



Amy ~~Scott~~ Meert / 55

7/28/2014

To: The Cambridge City Council

From: Lesley University, Division of Natural Sciences and Mathematics

Dear Cambridge City Council,

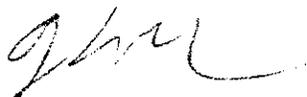
We are writing to express our strong support for passing Order #4 the Silver Maple Policy Order at your next city council meeting. As educators at Cambridge-based Lesley University, we value the educational opportunity provided by having an intact, native forest ecosystem that is easily accessible by public transit, while as ecologists and local residents we value the vital ecosystem services provided by this forest to the surrounding urban communities.

A great challenge in teaching at an urban school such as Lesley is getting students involved and in touch with local natural history. Urban students at all levels, from preschool to college, spend a disturbingly small amount of time in natural ecosystems, which hampers their natural inclinations towards observation and discovery, and may even promote attention deficit disorders (Louv 2005). Despite the desire of many parents and teachers to combat this trend, it is logistically difficult to bring students out to such sites, particularly for the many urban residents lacking cars. For our students, especially in the natural sciences and environmental studies, the Alewife Reservation and contiguous Silver Maple Forest have provided the only such local field site that we can access using the subway. Through close collaboration with the Friends of the Alewife Reservation, we utilize this forest for many classes and educational outreach programs: from students in our Introductory Biology classes going to observe basic ecological interactions and develop service projects, to our Nature Writing course going for inspiration, to our advanced Environmental Field Studies students developing independent, semester long projects focused on the ecology and eco-chemistry of the area. In collaboration with the Urban Ecology Institute, we have also brought local high school and elementary school teachers out to the forest to practice and develop ecological activities for their classrooms.

All these educational activities would be compromised by the loss of the Silver Maple Forest. Removing this central piece of forest and replacing it with a condo development would greatly reduce the integrity of the ecosystem, resulting in the loss of many interior forest species of birds, plants, and insects (Dowd 1992, Gibb and Hochuli 2002, Alvey 2006). Water quality would likely be compromised by the development, and the additional noise and light pollution would further reduce diversity and abundance of many species (Francis et al 2009, Holker et al 2010). Larger mammal species currently present in the reserve, such as coyotes, mink and fox, would almost certainly be lost due to the reduced space and increased anthropogenic disturbances. Perhaps most importantly from an educational perspective, the wonderful and inspirational sense of being alone in the wilderness one currently feels when wandering the heart of the Alewife Reservation, a feeling most urban students rarely or never get to experience, will be lost with a hulking condo development intruding on the reserve. It will feel more like a visiting a park rather than investigating a wild place, affecting the quality and depth of its educational potential.

From a broader perspective, we also highly value the ecosystem services provided by the

Sincerely,



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David Morimoto, Director of the Natural Science and Mathematics Division, Lesley University, Cambridge, MA

Jeffery Perrin, Assistant Professor of Psychology, Lesley University, Cambridge, MA

Albert Liao, Assistant Professor of Biology, Lesley University, Cambridge, MA

Nicole Weber, Director of the Science in Education Program

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