

## Riley, Kate

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**From:** Anita D. McClellan <[REDACTED]>  
**Sent:** Friday, January 3, 2020 12:41 PM  
**To:** Riley, Kate  
**Cc:** Clerk; City Manager; City Council  
**Subject:** Tobin/Vassal Lane 2020-24: retain Open Space @ Callanan Playgd & Tobin Fields; have MADEP & EPA certify parcel free of toxic hazards

To the deciders:

### PLEASE

- Do not engulf the 80+-year Open Space on the parcel abutting the 1972 John H. Tobin/Vassal Lane elementary schools and the 1960 National Guard Armory.

The Father Callanan Playground and Tobin playing fields were created in 1938 as a community resource under FDR's Works Progress Administration/WPA. The playground was renovated in 2007 after hard-fought residents' campaigns to keep this Open Space green and inviting for citywide residents, from infant caregivers to preschoolers, school-age, Little Leagues' & adults' formal and informal sports games. The space needs to retain its mature trees (puhleez, no post-development scrubs & saplings!), living green grass, age-appropriate play spaces, picnic tables, benches, water source for users of all ages.

- Address prior to any 2020 teardown or construction through formal Massachusetts Dept. of Environmental Protection/MA DEP and US Environmental Protection/EPA site analyses, the century-long environmental toxic-waste hazards on the Tobin-Vassal Lane building parcel. This has never been undertaken thoroughly or definitively by the city of Cambridge, the parcel's owner since 1927.

The City of Cambridge acquired the 1840s-1905 clay-pit extraction site of Tobin/Vassal Lane parcel used by a major environmental polluter (1980s-2000s EPA Superfund database) along with the 50 acres of today's Danehy Park, which, like the parcel, also had been a decades-long landfill for this city.

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**Sample hazardous-waste entries on the school and recreational parcel follow. Go**

here <http://bairdmedia.net/tobin/#all-hazards-cambridge> to see a documented timeline citing public documents on the 1972-built John H. Tobin school building in particular and its complete hazardous waste issues.

- In 1985 NUS Corp (a Haliburton Corporation) did a health risk assessment at the Tobin School to determine if the landfill under the building & grounds contained materials only from residential dumping [usual city landfill], or also from dumping of hazardous materials by local chemical and industrial manufacturers, including W. R. Grace & Co., subject of 1980s *A Civil Action* NF book by Jonathan Harr, PBS documentaries, and dramatic film by same title starring John Travolta & Robert Duvall—all based on a Woburn, MA, lawsuit, Anne Anderson, et al. v. W.R. Grace and Beatrice Foods: 1986 [<https://law.seattleu.edu/centers-and-institutes/films-for-justice-institute/lessons-from-woburn/about-the-case/>].

The Superfund branch of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA[23.7]) reviewed the assessment and determined that “no further remedial action” was necessary. The Tobin School is not classified as a “Superfund” site (i.e. a hazard site that is uncontrolled or abandoned)[24], and is not on the “National Priorities List” of highly toxic sites requiring long-term cleanup,[25] but is listed in the [EPA's Superfund database](#) because it was assessed.[26]

In 1987 the Tobin School site was included on a list of **sites suspected, but not confirmed, of being contaminated by hazardous waste**. The list was issued by the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Quality Engineering to comply with a 1986 Massachusetts referendum on toxic waste.[30]

In 1990 a group of parents of children at the Tobin School organized themselves around concerns that the school had “[sick building syndrome](#)”[32], and was making their children sick with fatigue, respiratory conditions, asthma, and other illnesses.[33]

In October 1991 Geotechnical Engineers Inc (GEI) was hired to test for gases in the soil beneath the crawlspaces of the Tobin School. In November they notified the Cambridge Public School Department that the tests showed elevated levels of methane and VOCs in the soil beneath the [Tobin building's] crawlspaces. Levels in the soil below the east crawlspace were "significant". **As required by law, the Cambridge Public School Department (CPSD) directed GEI to notify the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (MassDEP) of a "release or potential threat of release of hazardous materials."**[38] NOTE: "Volatile organic compounds, or VOCs, are gases that are emitted into the air from products or processes. Some are harmful by themselves, including some that cause cancer. In addition, they can react with other gases and form other air pollutants after they are in the air." Breathing VOCs can irritate the eyes, nose and throat, can cause difficulty breathing and nausea, and can damage the central nervous system as well as other organs. Some VOCs can cause cancer. Not all VOCs have all these health effects, though many have several." — <https://www.lung.org>

In 1998 the firm Camp Dresser & McKee/CDM was hired to sample and analyze the soil and groundwater of the Tobin School grounds, playground, and playing fields.[56] CDM found two contaminated "hot spots" in the top three feet of soil: a PAH ([polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbon\[56.5\]](#)) hot spot and a [lead](#) hot spot. Total contaminated area was about 3,300 sq feet.[57] CDM found elevated lead in some of the ground water samples, and also determined that there was minimal groundwater migration (movement) beneath the site.[58] CDM stated that contaminants found in the soil and groundwater were consistent with the landfilling history of the former clay pit. CDM stated that **how deep the contamination goes down into the Tobin site soil is unknown.**[63] CDM stated that **if the City wanted to remove all contaminated soil at the site, they would have to excavate the former clay pit/landfill completely.** — <http://bairdmedia.net/tobin/#all-hazards-cambridge>

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This year, 2020, is the city's opportunity to banish for once and for all any traces of toxic and hazardous waste on this school and playground/sports parcel as well as to continue the 1938-established Open Space as a 21st-century resource for use by city residents and visitors.

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