Dear Friends,

Here are some example paragraphs and sentences including the FACTS that you can use to write your own comment letter to the MEPA (Massachusetts Environmental Policy Act) office.

Scan the suggestions below if you need a few ideas.

We encourage you to write about your own concerns and the environmental damage associated with this project that you care most about.

All comment letters are read and counted by MEPA officials. We are offering the facts below to help you form your letter. Feel free to modify the language to match your own voice and perspective. Even a short letter can make a difference!

Thank you for your time.

Visit: Nemtforest.org
Questions: nemtforestoutreach@gmail.com

Ideas for Introduction of your letter:

I am writing to request a full review and Environmental Impact Report (EIR) based on the damage to the environment this project will cause.

I am writing because the purpose of MEPA is to: "provide meaningful opportunities for public review of the potential environmental impacts of Projects " 301 CMR 11.01(1).

This is a case where damage to the environment can be avoided.

The NEMT school campus has acres of developed land where they can locate the school that will meet the educational program goals.

There is no undue hardship to the Project to simply conduct an EIR to document the full extent of environmental damage.

I support both Vocational training as well as the new vocational school. It is only the building design and location to which we object. We do not want to "stop" this project; we merely want the new school to be built on a different site that is less expensive and more accessible to everyone, no matter their physical abilities.

Please help us prevent the senseless destruction of over 2000 trees on over 13 acres of rare wildlife habitat and wetlands. The public is still largely in the dark over this terrible choice. The trees will be cut, roots grubbed out, soil removed and a massive months-long blasting operation to reduce the height of the hill may begin in March 2023.

Most did not know until recently what building the new school on the forested hilltop site would entail. Many who voted to fund the new school did not know where it would be built. They are now horrified to learn that the forest will be demolished when they thought it would be built on the playing fields.

Biodiversity includes life at the gene, species, and ecosystem levels and is the foundation of the world we know. The food we eat, water we drink, and medicine we take are services that depend on the multitude of species that inhabit our planet.

“The one process now going on, that will take millions of years to correct, is the loss of genetic and species diversity **by the destruction of natural habitats**. This is the folly our descendants are least likely to forgive us.” Dr. E.O. Wilson

Facts for your letter:

This forest is Wakefield’s last area of designated forest core habitat on the Massachusetts BioMap, the goal of which is to identify and protect important lands and waters for conserving biological diversity in Massachusetts.

This is an irreplaceable historic pine-oak rock outcrop forest, home to rare and endangered species in an area known for ancient Native American sites. This should not be the site of a massive 383,000 square foot building, parking lots and 0.5 mile driveway. A 650-foot-long access road along the western boundary of the site will require rock blasting, leaving a 30-35 foot high cliff which will require signs and hazard fencing at the top and a 12-ft rock catchment ditch and guard rails at the bottom with ongoing maintenance to keep rockfalls off the road.

There will be “a mass tree clearing operation and mass rock blasting operation" on over 13 acres of the forested hilltop. The blasting operation will be destructive to the environment and generate rock debris that will be transported for processing to a rock crushing location behind the current school site. Blasting operations on this scale generate high levels of noise, vibration, dust and use hazardous blasting chemicals that can damage groundwater and the surrounding environment.

The new access road from Farm St. will pave over habitat, wetlands, pools. The road will require blasting upland habitat a few feet inside Farm St. Further on, they will blast again for a catchment basin because there is so much water.

The 0.5 mile “driveway” built through the forest will have only a 0 – 25-foot buffer to the wetland and pools. Buffers less than 25 ft do not function to reduce disturbance to adjacent wetlands. The importance of buffer zones to protect wetland resource areas is recognized by both state and federal agencies. Buffer zones protect water quality, groundwater supply, prevent pollution, provide flood control and are habitat for wildlife.

The extensive several month blasting operation may contaminate the water with toxic chemicals including nitrates. Blasting will cause fracturing of the underlying hydrology that may impact areas outside the areas subject to blasting and send potentially contaminated groundwater to neighboring wetlands and abutting private residences.

Amphibians need clean water for several months until the young can develop enough to leave the pools.

The land surrounding the raised road, parking lots and sidewalks will be impacted by de-icing chemicals containing chloride, harmful to the nearby wetlands and vernal pools.

