

Response to the Criticism by Tom Potash

I wish to respectfully respond to the letter by Tom Potash who criticized my article about the destruction of downtown Oakland. Please be aware the my source of events and dates are primarily from the highly comprehensive set of newspaper scrap books developed by none other than Al Potash himself from about 1936 onward.

It is entirely understandable that a descendant of Al Potash who is currently an executive of James Construction Company, a construction company founded by Al Potash himself in 1937, would pen a criticism of my recent article. But, OK, with that said let's discuss the facts that I am accused of omitting or distorting.

First, I am accused of making accusations regarding actions of the town leaders who are not here to defend themselves. Mr. Potash, you should know that the historical impact of actions can only be judged by the future and not within the time frame during which they are implemented. There some very unflattering books written about America's founding fathers and I'm sure their descendants are less than pleased about it. I'd love to hear Al Potash explain about a lack of vision of biblical proportions. But we cannot. Also, no one can judge a person's motives and I'm sure those of our town fathers 50 and 60 years ago were then in the best interest. However, the same can be said of many notorious historical figures. History tells us that the problem was in the execution, not their motives. The condition of downtown Oakland today has passed judgment upon the of actions taken 50 or 60 years ago.

Second, your criticism notes that what happened in downtown Oakland in the 1950s and 1960s was typical of what occurred in virtually every town. Simply, not so. Oakland had no 'downtown' prior to the advent of 4 strip malls within 10 years. Downtown Oakland with its 4 strip malls was created by developers with the approval of our then town fathers. Here, homes were destroyed here to create strip malls unlike any other community.

Third, with regard to the Ponds Church and the shopping center development, your criticism notes that the land swap was intended for the development of a new boro hall. Again, not so. In 1953, there was a proposal to build a new boro hall in its current location. Al Potash was a councilman at the time and voted for it. On September 11, 1954 an ordinance was passed to build it. By the time Al Potash made his recommendation in January, 1955 to the Ponds Church, Oakland's new boro hall was already a fact and, I believe, already built. Al Potash proudly presided over the ground breaking ceremony on site for the new Grand Union 18 months later. Thoughts and proposals for an expanded municipal complex would not be made for another decade and, even then, the idea was still born. No, the dates of the newspaper articles reporting the events above do refute your contention that I played fast and loose with the facts. Sorry.

With regard to the demise of the Oakland Military Academy, just know that Mr. Sarcka did not want to move his academy from Oakland. I stand by my statement as to the reasons why it was forced to move in 1962 as it was told to me directly by a close relative

of Sarcka who was there at the time and witnessed the events. Further, Mr. Potash, you are mistaken as I never said that there was any impropriety. It just looked and smelled as very, very odd. Some might even say suspicious. Additionally, the OMA property was in fact purchased by Lappas Development Company of Pompton Lakes in 1962 who on April 2, 1965 announced plans for the creation of 90 housing units on the OMA property. Later in the same year, 1965, Lappas Development also announced the development a new shopping mall on the site. That it was not completed until the mid 1970s is immaterial relative to the publicly stated intent of Lappas Development 10 years prior. Hence, the 20 year defense proclaimed in your criticism is simply not so. Sorry, again.

In summary I make no statement without either documentation as illustrated above or extraordinarily reliable sources who witnessed the events first hand. If you, Tom Potash, would like copies of the cited newspaper articles from the scrapbooks of Al Potash, please just let me know and I'd be delighted to provide them to you. My email address is listed at the end of the article.

Other than the above clarifications, I'm delighted that you enjoyed the article.