

# Delaware Valley Ornithological Club

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Lower Merion School Board

September 20, 2022

Members of the School Board:

We wish to comment on the proposed conversion of the landscape at the Oakwell estate (and adjoining parcel) into auxiliary playing fields for the new middle school. Our fervent hope is that after further deliberation and community feedback you will abandon this plan.

The proposed plan would destroy some 462 trees, more than one hundred of which are so old and so large that they meet criteria for Heritage status. A cluster like this of so many Heritage trees is rare in our area. Destroying them all will require a variance since zoning laws would not otherwise allow this. Contrary to what many believe, the ecological function of very old trees cannot be replaced any time soon, since they store so much more carbon than younger trees and absorb so much more water.

In addition, many of the trees at Oakwell are oak, maple, hickory, pine, elm, ash, and beech, which are among the most ecologically valuable of our native trees. Those tree types host the highest number of beneficial insects among native trees and, in turn, service a proportionally high number of birds, which rely on insects for their everyday energy and reproduction. But in actuality, all the trees in the Oakwell ecosystem are crucial because they also provide stormwater control. In fact, we know from recent historical research that when the Olmstead brothers wisely planned the buildings at Oakwell, they positioned them in such a way as to “save the [existing] trees.”

We believe there is another vitally important reason to preserve the Oakwell ecosystem. The School Board now has a golden opportunity to create *an environmental education site* for all students in the district, even though that was not the original intent of the land purchase. Our planet’s climate change crisis urgently dictates that our society pivot quickly from a “business as usual” approach to environmental issues like this one to a “do everything possible!” approach to forestalling the deleterious effects of the ever-increasing levels of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere.

By now, we are all aware that we cannot afford any further damage to the life-sustaining ecosystem resources that currently act as buffers against climate change. Hanging in the balance is not only our children’s welfare, but the continued existence of the human species. Widely known also is the fact that because of the slowness of societal response, planetary stewards are currently far behind where they should be in terms of optimal measures to forestall further climate change. Since our students must be taught as much as possible about the global crisis and what can be done about it, what better place for such education to take place than amid a glorious stand of trees where they can conduct field studies,



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gather data, and gain outdoor experience so pertinent to their lives and their futures?

To destroy invaluable resources such as a grove of ancient trees at this critical time in history is unconscionable. How can this possibly be less important than adding some auxiliary sports fields, especially when much less vital land is available elsewhere in the township for that important purpose?

Thank you very much for your kind attention.

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