

Nov 3, 2021

To: Newburyport Planning Board

From: Elizabeth Marcus & Sheila Taintor, Alchemical Garden Caretakers

Re: MINCO Project Landscape Concept Design for 166-168 Newburyport Turnpike

The Alchemical Garden was designed and installed in June 2010 by the Green Artists League, a local activist art organization. The “Articulture” installation was funded by a grant from the New England Foundation for the Arts. One of the goals was to provide a beautiful, healthy, edible, self-sustaining ecosystem. The garden is on the Clipper City Rail Trail and directly abuts the subject project

A couple of years after the installation of the garden we volunteered to become its caretakers. The garden currently produces pears, mulberries, beach plums, elderberries and raspberries. To date no pesticides, fungicides or herbicides of any kind have been applied. We have worked to create a space that is safe and inviting to trail users and area wildlife alike.

We have had the opportunity to review the landscaping concept plan for the MINCO project and overall are impressed by it. We do have a few comments to share.

1. **Removal of Invasive Plants.** One of our biggest challenges has been staying on top of the invasive plants which migrate in from the severely infested surrounding area. We regularly and literally wrestle with encroaching bittersweet, multiflora rose and Japanese knotweed.

We are thrilled that the plan provides for the removal of the invasive plants in the entire project area, including the space abutting the Alchemical Garden. Our understanding is that the removal will be accomplished by mechanical means, which we wholeheartedly support. We would object to the use of herbicides in such close proximity to our site.

2. **Preliminary Planting List.** The preliminary planting list of trees, shrubs and woody groundcover is a “who’s who” of plants suggested by the Native Plant Trust for our area. We strongly support the extensive use of native plantings to support the health of the area ecosystem and look forward to working to integrate the MINCO project landscape with that of the Alchemical Garden.

3. **Oak Trees - Existing and Future.** Oak trees have been identified as a keystone species. They support more life forms than any other North American tree, including over 800 caterpillar species which are critical to the local food web. The plan to protect existing mature oaks as well as planting additional swamp oaks will increase the number of these important trees in the area.

In summary, we believe the plan as conceived – the removal of invasive plants, substantial addition of native plants, and protection of existing oaks – will in time lead to a significant improvement of the ecosystem that exists in the area today.