

September 5, 2024

Dear Mayor and Town Council,

We are regular users of the meadow throughout all four seasons of the year. Many of us have walked the meadow long before it was taken over by the Town and even called a meadow. We write to voice our serious concerns about the proposal submitted by the Ad Hoc Meadows Committee at the August 12, 2024 Town Council meeting to remove 75 mature native red cedars in the meadow. As discussed in more detail below, the proposal is:

- contrary to the 2013 Operation and Use Plan;
- based on an unsupported view that the meadow is not a meadow;
- drastic and would take years to remediate; and
- not supported by the justifications given.

We urge you to give careful consideration to these arguments before making any decisions about the future state of the meadow.

**The Ad Hoc Committee’s proposal is contrary to the 2013 Operation and Use Plan.**

In their presentation, the Ad Hoc Committee cites the Operation and Use Plan and states that when the Conservation Park was created, the Operation and Use Plan specified that it was to be maintained as a meadow, but “[t]hat hasn’t been happening” and that one of the Ad Hoc Committee’s purposes is to “[r]each out to Montgomery Parks about restoring the meadow.”<sup>1</sup>

What the Ad Hoc Committee does not disclose is that one of the Operation and Use Plan’s stated objectives is to “[c]reate areas within the meadow with woody, early successional vegetation to provide wildlife refuges.”<sup>2</sup> In the section of the Operation and Use Plan that describes “the park management tasks necessary to implement the vision for this new Conservation Park and to provide management of the natural areas during an initial 5-year implementation phase and for the long term,” its recommendation for the initial five-year management of the “Meadow Habitat” is to:

Keep all existing native shrubs and trees that are taller than the deer browse limit (approx.. 4-5’) to provide a variety of habitats within the early succession meadow for birds and wildlife. Species to retain include: . . . Eastern Red Cedar.

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<sup>1</sup> [August 12, 2024 Meadow Committee Update](#), at p. 3.

<sup>2</sup> [Washington Grove Conservation Park 2013 Operation and Use Plan](#), at p. 10. To be clear, the cover page of the Operation and Use Plan says that it is an October 2013 “Staff Draft.” However, our understanding is that the draft was created in collaboration with, and approved by, the Town’s Field Committee at that time, see [December 22, 2023 Daggy Letter](#), at p. 1, is the only memorialization of the objectives and plan for the Conservation Park that we are aware of, and was cited by the Ad Hoc Committee in support of their proposal.

As for the long-term management (years 6 and beyond) the Operation and Use Plan does not call for the removal of any of the existing native trees, including the cedar, one of the species the Operation and Use Plan said “to retain.”<sup>3</sup> The Ad Hoc Committee’s proposal to remove the native cedars directly contradicts the Operation and Use Plan.

**The Ad Hoc Committee’s proposal is based on an unsupported view that the meadow is not a meadow.** As described above, one of the purposes of the Ad Hoc Committee’s proposal to remove the cedars is to restore the meadow. The Ad Hoc Committee, however, does not define what a meadow is or provide any meaningful plan to achieve whatever their view of a meadow is other than to eliminate 75 mature, native cedar trees.

According to the U.S. Forest Service, the “term ‘meadow’ is not a technical term as much as a cultural term. . . . Woody vegetation, like trees or shrubs, can be found in meadows but is not dominant.”<sup>4</sup> Merriam Webster defines meadow as “land that is covered or mostly covered with grass.” Under either definition, the current meadow is a meadow. Removing native cedar trees does not make the meadow a meadow. It’s simply a preferred aesthetic.

*If the meadow were intended to be as the Ad Hoc Committee envisions, why has the Town planted close to three dozen trees in the meadow itself? And why has the Ad Hoc Committee not presented any concrete plan to achieve what it envisions other than removing the 75 native cedar trees? The most threatening woody vegetation in the meadow today are the hundreds of non-native invasive volunteer trees which are currently spread throughout the meadow. There is no concrete proposal to permanently remove these trees. Mowing the meadow annually is not the solution. The tree roots remain and these non-natives invade further each year.*

**The Ad Hoc Committee’s proposal is drastic, would have a profound effect on wildlife, and would take years to remediate.** The cedar trees designated for removal are mature trees and are important to wildlife. According to the National Wildlife Federation:

