



Washtenaw County Parks and Recreation Commission

March 13, 2014

Mr. Mark Keezer, Supervisor
Lyndon Township
17751 N. Territorial Road
Chelsea, Michigan 48118

Subject: **McCoig Material – Special Land Use Permit**
Parcel ID #'s E-05-22-300-006 and E-05-22-300-007

Dear Supervisor Keezer:

On the evening of March 11, 2014, the Washtenaw County Parks and Recreation Commission (WCPARC) voted unanimously to express their concern and opposition to the approval of a Special Use Permit for the removal of sand and gravel on the above referenced parcels in Lyndon Township.

The two parcels, 190 acres in total, are owned by the Donald T. and Janet L. Cunningham Trust. The Cunningham property is bordered by the Waterloo State Recreation Area, over 20,000 acres; the Pinckney State Recreation Area over 11,000 acres; and Washtenaw County's own Park Lyndon, 340 acres. In total, well over 31,000 acres of public land has been protected for its ecosystem, unique localized habitats, and its recreational value - land that was painstakingly assembled over many decades by people who recognized the intrinsic value of protecting our unique natural areas and water resources for the sustainability and enjoyment of future generations.

It's important to note that the subject property is actually at the *junction* of the Waterloo State Recreation Area, the Pinckney State Recreation Area, and Park Lyndon County Park -- right in the middle. It shares the same natural attributes and sensitivity as the protected land that surrounds it. Simply put, the natural systems so highly valued and so critical to our own survival don't recognize property lines, they transcend them. The physical characteristics of the Cunningham property clearly suggest that it should be part of that larger body of protected land, not industrialized.

We believe the proposed use is grossly inappropriate for this particular site, and that this is a legacy

decision for those charged with that responsibility. Approving the Special Use Permit, essentially a 30 year mining agreement, will undeniably have measureable impacts on our environment and community for generations to come. That is unavoidable; this land will never be the same if a permit is granted.

The question isn't will this activity have a negative impact, the question is how great will that negative impact be? And, why should our community have to accept any negative impacts, environmental exposure or uncertainties? The burden of proof rests with the applicant. The consequences are real and for the most part irreversible. They are extremely serious. What is the ultimate cost to the community? Will we continue to build upon the work of the visionaries that came before us, creating one of the most significant natural systems in the Midwest, or will we allow it to decline by allowing this project, and those that would follow, to proceed?

There are other options. As a neighboring property owner, the Washtenaw County Park and Recreation Commission has been interested in acquiring the Cunningham property for over thirty years. Previous directors of the parks department have had direct discussions with the Cunningham family on multiple occasions over those years, and at times it appeared that the family was in agreement and interested in protecting the land.

It is important to note that the Washtenaw County Parks and Recreation Commission manages the County's Natural Areas Preservation Program (NAPP). NAPP was established in 2000 and is supported by a voter approved millage intended expressly for the purpose of acquiring and protecting natural areas throughout the County, and allowing appropriate public access. The Cunningham property would be among the best land ever nominated for the program. Several times over the past couple years, we have provided the Cunningham family with the NAPP application form and background information regarding the program. Each time we have expressed our continued interest in seeing the property protected. The Natural Areas Preservation Program gives us the resources to make that interest a reality.

The Michigan Department of Natural Resources has also had a long term interest in protecting the property, and has offered to work with the applicant to find a site of equal resource value (sand and gravel) without the same ecological sensitivity. Both agencies would support acquisition by the other. We are not in competition, we share a common objective. We want to protect the land. If the property owner is willing, there are better alternatives to three decades of ecological and cultural disruption.

The nature of the business proposed for this site is also not consistent with the rural character of the Township. Denying that it will have a negative impact on the quality of life and adjacent property values is delusional. The environmental degradation would be obvious and permanent. Again, it would never be the same. As a neighboring property owner, we believe this proposal will have a negative impact on the ecological value of Park Lyndon, particularly Lake Genevieve, a geologic remnant of the ice age (the lower shores of which are actually on the Cunningham property) and the fen in Park Lyndon North.

Further, the traffic associated with this proposal would irreparably harm the quality of life of Chelsea residents. Suggesting that an additional 120 to 160 gravel trucks per day driving through the two-lane (with parking) central business district of Chelsea with stop lights on every corner is reasonable and will cause no negative impact is also ridiculous. The current level-of-service provided by the transportation network in downtown Chelsea during peak travel times is already unacceptable, with traffic backed up for blocks, every single weekday. Claims to the contrary cannot be substantiated with data. Everybody in the community knows this.

And with that congestion, particularly from those large trucks transporting the sand and gravel to destinations outside our community, our air quality will be diminished. More traffic, slower traffic, more pollution. Would those trucks still operate on regional Ozone Action Days, when citizens are encouraged to avoid re-fueling vehicles or operating gas powered equipment in an attempt to maintain acceptable air quality standards? Of course they would, and the air quality of our community would be even more negatively impacted. Extend that over a thirty year period and the health implications are compounded.

In closing, we believe that exposing the ecological sensitivity of this property and the surrounding protected land to any potential risk is unnecessary and avoidable. The serious consequences for the community begin when that first shovel is put in the ground. There is no guarantee that surface water and groundwater won't be diminished or polluted while our resources are being removed over the next thirty years. That risk is not worth it under any circumstances.

The off site impacts are equally alarming. Who wants to live next to an industrial mining operation? The quality of life and property values will most definitely be impacted. The quiet enjoyment of rural life will be gone, and the value of the most significant investment most people have will be reduced. Is the applicant so confident that this won't happen that they would agree to reimburse nearby residents should their property values not keep pace with adjoining townships?

And further from the site, the traffic would bring nothing but negative impacts to the residents and businesses of the City of Chelsea. Congestion, air pollution and safety issues are unavoidable with an increase in traffic as described by the applicant. You don't have to be a traffic engineer to realize that.

The protected land that we enjoy so close to home is the envy of communities throughout the State and the nation. As described on the Department of Natural Resources website, it is a paradise for backpackers, mountain bikers, anglers and other recreation enthusiasts. It is nationally known for its extensive trail system; a chain of excellent fishing lakes; 47 miles of multi-use trail; developed campgrounds and remote campsites; cabins and equestrian trails; beaches; and picnic areas.

Essentially, what the Township and the State of Michigan have been presented with is a "Don't Worry, Be Happy" proposal. It is quite apparent, however, that the community is justifiably

worried, very worried. The Washtenaw County Parks and Recreation Commission shares that concern and looks forward to providing whatever assistance is necessary to bring this issue to a reasonable conclusion.

Sincerely,

Robert L. Tetens, Director
Washtenaw County Parks and Recreation Commission

cc: Lyndon Township Board of Trustees
Lyndon Township Planning Commission
Sylvan Township Board of Trustees
Sylvan Township Planning Commission
Chelsea Village Council
State Senator Rebekah Warren
State Representative Gretchen Driskell
State Representative Jeff Irwin
State Representative Adam Zemke
State Representative David Rutledge
County Commissioner Kent Martinez-Kratz
County Commissioner Yousef Rahbi