Water flow, drainage, recharge of the pools, amphibian migration will be damaged, if not destroyed. It is likely that small wildlife will become trapped by the roadway and roadway drainage systems.

Old forests are an ecosystem developed over centuries. Trees develop a mycorrhizal network (an underground network found in forests and other plant communities). Over 2000 trees will be cut down. All vegetation will be cleared. The soil will be grubbed out. Then blasting will reduce the height of the hill by 35 ft by 650 ft in length to create a flat pad for the school.

This is an Oak, White Pine and Hickory tree forest vegetated with lowbush blueberry, highbush blueberry and huckleberry. Oaks support more life than any other tree. The soil is rich and black from sequestering carbon, old trees sequester more carbon. In addition to acorns, oaks host over 400 species of lepidoptera (butterfly and moth) caterpillars, more than any other native tree or plant. These caterpillars are the primary food source for migrating and breeding birds. They are essential food for baby birds. The NEMT forest is a food forest. The birds know.

There are more than 100 species of birds that live in or migrate through this forest. The state listed Eastern Whip-Poor-Will is in this forest, newly documented. Eastern Whip-poor-will, Scarlet Tanager, American Woodcock, Wood Thrush, Prairie Warbler, Field Sparrow, Eastern Towhee, are officially species of greatest conservation need https://www.mass.gov/info-details/massachusetts-species-of-greatest-conservation-need-sgcn#birds . All have been seen in this forest. Indigo Bunting can be found here and the Golden-crowned Kinglets that overwinter in the forest are a treat to see and hear.

Go to www.nemtforest.org/ > seasons in the sanctuary > Beauty in biodiversity to see pictures.

The MA endangered species Hentz' red bellied tiger beetle lives in this forest. This beetle is only found in rock outcrop forests north of Boston. It is a specialist, not a generalist. Specialists do not adapt to changes and are in greater need of protection. If we blast away this habitat the beetle is extirpated from that location.

There has not been an archeological survey done in this forest. This needs to be done to protect ancient sites or materials before they are destroyed. Native Americans lived in this area near the Saugus and Mill Rivers and many sites were destroyed in the past when building roads in Breakheart Reservation.

The elected representatives on the building committee with the power to make the decisions for the site of the new NEMT school are using $141 million in state funding through the paid for by all Massachusetts taxpayers without considering the archaeological and environmental impacts or ever undergoing environmental review. The burden of the most expensive building option falls disproportionately on the communities who can least afford it, Chelsea and Revere. Winchester pays less than 1% of the building cost, while Chelsea and Revere together pay 40% of the costs borne by the 12 sending communities.

This is very disturbing considering the added expense, destruction, heavy blasting, threats to all the wetlands and certified vernal pools in the area, the negative impacts on abutters, as well as the permanent removal of over 2,000 trees and an entire ecosystem.

As we become more educated about climate change, we know that removing trees and forest ecosystems is simply not reasonable. We know better now. The forest is not just a bunch of trees

as some have said. It is an interconnected system of CO2-consuming trees that support life for hundreds of species. These 2,000+ trees cannot be replaced because replanting individual trees is not the same as an interconnected ecosystem.

There is no undue hardship for the Project to change the site to the other nearby sites that has been evaluated and found to meet all the criteria used by the MSBA (Massachusetts School Building Authority). This would protect the forested hillside containing wetlands, a certified vernal pool, potential vernal pools, ephemerals steams and seeps.

Ideas for Closing Statements:

We request that you require a full MEPA review including an Environmental Impact Report of this Project, in consideration of the extensive environmental damage that will occur if the Project moves forward.

Anything less than a full Environmental Impact Report would place an undue hardship on the current and future citizens of the Commonwealth who will bear the loss of this ecosystem, forest core habitat, biodiversity and historic and archaeological resources at a time when protection of these natural resources must be prioritized.

A huge project like this should not proceed without the proper reviews: an environmental review, an archaeological review (to determine whether it involves the destruction of an Indigenous Heritage site), and a review that examines the effects upon endangered species.

If the forested hilltop site is used and the school is built on a blasted and the site deforested, the adverse effects will resonate throughout the immediate community and among all the areas the school serves for years to come.