

The Greenway is No Place for the Anti-Defamation League

By David Boyajian
The Watertown TAB
Watertown , MA

Friday, Oct 26, 2007

WATERTOWN - The magnificent New Center for Arts and Culture, sponsored by the Combined Jewish Philanthropies and the Jewish Community Centers of Greater Boston, will probably soon rise on Boston's new Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy Greenway.

But suppose — hypothetically — that the chairperson of the Greenway Conservancy, which is charged with the future maintenance of the Greenway, had been impeding final approval of the New Center 's construction. Suppose, too, that he or she was a leading member of a Holocaust-denying organization that also opposed Holocaust resolutions in Congress. Impossible, you say?

Probably, but the Armenian Heritage Park is actually undergoing just such an ordeal. The Mass. Pike, which owns the Greenway, approved the Armenian Park in 2005, but construction has been held up, mostly by Greenway Conservancy Chairperson Peter Meade.

Meade sits on the board of the New England Anti-Defamation League. As the national and international media have reported, ADL has worked with Turkey to deny the Armenian genocide of 1915-23 and to defeat Armenian Genocide affirmation by Congress.

It is a conflict of interest, therefore, for a person with strong ADL ties to sit in judgment of anything Armenian.

Peter Meade — he's Catholic, not Jewish — is a longtime vice president of Blue Cross Blue Shield and travels in Boston's elite corporate and political circles. He is an outspoken supporter of Israel, whose government has long aligned itself with Turkey in refusing to recognize the Armenian Genocide.

Interestingly, Meade was instrumental in getting Blue Cross to fund ADL's "No Place for Hate" anti-bias programs, which are now mired in scandal because of ADL's genocide denials. Blue Cross was the first company that ADL certified as "No Place for Hate."

Why does Meade oppose the Armenian Park? He says that Conservancy policy bans "memorials" on the Greenway. Part of the Armenian Park will, indeed, commemorate both the Armenian Genocide and all genocides.

However, the alleged "no-memorials" policy has never been written down or formalized, and the Mass. Pike itself has no such policy. Indeed, there are or will be many memorials on, next to and near the Greenway.

For example, the Greenway's Chinatown Park contains the Tiananmen Square Massacre memorial. A memorial for community leader Mary Sou Hou is in the works.

The Greenway's North End Park has a lengthy Memorial Railing that will honor the neighborhood's past Irish, Italian, Jewish and other immigrants. Conservancy Executive Director Nancy Brennan is promoting a Mother's Memorial Walkway with named bricks in the Wharf District Parks.

The Greenway itself memorializes the venerated Kennedy matriarch, while underneath runs the Tip O'Neill tunnel.

Christopher Columbus Park, which abuts the Greenway, contains the Beirut U.S. Marine Corps Memorial, the Frank S. Christian Memorial and the Rose Kennedy Memorial Garden honoring the Gold Star Mothers of WW II.

It looks like the Conservancy's "no memorials" policy may be a "no Armenians" policy. Steps from the Greenway are the Holocaust Memorial's six towers of glass 54 feet high with steam rising from subterranean chambers named after concentration camps. The memorial also commemorates Poles and other victims of Nazi Germany. It is impressive, somber and moving. Nearby are the 1956 Hungarian Freedom Fighters Memorial, the Irish Famine Memorial, and other memorials too numerous to mention.

The Armenian Park and a wide-ranging human rights lecture series at Faneuil Hall are permanently endowed by the Massachusetts Armenian community and endorsed by the North End/Waterfront Residents Association.

It has been alleged that the Armenian Park would be out of place as too ethnic. Yet the Greenway's Chinatown Park will, quite properly, feature various Asian cultural elements, including waterfalls and streams based on Feng Shui.

The New Center, "rooted in Jewish culture," was designed and funded by Jews. Its director and board are Jewish. Every event it has held thus far, in non-Greenway venues, has centered on a Jewish theme, such as the 1933 Nazi Book Burning. The New Center will surely also be commemorating the Holocaust in many ways, and rightly so.

Thus the Greenway does have ethnic projects.

We forgot to mention that Peter Meade was instrumental in having the world-famous bridge near the northern end of the Greenway named after Lenny Zakim, the late, respected regional ADL director. He also co-chaired its Dedication Committee and is an adviser to the Lenny Zakim Fund. Not surprisingly, Meade has won ADL's prestigious Chairperson's Award.

We should also add that national ADL's recent alleged acknowledgment of the genocide, which implied that Turkey did not intend to kill Armenians, knowingly contravened the UN's official 1948 definition of genocide.

Peter Meade is an accomplished and generous man, and I am not accusing him or anyone of impropriety. However, a top ADL leader must recuse himself from any matter relating to Armenians. This is unfortunate but necessary.

Meanwhile, the ADL and kindred organizations need to halt their Turkish-organized proxy war against the Armenian people.

David Boyajian is a freelance writer based in Massachusetts
Copyright The Watertown TAB 2007