

# Recommendations to the Board of Selectmen Regarding the Decommissioned Witt School

August 2018

## Report 1 of the Stafford Historic Advisory Commission

Chairman: Leonard Clark  
Vice Chairman: Donald Passardi  
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### *A brief description of the Earl M. Witt Intermediate School building*



**Above: The Witt School.** Located in Hyde Park, Stafford's second high school was built in 1938 and was decommissioned by the Board of Education in 2007, after 68 years of use as a high school and an intermediate school. This action transferred responsibility for the building to the Board of Selectmen. In 1985, the building had been renamed in honor of Superintendent of Schools Earl M. Witt, who devoted 39 years to the Stafford public school system. Used now for storage and emergency preparedness exercises, the building is in a state of advanced deterioration.

## Introduction

Appointed in June 2017, the Stafford Historic Advisory Commission (SHAC) has met once a month during the past year to study the circumstances surrounding the decommissioned Witt and Pinney schools in an effort to assist the Board of Selectmen in finding a resolution to the financial drain that these Town-owned, decommissioned buildings represent.

Selectmen have stated their wish to get the buildings on the tax rolls, whereas certain citizens have expressed interest in finding a way to gainfully use these two Town-owned buildings for civic purposes. SHAC has taken into consideration both viewpoints.

During the past year, representatives of the State Historic Preservation Office and the Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation have accompanied SHAC members and Town Selectmen on tours of both schools. These historic preservation experts view both structures as having potential for reuse that would maintain the buildings' historic integrity. However, each structure requires different levels of investment.

Assessing the compatibility of any proposed uses with the prevailing character of each building's neighborhood has been an ongoing consideration of the Commission.

Report 1 focuses on SHAC's deliberations and recommendations related to the Witt School. This Commission will issue a separate report about the Pinney School, a landmark structure in a State and National Historic District.

## Considering the Witt School

Due to the Witt building's advanced state of deterioration, the historic preservation experts cautioned that the scale of renovation needed to rehabilitate it would require the use of special tactics, such as acquiring historic tax abatements and brownfield grants to make such a project economically feasible.

This led SHAC to research the logistics of nominating the Witt School, or preferably an area encompassing Hyde Park, Highland Terrace, and Main Street, to the State and National Register of Historic Places. We have learned that some architectural firms pursue this type of designation for individual buildings. Nomination of a "historic district" is more often undertaken by a municipal government that can use a State-funded matching grant to hire a professional preservation historian to compile the mandatory detailed documentation that authenticates this type of U.S. National Park Service–endorsed designation. In general, this approach benefits commercial developers aiming to purchase a historic property for profit-making goals.

The impact of profit-oriented residential or commercial uses of the Witt building has been studied and discussed at length by SHAC. The Town's zoning enforcement officer has provided guidance to SHAC on pertinent zoning issues, such as roadside setbacks, population density restrictions for residential uses, and the application of variances — all of which could forever change the nature of Hyde Park and would invariably infringe upon the public's use of Hyde Park.

SHAC urges that careful thought be given to the narrow byways encircling Hyde Park and its adjacent residential neighborhoods. The extant public parking lot behind the Witt enables access to the Woodlawn hiking trail that wends its way to the upper 147 acres of

### Want to know more about Hyde Park?

Over a century has passed since the establishment of Hyde Park, and much about the Park has been forgotten. For a detailed chronology of the history of Hyde Park, see **"Hyde Park: A Chronology with Notes about the Town's Schools,"** which begins on page 10 of this report.

Hyde Park. The same parking lot serves the Town’s Family Services building and allows citizen access to the hillside below the Witt building for wintertime sledding and summertime concert going.

The Commission concludes that proposed uses of the Witt building that are not educational or municipally oriented in nature would lead to zoning changes and quite possibly cause sale of significant Hyde Park acreage, which is not deemed to be in the public interest.

### Recommendation 1

**SHAC recommends that the Town of Stafford not sell any part of Hyde Park, since doing so would violate the bequest of Isaac Perkins Hyde. (See below “What is the Hyde bequest?”)**

The Historic Advisory Commission strongly feels that retaining ownership of parkland will allow the Town to maintain control over a vital section of the downtown area, especially as citizen interest in the economic and social revitalization of the Main Street–Hyde Park area continues to gain momentum.

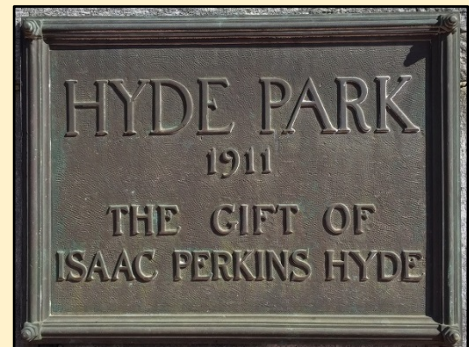
**We recommend that Hyde Park lands be kept intact and under the stewardship of the Hyde Park Commission.**

If the Town, aided by this Commission, cannot find a suitably compatible use for the Witt building that benefits the citizens of Stafford and in no measure diminishes Hyde Park, the Commission supports the Hyde Park Commission in its decision to recommend demolishing the Witt building in order to return the land to Hyde Park.

#### What is the Hyde bequest?

In 1897, native son Isaac Perkins Hyde gave to the Town of Stafford the equivalent in today’s currency of \$1.5 million. Mr. Hyde’s bequest specified that after the purchase of land suitable for a public park, “...the balance be invested as a perpetual fund, the income thereof to be used for the purpose of maintaining and keeping said park in a careful and proper manner for all time.”

