

Letter to the Editor, 7-17/22, The Manchester Cricket

40-B Shingle Hill Housing Development vs Nature

The proposed 40-B Shingle Hill housing development off School St must be opposed if Manchester residents care about their town and its future. Reclaiming previously developed land and finding existing lower income housing options need to be examined first before clear-cutting our forests. The town has already agreed that the wetlands and network of trails next to the proposed site has value to residents. It was set aside as conservation land back in 1966. The School St. Kiosk and parking area that is managed by Manchester Essex Conservation Trust (MECT) is a special gathering place for bikers, hikers, and other outdoor enthusiasts. As a Manchester resident, and a weekly user of the network of the Manchester/Essex trail system, I am deeply concerned about changing the priceless wetland ecology of the Millstone watershed.

Consider the importance of the adjacent wetlands that border the site today; As rain or snow saturate the surrounding wooded area, the productive wetlands and marsh (just at the foot of the proposed 136-unit housing complex) absorbs and then slowly releases the naturally filtered water, allowing Nature to do it's priceless work. After providing spectacular habitat for native birds and wildlife in the upper Sawmill watershed beginning in Essex, the Sawmill Brook makes its short and slow journey to the sea, nurturing invertebrates along the way and passing through the fragile gills of rare and recently discovered native Brook Trout on its way to the sea. The flowing water ends in the center of town next to the Seaside No. 1 Firehouse where it meets the sea and invites migrating smelt up to their spawning grounds in the spring.

No one can argue about the importance of wetlands and the extraordinary ecosystem services they provide us. Every wetland within our town needs to be cherished and appreciated for it's true worth and humble services. The complex hydrology that nurtures important vernal pools on Shingle Hill must not be altered. Why would anyone choose to risk such an important and life-giving area? We don't get a second chance once we destroy these valuable and wild places.

I strongly urge the Zoning Board to protect it's own conservation land adjacent to this proposal, by denying the application for a comprehensive permit, and additionally, deny the waivers of the local wetland bylaws to maximize the protection of the vernal pools, Sawmill Brook and the surrounding habitat and watershed

The zoning board and residents of Manchester must not choose development over healthy ecosystem services. For hundreds of years the residents have made good decisions about development and their future. The center of the town looks much the same as it did a hundred years ago because residents cared about their town. Huge housing proposals that require clear cutting our forests are inconsistent with Manchester's current values. There must be better options for housing and development and Shingle Hill should not be one of them. People come from all over the country to visit our iconic seashore community, and one doesn't have to look very far past our town borders to see what unrestricted development looks like. The financial costs to the town and burdens placed on Manchester's infrastructure are not worth the price. Please choose the right path for future generations to come just as our ancestors did for us.

Important websites to keep us informed on these pressing issues can be found at:

<https://mect.org/>

<http://manchester.ma.us/729/40B>

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