

Cattail, LC.
Joyce and Henry Harris
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August 13, 2021

Mr. Rob Donaldson
Project Manager, Land Use Review
Department of Planning and Zoning
1 Harrison Street, SE, 3rd Floor
Leesburg, Virginia 20175

RE: SPEX-2021-0025, Scott Jenkins Memorial Park

Dear Mr. Donaldson,

We write to inform you that we are opposed to the Loudoun County Department of Transportation & Capital Infrastructure's SPEX-2021-0025 application to provide lighting for Scott Jenkins Memorial Park.

We strongly disagree with the applicant's statement that "The development of the site will not negatively impact the area in any unusual or significant way above or beyond what is normal for a site of this nature."

We oppose this application for the following reasons:

Our family owns over 800 acres of land directly south of Scott Jenkins Memorial Park that is under a conservation easement held by the Nature Conservancy. One of the primary purposes of this easement is "to ensure that the property will be retained forever predominantly in its natural and scenic condition."

The Loudoun County Comprehensive Plan encourages the use of open space easements to protect agricultural resources, preserve farms, forests and open space and the rural character of the landscape in Rural Areas (Chapter 4 – Land Use, Comprehensive Plan for the Town of Hamilton and JLMA 2003-2020).

Additionally, the preservation of the property through the conservation easement furthers the goals of the Comprehensive Plan to “*conserve agricultural resources and avoid environmental pollution which would degrade the farmland, the natural environment and the surrounding communities*” (Chapter 6 – Natural Resources- Hamilton, Comprehensive Plan for the Town of Hamilton and JLMA 2003-2020).

In 2011, we included provisions in our conservation easement that allow the establishment of a non-commercial nature park on our land. At that time, we began discussions with NOVA Parks about developing and donating a Dark Sky Park on the northwest slope of Catoctin Mountain, where we have a high open field (over 10 acres, elevations over 550 feet) that looks directly to the west and north and is shielded by the mountain from the glare of artificial lighting originating around Leesburg and points east. The aspect of the sky at this site would be directly impacted by artificial lighting at Jenkins Park (elevation about 530 feet), which would make it pointless to establish a Dark Sky Park there.

Additionally, our family has explored building and utilizing greenhouses on our property for agriculture/horticulture crops. [The vast majority of our land (about 600 acres) is currently used for crop production, and one member of our family has prior experience in greenhouse operations.] The potential location for our greenhouses --- where we already have existing infrastructure, including road access, power, and sewer and water --- is about 1500 feet south of the southernmost ballfield.

Many greenhouse crops are genetically programmed to set buds on strict schedules for day and night. This is referred to as photoperiodism. Any use of artificial light -- including lights from athletic fields -- beyond these schedules will negatively impact greenhouse crops and not allow the plant to grow appropriately.

Allowing lights in Jenkins Park would make it impossible for us to use greenhouses for growing future crops.

Our conservation easement, one of the largest in Loudoun County, protects wildlife. Bald eagles, hawks, wild turkeys, bear, coyotes, deer, and numerous

insects, amphibians and migrating birds rely on the natural and scenic condition of our property.

Many animals on our property are active at night and sleep during the day. Birds use moonlight and starlight to migrate or hunt. Artificial lights cause them to migrate off-cycle and can radically alter their night time environment by turning night into day.

According to the International Dark Sky Association, *“Scientific evidence suggests that artificial light at night has negative and deadly effects on many creatures including amphibians, birds, mammals, insects and plants.”*

Allowing lights in Jenkins Park will create light pollution (sky glow, glare, light trespass, light clutter) that will negatively impact wildlife and nocturnal ecology on our property.

Finally, there are at least 25 or more residences, including ours, on the south side of Route 7 within ½ mile of the ballfields. Six residences are immediately adjacent to the west or north side of the park.

To date, we have welcomed and co-exist harmoniously with the park, in part because lights are not permitted so games must end on or before sundown. However, if lights up to 80 feet high are permitted in Jenkins Park and are allowed to remain on until 11pm., residents will feel as though they are living opposite Nationals Park. Residents will be negatively impacted by sky glow, light glare, light spillage onto adjacent properties, accompanying noise, and traffic until late in the night. This is not and should never be the norm for rural areas of the County. This will negatively impact work habits and sleep patterns for all, especially children and the elderly.

Once the sun is down, the quiet night should belong to residents who live in the surrounding area, as is normal and customary for rural areas of the County. They should not be disturbed by artificial light and noise associated with athletic fields.

Finally, note that our conservation easement with the Nature Conservancy states that outdoor lighting is permitted provided ***“it is placed no more than twenty (20) feet high and not more than fifty (50) feet away from any improvement located***

on the property...” This should give you a sense of how much the quiet night sky supports the scenic and natural condition of our property and neighboring areas. Lights that are 80 feet high will significantly degrade the normal and customary, scenic and natural conditions of the properties surrounding Scott Jenkins Memorial Park.

We ask that the County consider our reasons for opposing lights on Jenkins Park to help protect one of Loudoun County’s largest conservation easements and not approve of SPEX-2021-0025.

Sincerely,

Joyce and Henry Harris
Cattail, LC.