In 1911, his gift enabled the Town to buy Woodlawn Farm, the 156.8-acre Julius Converse family estate in order to create Hyde Park. At this time, about 8.8 acres is actively managed by the Hyde Park Commission. The Conservation Commission’s Woodlawn hiking trail traverses the upper 147 acres that extend to the Ellington town line and about Tolland Avenue in two places.



*Above: This bronze plaque at the Spring Street entrance of Hyde Park reminds visitors of the Park’s benefactor, Isaac Perkins Hyde, who was born in 1833 and attended the old district school house on Stafford Street.*

### Recommendation 2

**SHAC recommends that the Town retains ownership of the Witt building. The Commissions offers these possible scenarios for use:**

**Scenario 1. The Town retains ownership of the Witt building for municipal purposes** (i.e., ADA–compliant Town offices, police headquarters, community services, etc.), which would be consistent with the present “open space” zoning status of Hyde Park that permits educational, municipal and passive recreational uses; or

**Scenario 2. The Town retains ownership of the building but leases it** (perhaps at a nominal fee) to an entity

that could undertake leasehold improvements to renovate the building (a business tax strategy). Although this might entail zoning changes, an educational use for the Witt could also fit this scenario and be consistent with the present “open space” zoning status of Hyde Park.

On page 5, in “**Appendix 1. Proposed use of the Witt building for an educational purpose,**” SHAC presents background information about the School for Innovative Learning. This is a newly formed nonprofit educational organization that for the past 10 months has continued to update SHAC on its progress and includes a refurbished Witt building as part of its 5-year plan.

### How did the Witt School end up in Hyde Park?

In 1938, the Town’s second high school was built in the midst of Hyde Park, despite the fact that the building committee had first recommended acreage at the fairgrounds — an area actually endorsed by the State Board of Education and spacious enough for future school expansion and athletic fields.

At a town meeting in 1937, three rounds of possibly contentious voting are cited in the meeting minutes: 270 citizens voted in the second round of voting, whereas only 166 voted in the third and final round. Did over a hundred voters leave in a huff or abstain from voting? It is hard to discern from our vantage point in 2018, despite much hunting for context in newspaper archives and meeting minutes. In the end, the high school was built in Hyde Park where the former Converse mansion had stood, and high school classes began to be held there in January 1939.

By 1961, the Town was considering using another site in Hyde Park for the Town’s third high school. At that time, Town counsel Etalo Gnutti was quoted in the *Springfield Union* newspaper as saying: “Apparently there was no challenge or litigation at that time [i.e., in 1937] concerning using the park area for a public school building, but it is my sound opinion that the will of the late Isaac Hyde does not designate that it is broad enough to use the property for such purposes.”

And so the third high school, which opened for classes in 1971, is not in Hyde Park. It was built on the former Laurion property on Orcuttville Road, where the public school and library complex is today.

### Recommendation 3

**In 2018, this Commission’s intent is not to compound the repercussions of the 1937 decision that has resulted in our dilemma today: Deciding the fate of a deteriorating 40,000-plus square-foot structure sitting in the midst of a public park funded by a generous benefactor.**

**But if the Board of Selectmen decides to sell the Witt building with acreage, SHAC strongly recommends that a survey be undertaken and a deed created to define the boundaries, so Town residents clearly understand how much land is being carved out of Hyde Park. The boundaries of the parcel of parkland to be forfeited should be firmly established from the outset before marketing efforts begin.**

**Selling a portion of Hyde Park is an irreversible action that will result in the loss of a public inheritance.**

On page 9, in “**Appendix 2. Overview of possible uses for the decommissioned Witt School located in Hyde Park,**” SHAC provides an overview of possible uses presented to and/or researched by members of the Commission. Each use is shown with its impact on zoning status, implied need to sell parkland, and other relevant factors that came to light during the Commission’s deliberations.

## **Appendix 1. Proposed use of the Witt building for an educational purpose**

### **Background information about the School for Innovative Learning**

During the past year, the Stafford Historic Advisory Commission (SHAC) has considered the possibility of the Witt building being put to use again as a school, which would be compatible with the Witt's current "open space" (OS) zoning status.

Over the past 10 months, representatives of the School for Innovative Learning met with the Commission three times to report on their progress.

Following are complete excerpts related to the School for Innovative Learning from the meeting minutes of the Stafford Historic Advisory Commission.

#### **◆ From the SHAC meeting minutes of Sept. 25, 2017**

Pertinent to revitalized use of the Witt School, Stafford residents **Nicole and Brian Waicunas** and **Dino and Corrina Lusa** made a presentation about **their plans to establish a nonprofit School of Innovative Learning**. By September 2019, their goal is to enroll 35-50 students in Grades 6–8, expanding eventually to include Grades 9–12. The School of Innovative Learning will be based upon the academic research and methodologies of husband-and-wife team Joseph S. Renzulli, Ph.D. (UConn Board of Trustees Distinguished Professor and Neag Professor of Gifted Education and Talent Development), and Sally M. Reis, Ph.D. (UConn Board of Trustees Distinguished Professor and University Teaching Fellow).

Nicole Waicunas explained that for the past 30 years Renzulli and Reis have been increasing the pool of educators trained to apply talent development practices to mainstream instruction through the Renzulli Schoolwide Enrichment Model (SEM). Dr. Renzulli's educational philosophy infuses high-engagement enrichment activities into standardized curriculum topics. Nicole cited the Ace Academy in Austin, TX, as an example of the type of school that the Stafford residents envision establishing in Stafford Springs. (More about the Ace Academy can be found at [www.austingifted.org](http://www.austingifted.org). Of significance in the context of SEM, the definition of "gifted" can be found at <http://austingifted.org/about/what-is-gifted/>).

