



MYSTIC RIVER WATERSHED ASSOCIATION
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August 13, 2007

Rick Sullivan, Commissioner
Department of Conservation and Recreation
251 Causeway Street, Suite 600
Boston, MA 02114-2104

Dear Commissioner Sullivan:

The Mystic River Watershed Association (MyRWA) encourages you to do everything in your power to add the 15.6 acres in Belmont and Cambridge that are known as the Silver Maple Forest to DCR's adjacent Alewife Reservation.

MyRWA is a grassroots organization dedicated to the protection and restoration of the Mystic River, its tributaries, and the related natural resources throughout the watershed's 22 communities. The Alewife Brook basin is a sub-watershed of the Mystic River watershed.

MyRWA has formally supported House 21, for the acquisition of that land for DCR, in oral and written testimony to the Joint Committee On Bonding, Capital Expenditures and State Assets; and we urge you to add your voice to the many who support this important addition to the Commonwealth's park system. **The financing mechanism in House 21 would give the state a bargain, since about half the funds for the purchase would come from the municipalities and private donors.** (What a turnaround that is! Instead of state support for municipal land purchases, this proposes municipal support for a state land purchase.)

This land has been functioning as an important part of DCR's Alewife Reservation for most of the time since the reservation was created in 1903. Though it was farmed in the early years of the 20th century, during the decades since it has developed into an urban wild.

It is not just a city park, important as those are. The Silver Maple Forest and the adjoining part of the Alewife Reservation are nature in the wild. Many of the wetland species that live in the reservation need to spend some part of their lives in this small bit of upland, to feed or to nest. **Urban wilds are rare, but this one is even rarer: it is accessible from a subway stop, available for city residents, including city schoolchildren, to visit.**

This land was owned for years by the Arthur D. Little consulting firm and was acquired in 1999 by O'Neill Properties of Pennsylvania. The development O'Neill plans would come right up to the edge of the 200-foot riverfront zone and the 100-foot wetlands buffer zone. It would sit on a small hillock surrounded by protected land - land that would inevitably be degraded by the construction. The hillock is sometimes called the Belmont Uplands, but its highest point is only 27 feet above sea level. Most of the so-called Uplands is in the flood plain.

The watershed association is concerned about the effect of losing the Silver Maple Forest on water quality and flooding. The quality of the water in Alewife Brook affects downstream communities all the way to Boston Harbor. Flooding affects our downstream neighbors and even the motorists on Route 2. Development of the Silver Maple Forest will make these problems worse.

The Silver Maple Forest consists of forest and wetlands that significantly enhance the value of the adjoining Alewife Reservation and that, if developed, will irretrievably diminish the habitat, aesthetic, and other values of the Reservation. Though it is surrounded by densely developed transportation, commercial and residential areas, the land remains wild. Arlington, Belmont, and Cambridge have many opportunities for development without damaging valuable and rare habitat. Our residents and future generations would be ill served if we fail to take action now to preserve this rare natural asset.

Enclosed is a memo prepared by MyRWA to discuss the issues in more detail in conformity with state policies and standards. We'd appreciate your taking the time to read it.

Cordially,



Caroline Broderick
Executive Director

Enclosure

cc: The Honorable Deval Patrick
Governor of Massachusetts
State House, Room 260
Boston, MA 02133

Rep. Will Brownsberger
Room 22, State House
Boston, MA 02133