

Citizen Petition from Virginia Gray

Whereas community engagement for determining the uses of the Legion property has already occurred as detailed below,

Whereas in 2013 the Town's Park and Recreation Department in its Comprehensive Parks Plan proposed a Community Park for the northeastern part of town,

Whereas a Community Park is defined as 50 acres. The 36.2 acres of the Legion site plus the adjacent 10 acres of Ephesus Park would constitute the Community Park,

Whereas in December 2016 the town bought the Legion land, using funds from unspent fund balances, bond funds for Community Programming Space, and for Parks & Recreation Administrative Space,

Whereas in 2017 the Council appointed a Task Force to plan for the Legion property.

Whereas in 2017 a community charrette involving over 120 participants was held,

Whereas the American Legion Task Force presented its report in November 2017. The Task Force commissioned a citizen survey, which identified Athletic Activities (with citizens ranking court-based sports, indoor sports, and swimming as the top three priorities) and Casual/Passive activities (with citizens ranking taking walks, children's play, and outdoor gatherings as the top three priorities. Also in the Report were staff priorities. The staff said: "This site is the best opportunity for a community park in northeast Chapel Hill. Residential growth nearby underscores the need."

Whereas since early 2020, a hardy band of citizens on a weekly basis have removed invasive species growing on the Legion property, pulled stilt grass, cleared out the forest floor, planted native plants, and constructed trails in the woods and near the stream. There are fifteen regular weekly volunteers plus UNC students, four Scout troops, and members of local civic organizations and churches. They estimate that they spend between 900 and 1000 volunteer hours per year working at the Legion site,

Whereas the 36.2 acres of Legion land contains 8.6 acres of RCD land and 1.3 acres of steeply sloped land, leaving only 28 acres of buildable land. The portion near the stream is topographically challenging and subject to flooding. The remaining 28 acres is composed of two parcels: 19.5 acres from Legion Road to the RCD area and 4.6 acres behind the RCD plus the 3-acre pond,

Whereas in late 2019 the Parks and Recreation Commission voted that all the Legion property should be a Community Park,

Whereas the stock of mature trees on site greatly reduces greenhouse gases and global warming,

Whereas open green space with carbon absorbing soil reduces temperatures and contributes to the Town's climate goals,

Whereas if up to 145 units of housing are built in the woods and at the dance center location, many trees will be sacrificed. There are many different options for affordable housing that the Town has not considered,

Whereas if part of the land is sold for commercial space or for other private uses, even more land useable for a Community Park will be sacrificed,

Whereas ARPA funds could be used to pay for park improvements. Virginia Gray, supported by 67 signatories, proposed to the Town's ARPA process the funding of some necessary repairs; she also copied all Council members. Her proposal cites the \$500,000 necessary to repair or replace the leaking dam and the \$50,000 necessary to raze the Legion building before any park or other use of the Legion land can begin,

Whereas the thousands of new residents in new Blue Hill Apartments deserve a place to recreate. The apartments built in the last few years contain 2070 units; more apartments under construction on Ephesus Church Road or under contract on Fordham Blvd. number 962 units, for a total of 3032 units. If we assume that often more than one person lives in a unit, that means several thousand people have been (or soon will be) added to Blue Hill. Moreover, the four proposed housing developments along Old Chapel Hill Road will add more residents in an adjacent area.

Whereas the hundreds of residents in rental homes all along Legion Road and its side streets, residents in affordable housing on Legion Road such as Greenfield Place, Greenfield Commons (for seniors), Legion Road Townhomes, Colony Woods West, and residents of the entire town deserve a place to recreate,

Whereas the Legion property is the only available open space for a park left in the Town,

Thereby be it resolved that this petition for a Community Park on the Legion site be granted.