**Corrina Lusa**, who works at a private investment firm, **spoke about the business side of the project**. She is actively working on a 5-year business plan and spoke about seeking funding from philanthropically oriented entrepreneurs and investors rather than from government sources.

After the school is in operation, Nicole mentioned that the school would have the potential to host workshops for other educators, which may provide an ongoing income stream for the school. Nicole's current work includes teacher outreach efforts on behalf of the Neag Center for Creativity, Gifted Education, and Talent Development at UConn's Neag School of Education ([www. http://gifted.uconn.edu/](http://gifted.uconn.edu/)).

Dino Lusa is aware of the haz-mats issues at the Witt School, having talked with Selectman John Perrier during a recent tour (9/16/2017) of the interior of the Witt School. Corrina Lusa expressed interest in learning about available grants for building repairs.

SHAC member agreed that the innovative educational concepts presented were intriguing and appealing. Pragmatic questions directed to the organizers included:

1. Would the School of Innovative Learning complement the Stafford public school system or supplant aspects of the public school system?
2. Is this merely a magnet school by another name?
3. Has the Stafford Board of Education been consulted in any way?
4. Would the organizers envision seeking students from outside Stafford?
5. Have the organizers considered the need to transport students to the school?
6. Would Nicole, an educator herself, “quit her day job” to work at the school? (Answer: “Yes.”)
7. Would credits from this school conform to State educational guidelines and be transferrable to the public school system or institutions of higher education?

The school organizers are looking at other possible sites for their school but felt that the Witt School held great potential because they hope eventually to span Grades 6-12. They will refine their plans and contact SHAC within the next couple of months. In the meantime, SHAC members will draft a list of questions for the organizers to address at a follow-up meeting.

The presentation about the School of Innovative Learning and the ensuing discussion ended at about 8:45 p.m.

◆ **From the SHAC meeting minutes of Nov. 30, 2017**

**School for Innovative Learning board members (Nicole Waicunas, Brian Waicunas, Dino Lusa, and Corrina Lusa) returned to provide an update on their 9/25/2017 proposal to establish a school in the Witt building in Hyde Park.**

Dino Lusa reiterated the board’s deep commitment to establishing the school in the Witt building. (He clarified that although other possible sites are being studied, the St. Edward’s school facility is not one of them.) He reported that the School for Innovative Learning is now incorporated with the State of Connecticut and is registered with the Conn. Dept. of Revenue. They have filed paperwork to establish the school as a nonprofit organization eligible to receive tax-deductible contributions, and are awaiting confirmation of this status. The school board members are developing a budget and business plans with the help of others. A school website is expected to go live within two or three weeks so that citizens of Stafford, teachers, and students can read about how the process is going to work. On the website, students will be able to get an idea of how an average school day would unfold. The board is assembling a development team, and Mr. Lusa introduced **Mark Hopper of Crosskey Architects of Hartford, who presented two floor plans for incremental phases of rehabilitation** that would enable the school to conduct classes in selected portions of the Witt building while fundraising and rehab work could be ongoing. Mr. Hopper described the need to stabilize the exterior structure and update the mechanical systems. **He reviewed the process of historic research and documentation that precedes applying for state and federal historic tax credits that are heavily relied upon for historic refurbishments. He explained that his architecture firm does this work for its clients. Restoring the Witt building for educational use would be positively scored in the competitive ranking done for granting historic tax credits, according to Mr. Hopper, who in past years had worked on the elevator addition to the Witt School, as well as projects at the Town’s schools in West Stafford and Staffordville.**

School board member **Corrina Lusa asked the Historic Advisory Commission for guidance about the Town’s formal process for receiving proposals for reuse of the Witt building and the Town’s timeline for making a**

**decision about the Witt building.** Would competing plans for reuse of the Witt building be equitably considered? And could SHAC explain the process to help the team move ahead?

According to a town ordinance, the process by which a Town property can be sold involves (1) the issuing of a Request for Proposal (RFP) to elicit interested parties during a specified time period, (2) the review of any proposed plans by the Planning and Zoning Commission, and (3) subsequent presentation of substantive plans before a Town meeting, where a majority vote would determine the winning proposal. Selectman Tony Frassinelli fielded questions from all participants on this process.

**A motion was made by Steve Squire that SHAC ask the current Board of Selectmen (Mary Mitta, John Locke and Tony Frassinelli) to add to their agenda a discussion of the RFP/RFQ process related to the disposition of the Witt and Pinney properties by which the Town will make these properties available to interested parties for sale or lease.** SHAC Chairman Leonard Clark respectfully suggests that the Board of Selectmen provide advice to SHAC in writing. Tony Frassinelli seconded the motion. Commission members unanimously agreed to the motion.

◆ **From the SHAC meeting minutes of June 25, 2018**

**Update from the School for Innovative Learning (SIL) regarding SIL's interest in rehabilitating the decommissioned Witt School.** Chairman Clarke and Vice Chairman Passardi had occasion to talk or email informally with SIL Director Nicole Waicunas over the past few weeks, so an invitation was extended for her to address SHAC in person again.

**Ms. Waicunas reported that the SIL team is now seriously considering the former Baker Furniture building on West Main Street as a phase 1 school facility,** since the reduced scale of renovations required in the Baker building (also known to older town residents as the Bissonette home) would divert less energy and resources from development of the educational program, which is the main focus of potential nonprofit philanthropic partners that are being vetted as sources of financial support for SIL.

As she had conveyed back in Sept. 2017, Ms. Waicunas envisions an initial student body of 40–50 children, spanning grades 6, 7 and 8, and they could be accommodated in the smaller Baker Furniture building. Because SIL plans to add one grade to the school with each successive year, a larger building, such as the Witt, is still relevant to the SIL team's 5-year plan when more space would be needed. Since future plans also include training workshops for educators seeking immersion in the educational methodologies espoused by SIL staff, Ms. Waicunas envisions that, perhaps 5 years in the future, the Witt School could become the main school facility, whereupon the Baker building could become space for visiting scholars.

