



May 5, 2022

Hon. Robert Conley, Mayor
Borough of Madison
Hartley Dodge Memorial Building
50 King's Road
Madison, New Jersey 07940

Dear Mayor Conley:

The Whippany River Watershed Action Committee (WRWAC) is pleased to write this Letter of Support to support the Borough of Madison, one of our active Action Committee Members, in support of preserving the 53-acre intact Drew Forest. We need to preserve our wooded, open spaces, not clearcut them. Please do whatever is possible in your authority to preserve this pristine forest for future generations.

One idea to consider is whether the Borough of Madison currently has a county park in the County of Morris Park System? Perhaps Madison Borough and Drew University can partner with the County of Morris Park Commission, County Open Space Committee and State of New Jersey Green Acres funding to purchase the 53-acre parcel outright? The benefits are numerous! The general public benefits as do the residents of Madison and Drew University students. This is a tremendous benefit in the general interest of the public.

I do not need to tell you about the benefits the Forest provides with respect to biodiversity, groundwater recharge, clean air and carbon storage. Another consideration is the shrinking tree canopy in Morris County due to the Emerald Ash Borer (EAB) infestation. In light of this fact, doesn't it make sense to preserve trees when we can because of the fact we have lost so many? This idea could be of great interest to the Park Commission because they are our county's park stewards and know first-hand the number of trees they've had to cut down. You can contact Dave Helmer, Executive Director of the Park Commission or Joe Dunn, Morris County Soil Conservation District, who will tell you the importance of preserving the trees we have.

The Forest is a living classroom for teaching and research for Drew students but it is also an environmental resource for the wider Morris County community. The general public suffers when we don't have clean air, when we have to cut unnecessary trees down and when we become "concrete" cities.

For the past 13 years, 22 acres of the 53 forested acres known as the Zuck Arboretum and the Hepburn Woods have been restored through the Drew Forest Restoration Project, removing invasives and creating a rare understory of native plants and native trees. This is a huge feat. It takes many volunteer hours and tremendous resources. Please don't destroy this work in a day with a single change in zoning.

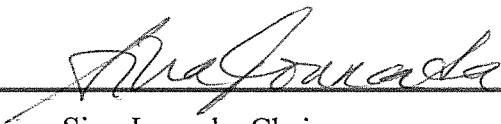
The Forest recharges the Buried Valley Aquifer, which serves clean water to municipalities accounting for over 450,000 people in New Jersey and nearly 200,000 people in Morris County, and reduces flooding and soil erosion; and serves as a major cooling zone to offset the urban heat island effect. These are important environmental attributes – and you won't realize or feel it until it is taken away.

The Whippany River Watershed Action Committee was established in 1999 by the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP) to preserve, protect and maintain the Whippany River Watershed and its tributaries and to assist our Member Towns, such as Madison Borough, with preservation efforts to protect the Watershed. While this preservation effort may not fall specifically in the confines of WRWAC's Watershed, it does impact the Passaic River Watershed, a sister organization and it indirectly still benefits the Whippany River Watershed which serves as drinking water for 1.2 million people downstream as it joins with the Passaic and Rockaway Rivers.

As an environmental preservation non-profit organization, the WRWAC could not be more supportive of preserving the Drew Forest in its entirety. Preserving land is not only good for the future of the watershed, flood mitigation, underwater aquifer recharge and stormwater management but helps to preserve the local environment's character. The Drew Forest, if preserved, will protect the environment for future generations for years to come. Once it's gone, it's gone forever and you can't get it back. There is one tree in the Preserve that is over 200 years old.

The WRWAC totally supports the preservation of the entire Drew Forest as open space.

Regards,



Siva Jonnada, Chair
Whippany River Watershed Action Committee

cc: Maureen Byrne, Madison Borough Council Member & WRWAC Liaison
Alison Deeb, WRWAC Facilitator
Elizabeth Osborne, Municipal Clerk, Borough of Madison