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Uli Seit for The New York Times

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Fort Totten

An Unguarded Fort, and Neighbors Who See a Risk

By JAMES ANGELOS

FORT TOTTEN in Bayside, Queens, sits atop a hilly peninsula near the Throgs Neck Bridge, where the waters of the East River meet Long Island Sound. The fort was built during the Civil War to guard the city against attack from the East River, but it closed in 1995, and since then, much of the land, along with many of its dilapidated Victorian buildings, has been handed over to the city.

A park now covers 50 acres of Fort Totten, and the Fire and Police Departments, as well as the Army Reserve 77th Regional Readiness Command and other groups, use some of the buildings on the remaining 100 or so acres.

Since the fort closed, the Fire Department has been in charge of security there, hiring private guards to patrol the fort and to staff a security booth at its entrance. But in February, the fort's neighbors learned that the department would eliminate that security detail starting March 1, citing budget cuts.

The move has unleashed local fears that the park and its historic buildings, some of them abandoned, will be vulnerable to vandalism, arson and other crimes. Earlier this month, a few dozen residents held a rally at the fort's entrance, chanting, "Hey, hey, ho, ho, we say safety, they say no!"

At one point, Councilman [Peter Vallone](#) Jr. spoke on a megaphone.

"During the toughest economic times," Mr. Vallone said, "that's when you have to keep the community and the people the safest."

A group of security guards who had worked at the fort watched the protest.

"There will be a lot of chaos," predicted one guard, Alexander Bolotinskiy, as he watched a car pass the empty security booth, where the sign still read, "Please Stop and Show ID."

Steve Ritea, a Fire Department spokesman, said the change was part of a wider cut in security expenditures that would save nearly \$1.2 million annually.

The Police Department, Mr. Ritea added, will continue to include the fort in its patrols. Fire marshals stationed at the fort will also provide an element of safety, he said.

But some residents are not placated. Among them is Carol Marian, president of the Bayside Historical Society, which is housed in the fort.

"This park is not a normal park," Ms. Marian said, pointing out the many old buildings. "We have hidden corners where people can lurk."