Red cedars, which are actually junipers, are real workhorses for wildlife. The evergreen offers birds and other wildlife year-round cover from predators and bad weather, along with places to rest, roost and nest. Cedars produce berry-like cones that provide food for birds from early summer through winter. And more than 30 native moths and butterflies, such as Juniper Hairstreak, lay their eggs on red cedar trees.<sup>5</sup>

And as the USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service’s Plant Guide explains:

Red cedar and other junipers are important to wildlife throughout the country. Their twigs and foliage are eaten extensively by hoofed browsers, but the chief attraction to wildlife is the bluish-black berry-like fruit. The cedar waxwing is one of the principal users of red cedar berries, but numerous other birds and mammals, both large and small,

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<sup>3</sup> [Washington Grove Conservation Park 2013 Operation and Use Plan](#), at pp 10-12.

<sup>4</sup> U.S. Forest Service, USDA, ["Meadows: 'Why Are They Important?'"](#)

<sup>5</sup> NWF Blog, ["Ten Favorite Trees for Wildlife"](#).

make these fruits an important part of their diet. In addition to their wildlife food value, cedars provide important protective and nesting cover. Chipping sparrows, robins, song sparrows, and mockingbirds use these trees as one of their favorite nesting sites. Juncos, myrtle warblers, sparrows of various kinds, and other birds use the dense foliage as roosting cover. In winter, their dense protective shelter is especially valuable.<sup>6</sup>

If you walk the meadow as much as we do, you can see and hear for yourself the impact of the cedars on wildlife; the fawns, does and antlered bucks that seek protection under the cedars from the summer's hot sun and winter's blowing snow, and the many birds and butterflies that use the cedars as a source of food, to nest and take refuge, and to propagate. The Operation and Use Plan recognized this potential impact in stating that one of its objectives was to create woody vegetation areas within the meadow "to provide wildlife refuges" and directing that the cedars be kept and retained "to provide a variety of habitats" in the meadow for birds and wildlife.<sup>7</sup> Removing the cedar trees will have a profound effect on this wildlife and what was intended for the meadow.

The cedars provide other protection. While they may not stop the highway noise from 370 and the ICC, they do provide some protection and will provide protection when the lower field (Piedmont Crossing) is eventually paved and developed. If these mature trees are removed, it would take years to bring them back to their current state.

**The Ad Hoc Committee's proposal is not supported by the justifications given.** The Ad Hoc Committee implies in their presentation that the cedars in the meadow are spreading aggressively and that they host rust disease.<sup>8</sup> There is no evidence that the cedars have spread, or are spreading, in the meadow. In fact, if you compare cedars in the meadow today to the picture of the meadow in 2012,<sup>9</sup> you will see that the cedars today are the very same cedars as in 2012 but now – 12 years later – much more mature. Nor is there any evidence that the cedar trees in the meadow are hosting rust disease or, even if they were, that it is causing any harm.<sup>10</sup>

We appreciate the efforts of the Ad Hoc Committee in hosting weed warrior events and their concern about ridding the meadow of non-native invasive plants and trees, which are abundant. Our disagreement is with the proposal to remove native cedar trees for the reasons we state above.

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<sup>6</sup> Natural Resources Conservation Service, USDA, [Eastern Red Cedar Plant Guide](#), at p. 2.

<sup>7</sup> [Washington Grove Conservation Park 2013 Operation and Use Plan](#), at pp. 10-11.

<sup>8</sup> [August 12, 2024 Meadows Committee Update](#), at p. 10.

<sup>9</sup> [August 12, 2024 Meadows Committee Update](#), at p. 9.

<sup>10</sup> Rust disease, also known as cedar-apple, cedar-hawthorn, and cedar-quince rust, is very distinctive in appearance on cedar trees; is not harmful to people, pets or wildlife; is primarily a disease that affects apple and crabapple production; and typically does not kill or harm surrounding trees or plants. Missouri Botanical Garden, [Cedar-Apple-Rust](#); Green Thumbs Garden, [What is Cedar Apple Rust?](#)

We appreciate your consideration. We strongly encourage you to walk the meadow and see for yourself what it is before making any final determination on removing the cedar trees.

Sincerely,

Deb Tarasevich  
Christine Dibble  
Kathi Fletcher  
Liz Gillanders  
Marida Hines  
Terri Johnson  
Tom Land  
Barb Leng  
Alice Negin  
Dan Tutas