

MENDHAM TOWNSHIP ENVIRONMENTAL COMMISSION (EC)

RESPONSE TO REQUEST FROM RECREATION COMMITTEE FOR COMMENTS ON THE PROPOSED RECREATION DEVELOPMENT AT THE MOSLE PRESERVE SITE FOR ADDITIONAL SPORTS FACILITIES WITH PERMANENT AND ADDITIONAL LIGHTING

The EC members have exchanged views and have reviewed the updated proposal for additional recreational facilities and lighting at the Mosle site.

There are mixed views on the value of the proposed development for our community, and the written EC views will focus on the aspects that impact the environment, keeping to the accountability of the EC.

First and foremost, the Mosle site is a Preserve. Any development work needs to respect the nature of the Preserve, taking into account impact on wildlife and the nature trails that are used by the community. Developments should not adversely affect wildlife habitat or corridors through our woodlands. The darkness of Preserved lands is important for nocturnal animals and their activities. Lighting is an important factor that can upset wildlife natural activities.

The Mosle site is also highly impacted by the Hillandale/St. John's housing development. That site was developed despite objections due to negative environmental impact. The development progress at that site is an increased concern, in view of extensive tree clearing, steep slopes, and drainage work that is evident at that site. Drainage overflow pipes are evident directing at the sports field area, and directly into Township conserved woodland. This item needs separate review and additional assessment.

For the recreational development that is proposed, from an environmental impact perspective, it is difficult to see how permanent and additional lighting would not further disrupt the wildlife in the area. The parking area is at a highpoint, and permanent lights at this trail head site could have negative impact. If permanent lights are installed, what will be next? The reality is that one development often leads to another, possibly plans for new surfaces or ground management that could impact water quality.

Further development of the site might be anticipated if permanent lighting were installed. No permanent lighting is needed to support the daytime preserve purpose of the Mosle site. The site is only occasionally used for sporting practice in the evenings at certain times of the year, yet it is used widely all year round for environmental recreation and trails. We are unclear on the real value of the proposal for the wider balance of community use. What is the wider community view? Occasional events could continue to leverage temporary facilities, and we would recommend alternative temporary lighting that is more environmentally sensitive, avoiding fossil fuels. Dark-sensitive temporary lights might make better sense to look into further.

In short, the EC role is to preserve the quality of our environment and sees potential negative impact from installing permanent lighting fixtures at the Mosle Preserve. More in-depth environmental impact studies and implications for local wildlife would be necessary. For example, activities of nocturnal animals, possibly including bats, at this location could be disturbed by lighting. Dark-sensitive lighting needs to be considered. Also, light impact on local communities needs to be taken into account. Including the new homes being constructed on the hill. Potential residents might not be attracted to a site where a sports development with night-lighting is under development. Additionally, increased focus on ensuring the housing development on the hill is not further negatively impacting the local environment is necessary, as described above, particularly regarding drainage and ground water impact.

Residents have indicated in surveys that open spaces are a priority for why they move to live in Mendham. We need to protect these preserved spaces with the same level of priority as residents.

MT EC April 12, 2023