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COMMUNITY REJECTS CITY'S PLAN TO PAVE GREENSPACE FOR PARKING LOT

COMMUNITY GATHERING TO "SAVE MORLEY FIELD" SCHEDULED FOR SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 3RD, 4:00PM 94 MOSHASSUCK STREET, PAWTUCKET

[Pawtucket, RI - Sept. 1, 2022] - Morley Field, the only youth sports field and public recreational green space in the densely populated Pawtucket neighborhood of Woodlawn, is in danger of being paved over to create a parking lot. Concerned neighbors have organized a community gathering to voice their opposition to the plan near the site at 94 Moshassuck St., on Saturday, Sept. 3rd at 4:00pm.

For the children and families who live nearby, Morley Field is an invaluable oasis in this densely populated corner of the city. That's one reason many neighbors attended a meeting two weeks ago at the Pawtucket City Hall to speak out against the plan to turn it into a parking lot. Morley Field is also a rare public access point to the Moshassuck River, and home to nesting osprey protected by the Migratory Bird Treaty Act.

Organizers of the rally say the plan is an example of environmental injustice, targeting an historically underserved community. The Woodlawn neighborhood is approximately 74% people of color, 59% people living at or below the poverty rate, and 29% children. Many people in this working-class neighborhood live in multi-family homes, often with no backyard. Since its designation as a National Park Service protected public recreational field in the 1970s, local families have used Morley Field for youth organized sports including the Woodlawn Cowboys football team, the Pawtucket Youth Soccer Organization and little league games. In addition, residents have used it for picnics, reunions, and as a place to relax and breathe.

"The City's plan to pave over the only large recreational green space in District 5 is just shameful," said Pawtucket resident Jennifer Stewart. "Every community should have access to green space and forcing people to leave their neighborhood and go elsewhere in search of green space is just wrong. Parks like Morley Field are one way we can mitigate the effects of the climate crisis, like the heat wave we experienced this summer, especially in densely populated neighborhoods. I hope the city will reassess, and do better for the families in Woodlawn."

Pawtucket City Councilor Clovis Gregor, who represents District 5, including the Woodlawn community, explained, “The loss of Morley Field will have a substantial & profound impact on the health and well being of our community. The children of District 5 deserve the same opportunity for healthy green space and recreational activities as are available in all other districts in this city. Preserving green space in this community is a moral imperative.”

Morley Field was originally created in the 1970s with funding from the National Park Service’s Land & Water Conservation Fund Assistance, and a gift from its namesake, William H. Morley, for the purpose that it be maintained as a youth recreational field. Councilor Gregor points out that it’s sale by the City of Pawtucket is specifically prohibited by statute (R.I. G.L. § 45-2-6), which states that land acquired by gift for public use, “is not subject to disposition.” For this reason, Councilor Gregor argues, the resolution authorizing Pawtucket to sell Morley Field should have never been brought before the City Council.

The developers of the new proposed trucking depot being built on the 10.2-acre former Microfiber site, plan to use Morley Field for an additional parking lot, and in exchange would fund a new park between the Riverside Cemetery and Max Read Field in the Oak Hill neighborhood. This would deprive Woodlawn of its one and only green space, while adding another park in the Oak Hill section of District 4, which is adjacent to Blackstone Boulevard on the Eastside of Providence.

The City claims that, in the process of moving forward with its plan to sell it, Morley Field was discovered to be contaminated. However, it was the City and not the RI Dept. of Environmental Management which closed the field. Organizers of the rally on Saturday point out that there doesn’t seem to have been any analysis of what could be done to remediate any contamination at Morley Field. Instead, they say, the discovered contamination has been used to justify paving it over for a parking lot. They argue the City needs to listen to the people who have enjoyed Morley Field for decades, and instead of turning this valuable green space into a parking lot, invest in environmental justice and equity.