

25 March 2021 - **DRAFT**

Lower Merion School District Board of Directors and Lower Merion Township Board of Commissioners,

The Federation of Civics of Lower Merion and Narberth is deeply concerned about the proposal to remove 482+ mature trees on the Lower Merion School District properties of 1800 Montgomery Avenue and 1835 County Line Road. These properties are uniquely beautiful, heavily wooded, and highly environmentally valuable. Mature native trees up to 5' in diameter, dense forest of 80'+ tall trees, and a protected wetland are situated on the properties.

Preliminary calculations by ecologist Dr. Adam Langley of Villanova University's Center for Biodiversity and Ecosystem Management and his class estimate that removal of trees at 1835 County Line Road would likely release 15,000 metric tons of CO₂ into the atmosphere—equivalent to the annual carbon emissions of 3,200 vehicles. He estimates that it would take at least a century to restore the tree biomass carbon and even longer to recover the soil carbon that will be lost.

We believe that replacing the mature tree canopy (at least 75%) with grass will create irreparable harm that cannot be compensated through replacement tree plantings. Oaks that are possibly hundreds of years old will not likely regrow in multiple lifetimes. Migrating and resident birds will lose valuable and historic nesting and roosting habitat as well as food to sustain flight and rear young. This type of property is more appropriate for low-impact activities that do not disturb the vital and complex ecological processes on site.

Both of our government bodies—Lower Merion Township and LMSD—are currently embracing more sustainable ways forward. Lower Merion Township is planning to write and implement a Sustainability/Greenhouse Gas Reduction plan and is considering adopting a Net Zero Carbon Emission resolution. It is also spending heavily on efforts to mitigate stormwater and erosion in our watersheds. LMSD's policies emphasize a commitment to environmental stewardship as a core value of the school community including water and soil conservation management as well as integrated environmental education at all levels. Facilitating deforestation of these properties will in contrast limit our capacity to achieve these important long-term goals on behalf of our future—including the future for our children whom we are trying to benefit with field space.

Removing valuable healthy trees with public money is an affront to modern day planning and development which rightly emphasizes environmental and financial stewardship, low impact development, and preservation of the urban canopy upon which we depend for stormwater services, carbon sequestration and storage, habitat, and filtration of pollutants from air and soil—and more.

We implore both Lower Merion Township and the Lower Merion School District to collaborate to fully explore ALL options for alternative field space within Lower Merion in order to preserve unique natural community assets and to meet long-term sustainability goals. We hope that the inherent high value of the trees will be treated as assets instead of liabilities for the benefit of all children and all Lower Merion residents now and into the future.

Sincerely,