

# **Town Topics**

## **January 23, 2008**

### **Battlefield Preservation Movement Gains Support From National Park Service**

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Preservationists opposing a plan for increased faculty housing for the Institute for Advanced Study made tactical gains last month, as the National Park Service came out against a development near the Princeton Battlefield.

The December 27, 2007, letter from the Park Service comes just months after the preservationists, in the form of the Princeton Battlefield Society, approached both Princeton Borough and Township governing bodies, seeking assistance in conserving 22 acres of land that lie outside the 85-acre Princeton Battlefield State Park, preserved to commemorate the January 3, 1777 battle where Gen. George Washington fought, and won, what is regarded as one of the most important battles in U.S. history. The 22 separate acres of land, privately owned by the Institute, is crucial, Society representatives said, because of its proximity to the site of the Battle of Princeton.

The Institute wants to build 15 houses on about eight of those 22 acres, in an area not directly adjacent to the Battlefield. Current IAS plans indicate that the houses will be built near existing houses “with no further disturbance to the Battlefield site line.”

IAS also outlines a 200-foot-wide, seven-acre, buffer zone, separating new houses from the Battlefield. The Institute would then relinquish its development rights on roughly 10 acres of its remaining land after the housing project is completed.

In the letter to Anne Weber of the Princeton Battlefield Society, Bill Brookover, historical architect for the National Park Service, said the Battlefield has been considered “threatened” since 2004 because of the proposals that would “result in incompatible new construction.” In addition to the IAS housing, the letter also cites proposed municipal soccer fields as potential visual threats.

The Institute first presented its development concept to the Regional Planning Board of Princeton in 2003, sparking immediate concern from preservationist groups, as well criticism from the Planning Board. Those plans, however, according to Institute spokesperson Christine Ferrara, have been revised, are still in the works, and are not ready for full Planning Board review.

The Institute sold 32 acres to the state in 1973, increasing the Battlefield Park by 60 percent. The New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection has expressed interest in purchasing the remaining property, though it has been reported that the budget-challenged state is currently unwilling to buy the land.

In 1997 the Institute also turned over 589 acres of woodland and farmland partly encompassing what is now known as the Institute Woods.

The Park Service’s Mr. Brookover said the Battlefield is a U.S. Department of the Interior Priority I Principal Site, “which are the most historically significant and most endangered Revolutionary War Battlefields in the nation.

“Princeton Battlefield was found to have a high degree of threat in the short term and a medium degree of threat in the long term,” he wrote.