Commissioner Roger Ingraham asked Ms. Waicunas if there is a way of looking at SIL's plans in such a way as to persuade SHAC and the BOS that "what you say is going to happen." Would SIL be funded adequately to undertake rehabilitation of the Witt while in the early stages of conducting classes at a smaller facility?

SHAC is primarily concerned with the disposition of the Town-owned Witt building, and commissioners reiterated that a possible educational use, such as SIL, would be compatible with the Witt's current zoning as "open space." Ms. Waicunas was unsure whether the SIL team's architectural firm, Crosskey Architects, would have the in-house expertise to seek a National Registry of Historic Places designation for the Witt building. This

is of concern to SHAC since requiring the Town to undertake this detailed documentation could cost \$15,000-\$20,000, depending on the size of the proposed historic district.

Ms. Waicunas and the SIL Board of Directors are now “courting” two philanthropic organizations, and they are looking forward to a late-summer meeting with representatives of one of these organizations. **Ms. Waicunas will update the Commission at a future date, and Mr. Clark suggested that perhaps a joint meeting with First Selectman Mary Mitta would be appropriate at that time.**

**[end of Appendix 1]**



## Appendix 2. Overview of Possible Uses for the Decommissioned Witt School Located in Hyde Park

**Compiled by the Stafford Historic Advisory Commission:** Leonard Clark, chairman; Donald Passardi, vice chairman; Tony Frassinelli, Town Selectman; Maureen Griffith; Roger Ingraham; Becky Kraussmann; Steve Squire, alternate; Beth Magura, Recording Secretary.

**A NOTE ABOUT ZONING:** The Witt School is located in Hyde Park. Hyde Park is zoned “open space” (OS), which allows passive recreation, education and municipal-type services.

	Viable parties that have expressed interest in the Witt building	Proposed use of the Witt building	Would the use require a zoning change?	Proposed use is achievable via (1) sale, (2) lease or (3) retained by the Town	Does the transaction require the creation of a deed? (See footnote 1 below the table.)	Would the developer benefit from a “Historic District” or “Historic Building” designation? (See footnote 2 below the table.)	Does the use conform to benefactor I.P. Hyde’s 1897 bequest to create and maintain a public park in perpetuity for the benefit of the people of Stafford?	Would on-site parking for the proposed use adversely affect citizens using Hyde Park?
	School for Innovative Learning (Nicole Waicunas, Dino Lusa)	Education (Grades 6–8 at first; later Grades 9–12, too)	No	Sale or Lease	Maybe	Yes; architect may seek designation	Same use as original Witt building	Yes
	Joe Vallone, architect	Rental housing units	Yes	Sale	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
	Stafford Housing Authority (Ann Marie Perrone, exec. director)	Congregate living (aka assisted-care living)	Yes	LLC creation (Town could own a percentage)	Yes	No	No	Yes
		Condominium housing	Yes	Sale	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
		Live-work housing	Yes	Sale	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
		Hotel accommodations	Yes	Sale	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
		Community college satellite training facility	No	Sale or Lease	Maybe	No	Educational purpose like the original Witt building.	Yes
		YMCA	??	??	Yes	No	—	Yes
		Business incubator or “Maker Space”	Yes	Sale or Lease	Maybe	??	No	Yes
		Municipal offices	??	Retained for use by the Town of Stafford	No	No	No	??
		Community center	Yes	Retained for use by the Town of Stafford	No	No	Yes	?
		Office complex	Yes	Sale	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
		Mixed use	Yes	Lease space; also some Town use	No	No	No	Yes
		DEMOLITION of the Witt building	n/a	Land restored to Hyde Park; rose garden?	No	No	Yes (land restored to Hyde Park)	n/a

**Footnote 1:** To offer the Witt building for sale, the Town attorney must draw up a deed for the Witt building with a specified amount of land. The land must be surveyed and a plot designated to conform to Planning & Zoning Commission regulations. The Zoning Board of Appeals may need to be consulted if setback regulations present “hardship” considerations.

**Footnote 2:** Developer efforts to rehabilitate decommissioned schools can benefit financially from state and federal tax abatements and brownfield remediation grants that are extended to structures that are deemed to be historically significant and thus eligible for nomination to the National Registry of Historic Places. Some architectural firms pursue this designation for individual buildings, whereas the historical nature of a lone building’s status may be bolstered by inclusion in a broader district or cluster of buildings that more completely encapsulates an era in history. Nominating a “historic district” is often done by a municipal government that uses a State-funded matching grant to hire a professional preservation historian to compile the mandatory detailed documentation.

## Hyde Park: A Chronology with Notes about the Town’s Schools

Prepared by Beth Magura, Recording Secretary, Stafford Historic Advisory Commission on April 6, 2018. REVISION HISTORY: Revised May 17, 2018. Revised June 27, 2018: total acreage of Converse estate and newspaper source added to entry for “1911 May 13”; confirmation that no parkland was intended for sale at the auction of Woodlawn mansion added to the “1929 March 4” entry; and footnote about William M. Krug added to the entry for “1940 Jan. 5.” Revised July 13, 2018: Names of selectmen added to “1940 Jan. 5” entry; on p. 5, additional biographical information added to footnote about William M. Krug; a “1937 Feb. 28” entry was added about the fairgrounds as the favored school site; in the “1937 Mar. 3” entry, the resolution to vote on the fairgrounds as a school site was added; and the addition of the “1937 Oct. 17” entry about the bankruptcy of the Stafford Agricultural Society, operator of the Stafford Fair.

