



Narberth residents fight against possible development

Residents of Narberth fight to protect Sabine Park from development.

Philip Reynolds '26, Copy Editor

Situated on the corner of Sabine and Montgomery Avenues, there lies a local park only half an acre in size but powerful enough to pull local residents into a battle over land use and development in Narberth Borough. Sabine Park, at 201 Sabine Ave, is home to both a non-profit preschool and a community park, and the Narberth borough has been considering plans to develop the property since 2016. Some residents are harshly opposed to any plans to develop the land, and have created the Save Sabine movement, a coalition of local activists and residents fighting to preserve the park.

Today, the property houses both a non-profit preschool and a volunteer-managed recreational space: Sabine Park. The multi-use park contains two jungle gyms and a smaller green area. These spaces all share an abundance of trees, shrubbery, flowers, benches, and tables. Additionally, Sabine Park is one of only two publicly owned pieces of land in the entire Borough. In 2016, Narberth started discussing the possibility of developing the property, a choice that prompted massive uproar from local residents.



Cristina Staab

Photo courtesy of

One may ask why the borough would even consider developing on such a scarce piece of public land used for community purposes. Some residents declare that the answer is quite simple; it comes down to money. According to Christia Staab, co-director of the Save Sabine Coalition, the Borough is allegedly in a financial deficit and is “chasing tails to develop a plan and get money.” From 2021, the Borough’s financial expenses have grown from \$4,491,370, to a projected \$5,792,735 (2025). In an attempt to balance this, Narberth plans to gain 51 percent of their revenue through real estate taxes. Residents like Staab believe that the Borough views Sabine as an unutilized real estate revenue stream. The property already makes up ten percent of Narberth’s 2025 budget, raking in \$728,605 in both property revenue from the piece of land. Even the Narberth Council recognizes this importance; Fred Bush, Borough President, said in a November 2023 meeting that “the Sabine property is a significant contributor to the borough budget.” With Narberth undertaking projects in 2025 like a new EV-charging station and the restoration of the Narberth Avenue Bridge, Sabine’s supporters believe that the property’s important monetary gains will become the main focus of the piece of land, rather than the community-centered park. During that November 2023 meeting Bush did mention the possibility of expanding the park with a new development, but Staab has noted that there has been no concrete plan by the borough to expand Sabine Park. This ambition to acquire revenue leads some residents to believe that Sabine park will slowly be phased out from the tapestry of Narberth.

Discussion over the development of Sabine Park began during the same time that other properties in Lower Merion Township, such as Oakwell, Stoneleigh, and Gladwyne parks were all in danger from prospective developers. Due to this, The Sabine Coalition was formed, eventually registering as a tax-exempt nonprofit. With around 700 people on their mailing list, they hope to spread awareness about the future of Sabine. The coalition then decided to hire Philip Rosenzweig, a lawyer whose areas of expertise include real estate, land use litigation, and finance. He has represented local movements such as “Save Oakwell,” a movement created in opposition to planned construction on Oakwell, a 13.4 acre estate owned by LMSD. After immense pressure, LMSD opted to sell the land to the Natural Lands Trust in August 2024.

Sabine’s history has been marked by years of shifting ownership and threats of development. LMSD had ownership of the property from the 1960s until 1979. They had the option to use the property, up until they ceded all claims to the land to the Narberth Borough in 2015. At one point, there was even consideration given to building a new LMSD elementary school on the site, according to an article by Narberth author and journalist Victoria Donahoe. During the 1980s, one of the biggest engineering firms in the Philadelphia Area, the Siegel Group, planned to “put Narberth on the map” by building on the property, according to the Siegel Group’s leaseholder, William Leishear. Regardless of the specific plan for development, Narberth citizens have consistently voiced opposition to it. Whether it be speaking out at Borough meetings or creating catchy slogans like, “Keep Narberth Green” and “Narberth is a Neighborhood keep it that way,” residents have consistently found themselves pitted against development.



Sabine Park has been in use for decades, like in this 1920's photo of a girls league enjoying the park. | Photo courtesy of The Sabine Coalition

In 2023, the slow erasure of the park came to full fruition when Sabine Park was removed from Narberth's Master Park Plan. During this same meeting, Council President Bush announced that "a corner of the property [201 Sabine Ave] is to be sent out via an RFP [Request for Proposal] process," a message to the Sabine Coalition that the park's current state is not in the future plans of the Borough. Additionally, the conversation was behind closed doors, discussed only in a September 2024 Council Executive Session, a private meeting with only the council, away from the public's eye. These actions have led Staab and the Coalition to question the honesty of the Borough government when it comes to the property. According to Staab, "The [Narberth] council have been keeping their heads down," noting, "[The borough] has not addressed any letters or protests with a direct response." Not only has the Council allegedly not responded to inquiries, but on some occasions they have contradicted themselves. The Merionite obtained an email that was sent July 16, 2024 and was a revision of the Narberth Planning Commission's letter, edited and sent by Council President Fred Bush. The letter contained multiple aspects of the borough's future infrastructure. In the letter Bush revised, it stated: "NPC should also consider whether the 'Collar Areas' they have identified should be incorporated into the 5a district to better reflect their integration into the downtown core." Yet, during a Borough Council meeting in September 2024, when a member of the Sabine Coalition, Carolmarie Scanlon, questioned Bush on what a "Collar Area" was, he responded: "Carolmarie I am not sure what you are referring to."

While the future of 201 Sabine is uncertain, if history has been any indicator, residents of Narberth will fight for what they believe to be an essential part of their community.