

C. Henry Price II
American Legion Post # 246
Department of Maryland, Inc.
PO Box 100, Betterton, MD 21610

Mayor & Council

DEC 21 2023

Per CT

Chestertown Historic District Commission
118 N. Cross Street
Chestertown, MD 21620

December 14, 2023

Subject: Proposed Demolition of John H. Newnam Armory

It has come to our attention that Washington College is seeking approval to demolish the historic John H. Newnam National Guard Armory in Chestertown. The C. Henry Price II, American Legion, Post 246 located in Betterton, Kent County, MD would like to officially go on record as opposing the proposed demolition. We strongly support the rehabilitation of this historic armory into a boutique hotel or another comparable community use.

Our Legion family is made up of Post 246, Sons of The American Legion Squadron 246, and the American Legion Auxiliary Unit 246. Our namesake, Charles Henry Price II of Betterton was killed in action in World War II while serving on the USS Juneau (CL-52) in the Pacific Theater.

Constructed in 1931, the Chestertown Armory has a long and storied history in Kent County. At the onset of the Second World War, the armory was home to the Medical Detachment 'Medco' of the 115th Infantry Regiment of the famed 29th Division. On January 31, 1941, thirty-five (35) men from Kent and Queen Anne's Counties were mobilized into federal service from this armory. Attached to the companies of the 115th Infantry Regiment of the 29th Division, these medics landed as part of the second wave on Omaha Beach of the Normandy Invasion on June 6, 1944. Many of these men were wounded and decorated for valor in combat fighting across France and Germany to defeat Hitler's armies. They exhibited heroism beyond the pale, and carried the physical and emotional scars of battle for the rest of their lives.

As a National Guard Armory for 74 years (1931 - 2005), multiple generations of Kent Countians proudly served at this armory. Many of these past and present veterans also served with and were members of American Legion Post 246 in Betterton. These veterans not only served their country abroad in battle, but afterwards also tirelessly served their home community as civic leaders. Deceased Post 246 member, Colonel James Wroth Stavely Meikle of Lynch, Maryland commanded the 115th Infantry Regiment at Chestertown Armory from 1986 to 1989.

The Chestertown Armory was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1985 because of its place in history. We must preserve this history, and highlight and tell the stories of the heroism of these brave veterans for future generations of Kent County residents. The John H. Newnam Armory is a testament to those who fought to preserve our country's freedom.

We are especially concerned that the leadership of Washington College has failed to reach out to veteran's organizations in Kent County to include us in any potential plans for the adaptive reuse or demolition of this historic armory. The John H. Newnam Armory is a piece of shared community history, and Washington College's tone deaf plans for demolition, formulated without any public input, make a mockery of the heroism and sacrifices made by scores of Kent County residents, especially to those fateful (and now deceased) medics who landed on Omaha Beach as part of the Normandy Invasion.

If the Armory were demolished, we would lose forever a building that represents the accomplishments made by the "greatest generation." We at the C. Henry Price II, American Legion, Post 246 respectfully ask the Commission to weigh heavily their responsibility to preserve the legacy of America's past, including the National Guard members who proudly served their community, state, and nation over a 74 year period. We also ask that Washington College be required to embark upon a community master planning process to solicit and garner input from the residents and civic organizations (especially from the County's many veterans organizations) for the future re-use of the armory and site.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "S. Matthews", with a stylized flourish extending to the left.

Stephen "Jacob" Matthews
Commander, Post 246

cc Dr. Michael Sosulski