The provenance of Stafford’s Hyde Park extends back into the 19th century, when a generation of highly successful industrialists was bequeathing legacies to many cities and towns. The benefactor of Hyde Park in the village of Stafford Springs was Isaac Perkins Hyde (1833–1897), a native son of Staffordville who successfully made knives and cutting blades for local industries from his factory in Southbridge, Massachusetts.

As the chronology below documents, the late 19th century bequest of Mr. Hyde coincided with the expansion and modernization of the public school system in the Town of Stafford, which eventually led to the construction of a high school in Hyde Park in 1938.

After 68 years of use as a high school and an intermediate school, the Earl M. Witt Intermediate School is decommissioned as a public school and is under the control of the Board of Selectmen in 2018.

**NOTE:** Unless otherwise specified, the gray-highlighted entries about the public school system are based on the following book: Witt, Earl M., 1946, *A History of the Schools of Stafford, Connecticut* (Stafford, CT: Stafford Teachers Club, Press Publishing Co.) A copy of this book is in the collection of the Stafford Library.

<b>1882</b>	<i>The Red School was built on Prospect Street in the Borough for high school classes.</i>
<b>1897 March 4</b>	<b>Isaac Perkins Hyde</b> signed his last will and testament. (Source: This is a secondary source, i.e., it is a typed transcript of an original cursive-written document that is on file at the Town Clerk’s office.)
<b>1897 Oct. 21</b>	<b>The death of Isaac Perkins Hyde</b> (Source: <a href="https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/112885224/isaac-perkins-hyde#">https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/112885224/isaac-perkins-hyde#</a> Date of death verified on the tombstone.)
<b>1897 Nov. 14</b>	“ <b>Mr. Hyde expected that the trustees</b> appointed to look after this fund after Mrs. Hyde’s death, and to see to the proper use to which it was put, <b>would be men who were not mixed up in town affairs, and in no case did he want the trusteeship to fall into the hands of the selectmen.</b> Mrs. Hyde has been somewhat surprised that no one from Stafford has looked this matter up, and as there is to be a hearing at the probate court at Worcester before long, <b>it seems as though Stafford, in appreciation of Mr. Hyde’s remembrance of the town, and Mrs. Hyde’s wishes that the provisions of the will shall be carried out to the best of her ability, should send representatives to wait upon Mrs. Hyde and Mr. Corcoran and express the town’s appreciation of the gift.</b> ”  <b>NOTE:</b> It is not known whether anyone from Stafford ever met with Mrs. Hyde and her lawyer or whether an official expression of appreciation was delivered. <i>(continues on next page)</i>

<p><b>1897 Nov. 14</b> (continued)</p>	<p>(Sources: Unattributed newspaper clipping in <b>Town Meeting Book, Vol. B, p. 416</b>. This article was retrieved on 5/17/2018 from GenealogyBank.com. The article is attributed to the <i>Springfield Republican</i>, Sun., Nov. 14, 1897, p. 11.)</p>
<p><b>1897 Nov. 16</b></p>	<p>The will of Isaac P. Hyde is “allowed.”</p>
<p><b>1897 Dec.</b></p>	<p>At a Town meeting, <b>citizens of the Town of Stafford agreed to accept the Isaac P. Hyde trust and its stipulations.</b></p> <p>After making provision for his wife and other relatives, Isaac P. Hyde requested and directed that, upon the death of his wife and sister, all of the remainder of his estate should go to the Town of Stafford, as described in <b>Stafford Town Meeting Book, Vol. B, p. 269</b>. Upon the death of Mr. Hyde’s wife and sister, the remainder of his estate will be bequeathed to the Town of Stafford on the condition that the Town accepts the same and appoints suitable officers or trustees to administer this trust and use a portion of the funds <b>to purchase a public park, to be known as Hyde Park, and that “the balance be invested as a perpetual fund, the income thereof to be used for the purpose of maintaining and keeping said park in a careful and proper manner for all time.”</b></p> <p>At the Town meeting, <b>the first trustees of the I. P. Hyde Park Fund</b> were chosen: <b>Edwin C. Pinney, Joel H. Reed, and Charles F. Harwood</b>. They were to serve without monetary compensation.</p> <p>The minutes of this Town meeting state that “...said trustees shall in no way obligate the Town of Stafford for the payment of any money or incur expense for the Town without first bringing the matter before the Town at its annual meeting held in November or a special meeting legally warned.”</p>
<p><b>1898 June 3</b></p>	<p><b>Eliza F. Hyde and John M. Cochran were appointed trustees under the will of Isaac P. Hyde in Probate Court</b>, Commonwealth of Massachusetts. The estate was “...given in trust for the use and benefit of Harriet A. Marble [Hyde’s sister] and Eliza F. Hyde [his widow].”</p> <p>(Source: This is a secondary source, that is, it is a typed transcript of an original cursive-written document.)</p>
<p><b>1907 Oct. 10</b></p>	<p><b>The death of Mrs. Eliza Foster Hyde</b> in Southbridge, Massachusetts</p> <p>(Sources: “Stafford to Have \$60,000 Park,” <i>Hartford Courant</i>, Mon., October 21, 1907. Also, <a href="https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/112885222/eliza-hyde">https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/112885222/eliza-hyde</a>. Also, “Probate Business,” <i>Fitchburg Sentinel</i>, Thurs., Nov. 7, 1907.)</p>
<p><b>1911 May 13</b> (A 3 p.m. meeting; the meeting notice was issued by <b>Selectmen M.W. Leonard and William R. Preble.</b>)</p>	<p><b>It was moved and voted that the report of a site search committee be accepted, namely, that the Town of Stafford purchase the 150-acre Julius Converse estate (including a number of buildings), named Woodlawn Farm, for \$17,000:</b></p> <p>“That the Town of Stafford purchase the Woodlawn Farm property so-called for park purposes at the purchase price of \$17,000 and that the trustees of the Isaac Hyde Park Fund be instructed to pay \$17,000 for said Woodlawn Farm property and to <b>take a proper deed thereof.</b>”</p> <p><b>It was moved and voted to appoint a Board of Park Commissioners.</b> The first commissioners were <b>Frank H. Baker</b> (a 5-year term), <b>William Park</b> (a 5-year term), <b>Burt T.</b></p>

