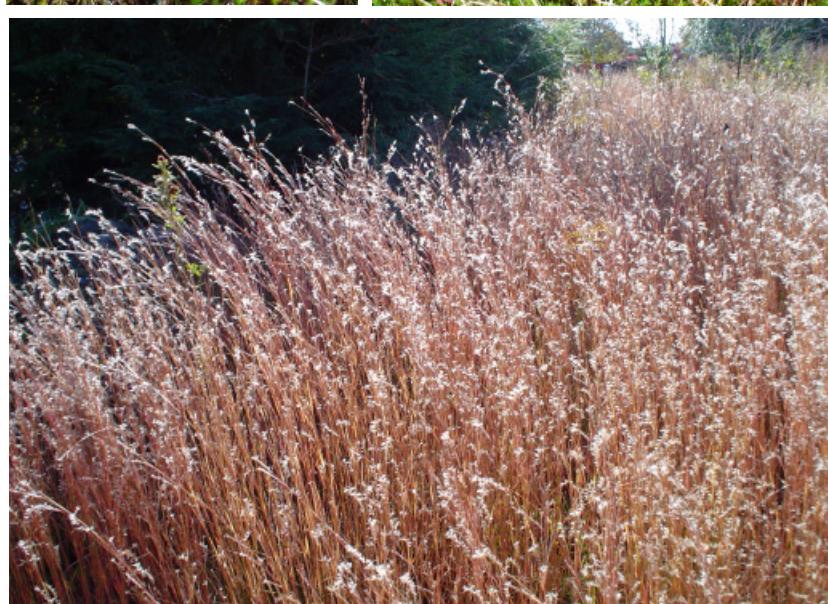


The Sharon Soccer Association has proposed an additional soccer field to be built on town-owned land in Sharon Woods across the street from the existing soccer fields for the purpose of scheduling flexibility. It is important to be aware of what will be lost, as well as what will be gained, before deciding which way to vote on this matter.

When the Sharon Woods development was constructed, the land on the north side of Gavins Pond Road was set aside as open space, in exchange for permission to build a more clustered development on the south side of the road. Thus, an oasis of contiguous wildlife habitat with Billings Brook meandering through it was preserved amid a landscape increasingly characterized by suburban sprawl. It is an important wildlife corridor linking nearby woodlands with Gavins Pond, Billings Brook and the Atlantic white cedar swamp. Many wildlife species depend on freedom to move from one area to another in search of food and breeding habitat as conditions change from season to season.



This habitat is unique and valuable. Its sandy, permeable soil, coupled with its proximity to the waters of Billings Brook and Gavins Pond, supports an unusual ecosystem inhabited by diverse, colorful and interesting wildlife. A wide variety of species depends directly or indirectly on the seeds and insects found in the grasses, mosses, lichens and flowers interspersed with pines, oaks, and birches. The plant community is surprisingly diverse, and provides food and habitat for wildlife.



Birds found in this area include goldfinches, cedar waxwings, chickadees, tufted titmice, rose-breasted grosbeaks, indigo buntings, flickers, woodpeckers, nuthatches, yellowthroats, rufus-sided towhees, bluebirds, cardinals, redwing blackbirds, killdeers, chipping sparrows, blue jays, mockingbirds, orioles, kingbirds, and hawks. In spring, woodcocks nest in the grassy areas, and perform their spectacular mating flights at dusk, spiraling upwards 300 feet and then tumbling back to the ground, punctuating the end of the ritual with a distinctive “peent” amid the spring peepers. Over a dozen species of warblers migrate through Sharon, relying on food from increasingly rare open space to fuel their journey. Prairie warblers, which nest in the Gavins Pond field, remain all summer. Breeding Bird Surveys (BBS) show recent declines in most of the prairie warbler’s range.



Other interesting and beautiful creatures also inhabit or pass through this parcel of land, such as deer and rabbits. Turtles from Billings Brook and Gavins Pond lay their eggs in the sandy soil. Spectacular green luna moths, monarch butterflies and dragonflies provide flashes of color.



We should try harder to find a solution to the soccer issue that does not involve sacrificing valuable wildlife habitat. For example, the playing fields at the East Elementary School become flooded after rain storms, cutting into playing time. Why not apply a layer of topsoil from the surplus at Hunter's Ridge and grade it so the field drains properly? By repairing the fields at East Elementary, additional field time could be created to help alleviate scheduling problems.

Sharon's diversified ecosystems provide an oasis for a spectacular diversity of wildlife in a landscape increasingly homogenized by suburban sprawl. Unless we make a concerted effort to protect and preserve what remains of wildlife habitat in Sharon, we will deprive future generations of the opportunity to experience first-hand the natural wonders at our doorstep.

