forthcoming from private sources. In addition, another \$7 million was allocated for miscellaneous work at the proposed site. It is a given that Philadelphia taxpayer money is reflected in these acts of political largesse.

Fact: The governor and attorney general collaborated to have Lincoln University, which was empowered to appoint four out of the five trustees of the Barnes Foundation, give up its control in exchange for \$80 million. This clandestine arrangement should have disqualified the Office of the Attorney General from participating in the hearings to move the art collection. Instead, it paved the way bringing to mind Juneval's "who shall guard the guardians themselves." Again, a significant portion of these millions were "contributed" by Philadelphia taxpayers.

Fact: To make room for Barnes on the Parkway, the YSC had to be relocated. A suitable site in her West Philadelphia district was suggested by Councilwoman Jannie Blackwell. However, she delayed the move until the City agreed to also build a new recreation center nearby bearing the name of her late husband. Its cost is estimated at \$8 million plus (*see note below*). This tactic has reportedly cost the City tens of millions of dollars due to the delay in building and opening the new Barnes and due to the cost of renovating the former Eastern Pennsylvania Psychiatric Institute in East Falls as a temporary home for the YSC. These millions represent Philadelphia taxpayer dollars.

Fact: Philadelphia will lose the value of almost six-acre prime city-owned real estate on the Parkway. One wonders whether, prior to the giveaway, a feasibility study was undertaken to determine its potential value by exploring commercial options for its use? (Or, for that matter, does a feasibility study exist that justifies the Barnes debacle)? The land could be sold outright, leased to a developer or sold subject to a ground lease which would produce income in perpetuity. Under all scenarios, tax ratables would be created in addition to wage, business and other tax revenue.

The sum of these facts is monies that could be used for libraries, art, music and general education, public safety and other more global concerns have been diverted to gratify the elite.

Lest it be forgotten, the proponents of the move admit to an annual \$4.5 million operating deficit. How this will be resolved is an unresolved matter. How it will impact the fund raising efforts of the other Parkway cultural institutions is another. The so-called "museum row" is a nineteenth century concept. What the Parkway needs to make it more universally attractive and vibrant are diverse uses, not more of the same.

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(Note from Friends of the Barnes Foundation: The amount of the expenditure planned for the West Philadelphia facility is not \$8,000,000 but between \$97,000,000 and \$180,000,000.)