<p><b>1911 May 13</b> <i>(continued)</i></p>	<p><b>Eaton</b> (a 4-year term), <b>William E. Hanley</b> (a 4-year term) and <b>Selectman W.R. Preble</b> (a 4-year term).</p> <p>\$60,000 was bequeathed to the Town, which is the equivalent of about \$1.5 million in 2018. A motion was made to set aside \$10,000 to establish a “Hyde Park extension” between Stafford Hollow and Staffordville, but it was ruled out of order because it was “not in the warning” [that is, this topic was not publicly posted in the official agenda].</p> <p><b>Layout of Hyde Park:</b> The Commission was authorized to spend not more than \$3,000 of the principal of the Hyde Park Fund plus the annual earned interest on the principal without a “vote of the town.”</p> <p>(<b>Sources:</b> Town Meeting Book, Vol. B, p. 381–382. Also, a news article in the <i>Hartford Courant</i>, Apr. 22, 1911, p. 10.)</p>
<p><b>1911 May 19</b></p>	<p><b>In Hartford, ownership of Woodlawn Farm is transferred to the Town of Stafford.</b> The seller was Eugenia C. Mathews of the City of Chicago, a daughter of Woodlawn Farm’s deceased owner, Julius Converse (1827–1892). Price: \$17,000.</p> <p>(<b>Source:</b> The deed can be found in the Town Land Records, Vol. 46, p. 178.)</p>
<p><b>1912 Mar. 26</b></p>	<p>Hyde Park Commissioners hire <b>William T. Wynings</b> to be caretaker of Hyde Park.</p> <p>(<b>Source:</b> <i>Hartford Courant</i>, Tues. Mar. 26, 1912, p. 13.)</p>
<p><b>1912–1913</b></p>	<p><b>A crowded high school.</b> The cost of building a second addition onto the Red School was investigated. The committee <b>also studied the possibility of remodeling the Woodlawn mansion in Hyde Park for use as a high school.</b> In May 1913, the Town voted an appropriation of \$12,000 for a four-room addition to the Red School.</p>
<p><b>1922</b></p>	<p><i>The Borough School, on Prospect St., was completed to accommodate the lower public school grades. It was built adjacent to the Red School, relieving crowded conditions in the Red School for a few years.</i></p>
<p><b>1927</b></p>	<p>Hyde Park Commissioners hire <b>Robert A. Tuthill</b> to be the caretaker of Hyde Park, a position he would hold for 32 years until 1959.</p> <p>(<b>Source:</b> “Caretaker Picked for Hyde Park,” <i>Hartford Courant</i>, Thurs., Apr. 30, 1959, p. 40.)</p>
<p><b>1929 March 4</b></p>	<p><b>The Hyde Park Commission was authorized to sell Woodlawn mansion to the highest bidder.</b> This was decided by vote at the Town meeting held on March 4. On March 24, 1929, the buyer was P. J. Brown of Stafford Springs. <b>A time limit of 7 months for removal of the house from the premises was specified.</b> Price: \$430.</p> <p>(<b>Sources:</b> <i>Hartford Courant</i>, March 17, 1929, p. 24. Also <i>Springfield Republican</i>, March 24, 1929, p. 12.)</p> <p><b>Within 12 hours of the auction, the mansion was destroyed by fire.</b> Half the lumber was saved.</p> <p>(<b>Sources:</b> A <i>Springfield Republican</i> clipping in the collection of the Stafford Historical Society, dated March 21, 1929. Also an article from the <i>Hartford Courant</i>, dated March 25, 1929.)</p>

<p><b>1932 Oct. 7</b></p>	<p>At a Town meeting held on Oct. 7, 1932, <b>the Hartford–Connecticut Trust Co. of Hartford was appointed Trustee of the Hyde Park Fund. Town residents Christopher Allen (1855–1939), Freeman F. Patten and Charles F. Chandler had resigned as trustees of the Hyde Park Fund.</b></p> <p>(Source: Town Meeting Book, 1932–1952, Vol. D, p. 16–17.)</p> <p><b>The bank was to invest the money as it saw fit.</b> “The Trustee shall pay over the income from the Hyde Park Fund quarterly to the treasurer of the Isaac Perkins Hyde Park Commission.”</p> <p>(Source: A 1980 review of the Trust Fund by attorney Craig Argenta kept in a Hyde Park Commission file labeled “1980–2007.” On file at the Stafford Town Clerk’s office.)</p>
<p><b>1935 June 30</b></p>	<p><i>Board of Education and Board of Selectmen conferred and agreed to <b>apply for a federal Public Works Administration grant.</b> This did not involve the Town, because the Town had not yet taken any action to appropriate any money for a school.</i></p>
<p><b>1936 January</b></p>	<p><i>The Town voted to appropriate \$100,000 to be used as its share of cost, in the event a Public Works Administration grant was secured.</i></p>
<p><b>1937 Feb. 27</b></p>	<p>A newspaper article reported that the Stafford High School Building Committee “announced that after a careful inspection of all the proposed sites, <b>the members of the committee had agreed that the fairgrounds provide the most suitable location.</b> ...the fairgrounds may be bought for several thousand dollars under the \$12,000 figure asked by the Agricultural society, when the town considered the purchase of the property last year.</p> <p>To quote further from the article: “The grounds are already graded, and there are salvage possibilities in the buildings already there, lowering construction costs by a considerable figure. A dwelling is a part of the property and this may be rented or sold. The site has the indorsement [sic] of the state board of education. Without any equivocation two of the supervising members of the board have stated that the fairgrounds is the most suitable location for a school in Stafford. There are more than 50 acres in the plot, providing adequate room for playing fields and grounds. There is enough acreage to provide for any future necessary expansion. The location on the edge of town, without a house nearby, will provide plenty of light on all sides of the building.</p> <p>“...Physical education is considered to be extremely important in high school curricula by the state board, not only from a health but from a moral point of view. <b>The fairgrounds is considered the only site which will provide enough room for physical education activities.</b> The committee investigated 11 sites before recommending the fairgrounds, which is located within the radius of two miles from any distant point in the borough and within the limits recommended by the state board of education. A detailed presentation of the recommendation will be made next Wednesday night.”</p> <p>(Source: “Stafford Has Many Public Spirited Citizens,” <i>Springfield Republican</i>, Sunday, Feb. 28, 1937, p. 6.)</p>

