

Printed in the Milton Times on May 11, 2023

To the Editor:

We write today with an issue of ongoing concern for Milton – the illegal, dangerous, and escalating use of the Cunningham Park woods as a gathering spot for high school students during nighttime hours. Our hope is to engage parents of teens and other members of our community to help us eradicate the use of the park as an underage party venue.

Anyone who has walked through the woods at Cunningham Park knows of the extensive litter found in the sunken area known by some as “the pit.” Broken glass, crushed beer cans, smashed liquor bottles and empty “nips” regularly appear in this area. Bonfires are also routinely lit around this gathering spot.

Teens gathering in Cunningham Park after hours are exposing themselves and the community to multiple dangers. Beyond the underage drinking and drugs, brawls with gangs from neighboring communities have occurred, as have fights between our own Milton high school students. Recent incidents of police interventions at the park – several instances since the new year including one most recently on St. Patrick’s Day - have resulted in police being attacked by students, and underage partiers being arrested.

In partnership with the Milton Police, and the Milton Coalition, we ask those Milton parents who may have actively condoned or passively accepted having their teens go to the Cunningham woods in the past, please consider the potential consequences before there is a tragedy. By looking the other way, or even transporting your children to the woods after dark, you are putting your children and their friends at undue risk. Your children are not safe in the woods, and they are breaking the law, as Cunningham Park – which includes the wooded area in question – is private land where entering the grounds after sunset is prohibited. From a legal perspective, you are abetting your child’s illegal behavior, and are therefore liable should any harm result to them or to others.

Our sincerest hope is that, going forward, Milton’s teens will begin to respect the No Trespassing rules at our Park, such that the police will have no cause to pursue or detain any students who may be on the premises after sunset. We prefer not to take further action to protect our town’s youth, and an asset which is valued by many within our community.

Milton is a wonderful town and a special place in which to raise a family. We all have a stake in protecting our youth and respecting the private property of those who live here. Parents of teens: please do your part by preventing your children from having party nights in the woods – and help them find other ways of entertaining themselves which don’t involve breaking the law at Cunningham Park.

Respectfully,

The Cunningham Park Foundation Board

Tony Will, Chair
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To the Editor:

Two weeks ago, the Cunningham Park Foundation Board wrote a letter to the Milton Times imploring parents to keep their teens from gathering at night in Cunningham Park to socialize, drink, and use drugs. The Milton Coalition (formerly the Milton Substance Abuse Prevention Coalition) wholeheartedly agrees that it is time for community-wide engagement to address “the woods.”

Partying in the woods has been a part of Milton culture for generations, but it is high time we change. Underage alcohol use is a complex problem and there are no simple solutions. This problem will only be solved with a range of responses from multiple perspectives. Your help is needed.

Based on the work the Milton Coalition has already done, we are confident our community can reduce partying in the woods. When the Milton Coalition, in partnership with Milton Public Schools analyzed data in 2016 from the Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS), our youth alcohol use was 50% for high schoolers. Data from the 2022 YRBS found alcohol use at 31%, a vast improvement over six years. We have done this by making sure that youth and families have the knowledge and skills to make positive, informed decisions about alcohol use. However, work remains to be done. To get to the next level of change, to address our culture, we need greater parental buy-in and expanded town-wide involvement. As individuals and a community, we must ask:

Do we provide enough substance free places for our youth to socialize? Plenty of youth say that they are not interested in drinking, but the woods are where their friends are. Where can high schoolers go where there is no pressure to use alcohol?

Are we clear about expectations and consequences when it comes to underage drinking? Youth deserve clear messages about values, expectations, and consequences from adults in their lives, as well as community institutions. What messages are we sending our youth now, not only about alcohol, but about how we value them?

Do families get enough support to address past trauma and resources to prevent future trauma? Unaddressed childhood trauma, along with a genetic pre-disposition to addiction, can increase the chances of early alcohol and drug use and later substance use disorder.

The Cunningham Park Foundation Board is no longer going to turn away from trespassing on park property. We should not turn away from the needs of our youth. Please join us in this important work.

Learn more about the Milton Coalition and how to get involved here: www.milton-coalition.org. On the website you can sign up for the newsletter, find out about upcoming events, find links to conversation starters and guides for talking to youth about alcohol. There is also information about treatment and support services. We can also be reached by emailing: info@milton-coalition.org

The Milton Coalition