

# BAILIWICK NEWS

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## **Pine Hall Forest: A Ferguson Township Treasure at Risk**

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### *A Forgotten Forest*

Pine Hall Forest is 65 acres of mature woods bordering Old Gatesburg Road and extending almost a half-mile along Blue Course Drive.

It holds Pennsylvania's premier natives: oaks, maples, black cherry and white pine. Many are giants, 10 stories tall.

These 30,000 trees feed and shelter abundant birds and wildlife. The forest also filters our region's drinking water.

Well over a century old, the forest has survived two world wars and our region's growth from a village to a small city.

### *What Could Happen*

Pine Hall Traditional Town Development (TTD) proposes 150 acres of commercial buildings, housing and parking. Plans show that 85%, or 56 acres, of Pine Hall Forest will be cut down. The remains will not be a forest, but nine fragmented acres of trees: a fringe along one edge. Along Blue Course Drive will be parking lots a half-mile long. Parking lots and stormwater detention basins will each exceed the acreage of the remaining trees.

Public hearing: Monday, August 5, 7:00 pm, Ferguson Township Municipal Building, 3147 Research Drive.

### *What Ferguson Township Stands For*

Ferguson has claimed Tree City USA status for three years. Ferguson's TTD Tree Preservation Ordinance's states: "...wooded areas shall be protected to prevent unnecessary destruction. At least 40% of the trees (of at least 5" diameter trunks) shall be maintained or replaced."

Additionally, Ferguson's Environmental Bill of Rights endorses citizen rights to pure water, clean air, rights of natural communities and a sustainable future.

### *What the Developer Says it Stands For*

Residential Housing, Inc, of Houston, Texas, the developer of Pine Hall, states on its website: "The [Pine Hall] Woodlands protects and celebrates the site's existing trees." If so, then its TTD needs to protect Pine Hall Forest.

### *A Better Option For Now...*

Traditional Town Development is a good concept – it promotes denser growth in community centers to prevent sprawl further out. Built areas of this TTD can be made denser by allowing higher buildings, using more parking decks rather than surface parking, and reducing the forest-eating stormwater basins. Ferguson could reduce required parking.

Critically, the Township must require trees to be maintained, not replaced. (New 2" diameter "replacement" saplings are 1/1000 of the size – and carbon storage and wildlife value – of the forest giants they replace.)

The benefit of these changes? 40%, or about 26 acres, of mature forest preserved in a compact parcel, actively managed for healthy habitat, and enjoyable for walking, jogging and biking. The developer can achieve most of its aims, with far less impact.

An ancient, intact forest – even a small one – would be a spectacular amenity for the new Pine Hall residents. This would be a true 21<sup>st</sup>-century TTD: really smart growth.

### *And a Plan for the Future*

Let's help our townships and region work together to strengthen protections for local forests. This is urgent as other new developments, such as Patton Crossing, deforest our region. Let's require maintenance, not replacement, of existing trees. Let's start thinking in terms of big-tree canopies – with their built-in ecosystems – to manage rainfall: an accepted, progressive approach to stormwater management resulting in smaller and fewer stormwater basins. Big trees, besides all their other benefits, are free. Woods in our backyards are an amenity for everyone: no need to get in a car and drive.

Please consider attending and speaking at the public hearing, currently scheduled for Monday August 5, 7:00 p.m. at Ferguson Township Municipal Building.



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