

July 12, 2006

The Board of Trustees
Middlesex School
P.O. Box 9122
1400 Lowell Road
Concord, MA 01742

Dear Members of the Board:

On behalf of the Walden Woods Project, I write to urge you to reconsider your decision to construct athletic fields in Estabrook Woods. This area, rich with irreplaceable natural and historic features, is one of the largest expanses of undeveloped, privately held land in the Greater Boston area. It supports a diversity of wildlife, some endangered species, and is a highly valued recreational and educational asset for the surrounding communities.

For the past 16 years, our organization has led a highly successful national initiative to preserve the land and legacy of Henry David Thoreau. Tens of thousands have supported our organization in calling for Walden Woods to be protected due to its ecological significance and its connection to this great author, philosopher and social reformer. In the course of that effort, several ill-advised and environmentally destructive commercial development projects (including a proposed 147,000 square foot office building) were halted in order to protect key sites that were studied by Thoreau and that influenced his writings and philosophy. The historic and ecological impacts of these developments that once threatened Walden Woods are not unlike the devastating impacts that would result from the Middlesex School's expansion into Estabrook Woods.

Thoreau's connection to Estabrook Woods is nearly as strong as his connection to Walden Woods. Shortly after his time at Walden came to an end, his Walden house was relocated to Estabrook Road at the edge of the woods, and he passed by it during his frequent walks through Estabrook country. During the course of his lifetime he wrote extensively about the Estabrook Woods, calling for the area to be preserved. He referred to Estabrook as Concord's primitive forest, "...

where a stick should never be cut for fuel ~ nor for the navy, nor to make wagons, but stand and decay for higher uses ~ a common possession forever, for instruction and recreation.” Further, Thoreau recognized the strong connection between the natural world and education. He wrote, “We boast of our system of education, but why stop at schoolmasters and schoolhouses? We are all schoolmasters, and our schoolhouse is the universe. To attend chiefly to the desk or schoolhouse while we neglect the scenery in which it is placed is absurd.”

Middlesex School has a rare and exciting opportunity to build on the commitment to conservation that began with Monk Terry and, more recently, with the protection of a portion of Estabrook Woods. We call on the Middlesex School Board of Trustees to demonstrate leadership, vision, and stewardship for an area that has an extraordinary history and abounds with recreational and educational opportunities. Surely the preservation of Estabrook Woods takes precedence over the construction of athletic fields, particularly in view of the alternatives that exist. We thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Kathi R. Anderson
Executive Director