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July 21, 2016

Commissioner Elin Howe
Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Department of Developmental Services
500 Harrison Avenue
Boston, Ma 02118

Dear Commissioner Howe:

I'm writing to alert you to a serious and urgent public safety issue regarding a property owned by your agency, the Department of Development Services (DDS).

The property in question is a 2.89-acre tract of open land at 124 Maple St., bordered on the other side by Hawthorne St. in New Bedford, Mass. (parcel id 345-237) formerly known as the Reed estate.

Recently this area has become a favorite place for amateur drone operators to fly their machines, a dangerous activity in and of itself.

The serious public safety concern is that the property is located a mere 150 yards from St. Luke's Hospital, where Med Flight helicopters fly to and from daily, landing and taking off from the helipad there. The helicopter's flight path often carries it directly over the DDS-owned field, at that point coming in at a very low altitude

Flying drones 400 feet into the sky a mere 150 yards from a busy helipad is a surefire recipe for a disaster of major proportions.

The area in question is an unlit, unmonitored, partially fenced open space with large trees and unrestricted access in the middle of residential homes. It has a history of problems due to this very lack of oversight. Greatly increased crime, drug dealing, dog racing and feces, gunshots, gang activity and discarded hypodermic needles are some of the hardships the neighborhood has had to endure. They even pulled a dead body out of there a few years back.

As detrimental to the neighbors' quality of life as the property has been, the present challenge is especially alarming due to the danger to large numbers of people.

Area director Elizabeth Duffy suggested "NO TRESPASSING" signs with police to be notified of violators. While well intentioned, this was already tried and failed badly. A number of years ago City Hall ordered Animal Control to place "NO DOGS" signs. The dog activists tore down the signs that very day. After a few more such confrontations Animal Control ceased enforcement.

The area is also a two-way short cut with a high volume of foot traffic. People continue to drive up in large numbers and use the area as their own dog park, and it remains a haven to conduct drug deals in the evening, and whatever else goes on there.

"NO TRESPASSING," signs won't deter anyone presently abusing the "park," and violators won't be there long enough to be caught.

By the time police would receive a complaint and go to the location, the offenders would be gone. In the past, when police have arrived with suspicious activity in progress in the evening, they easily eluded them due to the lot's size, configuration, and multiple routes of escape. It's a good strategic base of operations for illegal activity.

The added difficulty of spotting and reporting drone operators is that when they're out there, it doesn't appear that's what they're doing. It's obvious mostly when the machines are taking off and landing, or when they're walking in and out of the "park" carrying the devices. Most also are looking down at a televised image from above on a screen instead of staring up at the drone itself. From a distance it appears that they're dialing or texting on a cell phone. Drones also are virtually silent, so neighbors aren't alerted when they're starting them up.

One can only imagine the devastation should one of these drones hit a helicopter rotor as it's landing or taking off from the hospital.

The problem is this tract of state owned land has been ignored by the authorities for so many years that these various individuals and groups feel entitled to claim it as their own. Half measures to keep people out have proven they just won't work.

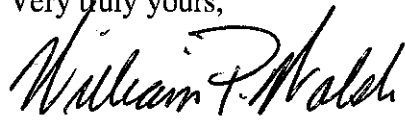
For the sake of safety and for the neighborhood's peace of mind the public must be physically prohibited from entering the property.

The obvious solution to prevent access is to place the same fencing on the south side of the property as it exists now on the north side, and install security locks on the three gates, along with signage to keep out.

I trust you now fully understand the urgency of this situation and would appreciate your getting back to me, a concerned nearby homeowner, with an effective remedy to our newest and most critical problem with your property. I, and a number of nervous neighbors look forward to hearing from you as soon as possible.

Rather than respond to a disaster, let's take the steps necessary to prevent it from happening in the first place.

Very truly yours,



William P. Walsh

cc: Mayor Jon Mitchell

Sec. Marylou Sudders, Health and Human Services

Police Chief Joseph C. Cordeiro

Fire Chief Michael Gomes

Mark M. Mahoney, Emergency Management

President Linda Morad, New Bedford City Council

Keith A. Hovan, President & CEO of South Coast Health

Peter Bullard, Esq.

Senator Mark C.W. Montigny

Rep. Antonio Cabral

Councilor Kerry Winterson

Hon. Scott W. Lang, Esq.

Board of Directors, South Coast Health

William Burns, South Coast Health

Rich O'Meara, Dept of Developmental Services

James Millin, Property Manager DDS

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