<p><b>1937 March 3</b></p>	<p>At a Town meeting, <b>citizens vote to build Stafford’s second High School on the former site of Julius Converse’s Woodlawn mansion in Hyde Park.</b></p> <p>The Stafford High School Building Committee (Earl M. Witt, secretary) reported on <b>three possible sites for a new high school:</b> (1) about 7 acres owned by the Stafford Fair Association, (2) a location in Hyde Park, or (3) on the sloping lawn of the existing high school on Prospect Street.</p> <p><b>Town Counsel William M. Krug provided legal advice to the Building Committee,</b> writing the following: “...The possibility of using a portion of said park as a site for the new High School now presents the question whether such use will in any way result in a violation of the conditions set forth in the trust and upon which the Hyde Park Fund was accepted by the Town of Stafford. ... Any site that is chosen cannot substantially interfere with the purposes and use of the remaining portion as a public park in the Town of Stafford, as provided by said trust. ... Therefore, <b>if the Town of Stafford decides to have the new High School there, it would necessarily have to reimburse the Fund for any land taken,</b> in view of the fact that the whole property was originally purchased with funds from the Hyde Park Fund and intended solely for park purposes.”</p> <p><b>FIRST RESOLUTION PRESENTED AT THE TOWN MEETING ON March 3, 1937:</b>  <b>“Resolved that the new high school building be located in the southeast portion of the Stafford Fair Ground,</b> and site to consist of 7 acres more or less, which has been provisionally offered to the Town of Stafford at the sum of \$4000.00, conditioned upon approval of such offer by the Directors of the Stafford Fair Association. After discussion, it was voted to vote on the resolution by ballot. [It was] voted to rescind [the] vote to vote by ballot. <b>The resolution was then defeated by a rising vote.”</b></p> <p><b>SECOND RESOLUTION PRESENTED AT THE TOWN MEETING ON March 3, 1937:</b>  <b>“Resolved that the new high school be located in Hyde Park,</b> the final choice of a site within said park to be made so that the use of such site for the school will not substantially impair the use of the remainder as a public park, and upon the further proviso that The Hyde Park Fund be reimbursed by the Town of Stafford in a reasonable sum for the land to be used as such site.”</p> <p><b>Citizen approval of the use of a site in Hyde Park for a high school required three rounds of voting.</b> The tally for the second vote was 140 “yes” to 130 “no.” The minutes say that there was discussion, but no details are supplied. Then there was a third round of voting: 165 “yes” to 1 “no.”</p> <p>(Source: Town Meeting Book, Vol. D, p. 158–159.)</p>
<p><b>1937 Oct. 17</b></p>	<p><b>The possible reason for the willingness to sell the fairgrounds:</b> “This week marks the second year that the town of Stafford has been without its famous fair. ...After the annual fair in 1935, the Stafford Springs Agricultural society, operators of the fair, discontinued the exhibition because of several unprofitable years. Last month the society petitioned to the Tolland county superior court for receivership.”</p> <p>(Source: Excerpt from a news column in the <i>Springfield Republican</i>, Oct. 17, 1937, p. 14.)</p>
<p><b>1937 Dec. 28</b></p>	<p><i>In Hyde Park, excavation started for the construction of the new High School.</i></p>

