

To: Symmes Advisory Committee
From: Arlington Open Space Committee
Re: Open Space at Symmes
Date: January 23, 2003

In the summer of 2001 the Arlington Open Space Committee reviewed the open space resources of the Symmes site and produced a memo (August 14, 2001) describing and mapping the various sections in regards to their value as open space. As discussions and plans have progressed for this site over the last year, we believe it is important to again state our views regarding open space at Symmes.

First, we acknowledge and agree with the Board of Selectmen's commitment to protect 50 percent of the land as open space. In particular, we strongly support maintaining and enhancing the existing wooded areas along the ridge and at the bottom of the hill adjacent to Summer Street, for the following reasons:

- The Summer Street frontage is the gateway to the Symmes property and as such must present a welcoming face. Open space is the most attractive way to do this.
- Arlington as a whole has very little open space, especially in certain neighborhoods. The Symmes section of Summer Street is one of those neighborhoods that would benefit greatly by retention of green space in a well-traveled part of town.
- Once developed, open space is essentially lost forever. Will the residents of Arlington in future decades most appreciate a wooded park along that section of Summer Street or just another neighborhood of dense buildings?
- A wooded public area of a comparable size at the top of the hill would be much less accessible for residents from other areas of town or from the bikeway.
- While the site needs landscape improvements to be even more attractive, it does have some mature trees and diversity of plant species. There is no equivalent wooded area on the upper portion of the Symmes site. Creating such an area would be expensive and it would require decades for new trees to reach maturity.

Second, the Open Space Committee is aware that the Arlington Cemetery Commission is proposing a memorial grove/columbarium for the Summer Street part of the Symmes site. We understand the town's need for such a facility and agree that this location might offer an appropriate setting. However, we would support this development only if the memorial grove is conceived and designed of the highest quality as an attractive wooded space first and an internment area second. If developed properly, with public access to the top of the site via modest trails, this kind of public use could complement our goals of open space preservation and habitat protection for birds and other wildlife.

Some of our concerns about this type of development on this particular site are the provision of the requisite parking and access paths for visitors, many of them elderly or disabled, and the need for maintenance activities that could impinge on the quiet beauty of the space. We believe the Cemetery Commission understands these concerns and is working to accommodate them. We will continue to review the design options for a memorial grove within this wooded area, and we will comment further on those plans as they are become formalized.