<p><b>1938 Dec.</b></p>	<p><i>The Stafford High School Building Committee accepted the building as being substantially complete.</i></p>
<p><b>1939 Jan. 3</b></p>	<p><i>The first classes were held at the Town's new High School in Hyde Park.</i></p>
<p><b>1939 March &amp; April</b></p>	<p><b>The Board of Education relinquishes any and all rights to the old Red School.</b></p> <p><b>Old Red School demolition agreement:</b> During the grant application process, Public Works Administration engineers had declared the old Red School a hazard, requiring that it be torn down upon completion of the new High School.</p> <p>(Source: Town Meeting Book, 1932–1952, Vol. D, p. 233–234.)</p>
<p><b>1940 Jan. 5</b></p> <p>Selectmen at this time were Clarence Benton, Milo E. Bradway, and Angelo L. Argenta. (Source: Meeting notice, dated Dec. 29, 1938; Town Meeting Book, Vol. D, p. 257.)</p>	<p><b>Rhode Island Worsted Company offers to deed a parcel of land on Keefe Plains in the Borough of Stafford Springs to the Town of Stafford.</b> "Said parcel of land shall be called Olympic Field."</p> <p><b>Olympic Field was placed under the control of the Hyde Park Commissioners and "was in full reimbursement of site taken from Hyde Park for said new high school."</b> The Park Commissioners were authorized to rent said Olympic Field for athletic, recreational and similar purposes.</p> <p><b>No citizen vote tally was recorded in the minutes. Neither the Hyde Park Commissioners nor the Town Selectmen were cited by name in the meeting minutes.</b> The meeting was held at 8 p.m. on a Friday night.</p> <p><b>Townpeople named in the meeting minutes are as follows: Charles B. Pinney,</b> moderator; <b>Harold L. Andrews,</b> clerk; <b>Joseph Mottes;</b> <b>Arthur Polios;</b> and <b>William M. Krug,*</b> the latter man had been the Town attorney in 1937 (see "1937 March 3" entry).</p> <p>(Sources: Town Meeting Book, Vol. D, p. 259. Newspaper article: "Stafford Votes to Take Athletic Field as Gift," <i>Hartford Courant</i>, Sat., Jan. 6, 1940.)</p> <p><b>NOTE:</b> <i>In other Town documents from this time period, Historic Advisory Commissioner Beth Magura found the following names of two Hyde Park Commissioners: Alfred Long, Frank H. Baker. To find the names of other commissioners serving in the January 1940 time period, would require scanning more Town meeting minutes. No master listing of Hyde Park Commissioners exists.</i></p> <p><b>NOTE:</b> <i>On Nov. 22, 2017, Historic Advisory Commissioners Beth Magura and Maureen Griffith examined the extant Hyde Park Commission files for additional historical context. No Hyde Park Commission meeting minutes are extant prior to 2007.</i> However, there is a 1980 review of the Hyde Park Trust Fund by attorney Craig Argenta on file in a Hyde Park Commission file, labeled "1980–2007."</p>

\* William M. Krug was named town counsel in Nov. 1936 and prosecuting attorney in July 1937 (source: *Springfield Republican*, July 4, 1937, p. 21.) In the early 1940s, Krug was manager of the semi-professional Stafford Olympics football team (source: *Hartford Courant*, Sept. 23, 1940, p. 10). The team's home games were played at Olympic Field (source: *Hartford Courant*, Dec. 1, 1940, p. 47), formerly called Keefe Plains. In 1948, after repeated instances of embezzlement from estates that he had been administering, Krug pleaded guilty, resigned from the Connecticut bar, and was sentenced to 1 year in jail (source: *Hartford Courant*, Feb. 4, 1948, p. 1). In a Dec. 1956 SNET Co. telephone directory, Krug was listed as a lawyer, living on Summit St. in Willimantic, CT. According to [www.lawyers.com](http://www.lawyers.com), Krug died at the age of 82 on Jan. 1, 1988.

1940 Feb. 26	<p><b>Ownership of Olympic Field was transferred from Rhode Island Worsted Co. to the Town of Stafford.</b>  <b>(Source:</b> A deed is in Town Land Records, Vol. 77, p. 363.)</p>
1959	<p>Hyde Park Commissioners hire <b>Michael Sedlak</b> to be Hyde Park caretaker. He “will also do some work at Olympic Memorial Park on Keefe Plains.”  <b>(Source:</b> “Caretaker Picked for Hyde Park,” <i>Hartford Courant</i>, Thurs., Apr. 30, 1959, p. 40)</p>
1961 Mar. 24	<p><b>In 1961, the Town was considering using another site in Hyde Park for a third high school.</b></p> <p><b><i>Town Counsel Etalo Gnutti is quoted in print as saying:</i></b>  <b>“Apparently there was no challenge or litigation at that time [i.e., in 1937] concerning using the park area for a public school building, but it is my sound opinion that the will of the late Isaac Hyde does not designate that it is broad enough to use the property for such purposes.”</b></p> <p><b>(Source:</b> Newspaper article in the collection of the Stafford Historical Society; retrieved from GenealogyBank.com on 5/17/2018. Title: “Three Sites Are Chosen for New School Building,” <i>Springfield Union</i>, Fri., Mar. 24, 1961, p. 50.)</p> <p><b><i>NOTE:</i></b> <i>The Town later chose the Laurion property on Orcuttville Road as the location of the Town’s third High School, where the public school and library complex is located in 2018.</i></p>
1985	<p><b>The school building in Hyde Park was renamed the Earl M. Witt Intermediate School.</b>  <b>(Source:</b> <i>Hartford Courant</i>, Jan. 30, 2007.)</p>
2007	<p><b>The Board of Education discontinues use of the building as an intermediate school.</b> Control of the school passes from the Board of Education to the Board of Selectmen (as per Connecticut General Statute Sec. 10-240).  <b>(Source:</b> Letter to First Selectman Anthony Frassinelli from Attorney Ed Muska, dated Nov. 13, 2017. On file at the Town Clerk’s office.)</p>
2017 Nov. 15	<p><b>Attorney Ed Muska expresses the opinion that there are no legal impediments to the Town of Stafford selling or changing the use of the former Witt School.</b> According to Mr. Muska, several past actions have the net effect of removing the Witt School property from the restrictions of Isaac P. Hyde’s 1897 will. In Mr. Muska’s opinion, there are no deed restrictions on the use of the Witt School property.</p> <p><b>Mr. Muska cautions that sale of the Witt School must follow the usual procedures for the disposal of Town property.</b> There must be Board of Selectman approval, Town meeting approval, and a favorable recommendation by the Planning and Zoning Commission. In addition, he said, other procedural steps must be met.</p> <p><b>(Source:</b> Letter to First Selectman Anthony Frassinelli from Attorney Ed Muska, dated Nov. 13, 2017. On file at the Town Clerk’s office.)</p>