

Rec'd 8/18-14

Mark Firth & Bettina Schwartz  
111 Chestnut Hill Road  
Monterey, MA 01245

August 17, 2014

Select Board  
Town Hall  
Monterey, MA 01245

To Whom It May Concern,

Five years ago, our family made a life change, leaving New York City's chaos to settle on a small farm on a dead end road, in a quiet little village called Monterey, to raise our children with a closer connection to the earth. We feel so strongly about this that when we bought our 82-acre property, we put the bulk of it under an Agricultural Preservation with the help of the Monterey Preservation Land Trust, preventing it from ever getting developed in the future. Our plan was to live here for many many years, to grow gardens and to grow old here listening to the babbling brook, wind in the trees and the sounds of animals.

This plan, and our investment in our property, have been endangered by a new neighbor, Hume Camp, and we feel shocked and scared.

Frequent use of amplification of loud music, bullhorns and microphones for counselors and campers, have recently created in our backyard a background atmosphere reminiscent of a Six Flags amusement park or a carnival.

Hume Camp has responded to our complaints with some adjustments and repeated friendly claims that they want to be good neighbors and responsible members of the community, yet we have no commitments from them that they will stop using amplification and bullhorns.

Where does being a good neighbor include using amplification for all kinds of outdoor events throughout the course of the summer - from volleyball sandpit parties to MC'd belly flop contests, producing noise that can be heard by their closest neighbors as well as by homeowners as far as two miles away in Sandisfield, the next town over?

Hume Camp in California is far more isolated, allowing them to produce as much noise as they want without imposing on their neighbors. It is extremely surprising that Hume leadership did not consider that this property on Chestnut Hill, with its close proximity to others, and the geography of our area, with all of its little hills and vales, would be particularly unsuited for their style of loud high-energy events.

This is a quality of life issue for those of us being affected by the noise: noise pollution has invaded a previously tranquil rural neighborhood, but it is also a public health issue. Decibel levels above 80-85 dB can cause hearing loss and there is no question that this summer these levels have frequently been reached at Hume Camp on speakers in close proximity to unwitting teenage ears.

We also have many additional concerns regarding the camp's intentions to increase facilities and attendance, and the effect that construction and traffic have already had on narrow dirt roads that were never meant to regularly accommodate eighteen wheelers.

The bottom line is that this situation is currently unsustainable for us. We are at the mercy of a neighbor who has very different ideas of what it means to be outside, and we can no longer go into our own backyard without being afraid that we will feel violated by noise from the camp, turning a haven that once held the promise of peace and beauty into a source of anxiety.

We are begging Hume Camp leadership to commit to a less intrusive way to exist in our special piece of earthly paradise, otherwise we will be forced out of the place we were hoping to call home for the rest of our lives.

Sincerely,



August 18, 2014

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BOARDS MEETING

Dear Monterey Select Board, Monterey News and Hume,

I have lived at 17 Cronk Road for 26 years. I raised my son here and have made this my home. It has always been a peaceful and wonderful environment to live in. I chose it carefully for its privacy, its quiet beauty and safety. I bought a renovated 1792 barn and property that had fallen into neglect in the 1980's, and slowly over the years have cared for it, renovated it, and made it a home that I think of as a sanctuary for myself, my family and friends, and for the plentiful wildlife that lives on my property. In the past six months everything that I have come to love and appreciate about my home has come into jeopardy.

Every day for many months now, dozens of large trucks, larger than any I have ever seen on Cronk Rd (or in Monterey for that matter in 26 years) have careened down the road at great speeds, some literally shaking my house as they pass. They tear up the narrow dirt road as they pass and leave huge clouds of dust in their wake as well as constant noise. Cronk Road has had very little traffic over the years. For many years I worked in the studio building down the road from my house on Cronk Rd and I was there all day long. Some days at most four or five cars would slowly pass during the entire day. I now find myself living in the middle of a major thoroughfare for large delivery trucks, logging trucks and construction vehicles. The size of the trucks is such that it creates a hazard. Several weeks ago a huge truck came barreling around the curve just before my driveway as I was preparing to turn onto Cronk Road. The truck was huge, took up the entire road, and was traveling way beyond the 25 mile speed limit. Fortunately I was able to slam on my breaks quickly enough to avoid being hit. This is happening continuously throughout the day and is creating an ongoing sense of danger to anyone walking or driving or cycling on the road.

For many months I have heard the ongoing rumble of construction noise which has created an awful intrusion to my ability to do work, enjoy company or to just enjoy day to day life in my home. I have told myself that at the very least this will be over soon as all construction eventually is, but in reading the minutes from your most recent meeting I find that the construction may continue on and on for several years with one project after another. I'm not sure how we are meant to live with this or to what extent we, as tax paying homeowners have any rights to protect the peace and sanctity of our homes and daily lives. I find myself wondering how this came to pass without anyone on the Select Board or Planning Committee talking with the people it would effect the most on Cronk Rd and Chestnut Hill. Until I read the minutes of a recent meeting I had no idea what was being planned in my back yard. It appears a huge commercial operation that involves massive construction and potentially a large population of campers coming and going daily past my home is being launched, and the entire fabric of my life and my neighbors lives may be forever negatively impacted and yet no one made an effort to include me or us in this as it was developing. I do not understand this.

Saturday, July 19th, I was on my porch having breakfast when a loud speaker started up from the HUME property. A voice was yelling instructions of some sort through what sounded like a bullhorn and amplified music was blaring in the background.

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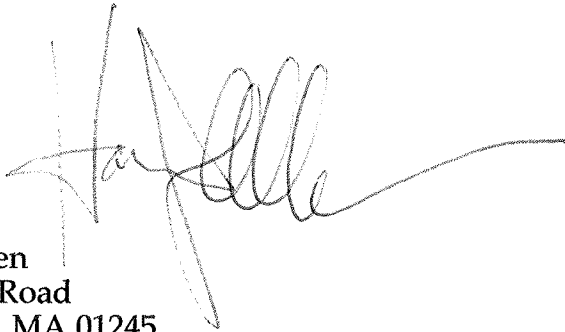
I had the feeling of suddenly being transported into the middle of a loud jazzercise class in my own backyard with someone screaming in a nightmarish sort of way. I had no idea what was going on. I abandoned my breakfast and would have gone up the road to the HUME property to ask if they had any idea how strongly the music and loudspeakers were carrying to other properties, except I had to drive into Great Barrington for an appointment. When I returned home, thankfully the music and screaming had stopped. I live in fear of being subjected to it again. When I am not dealing with the construction noise or the music and screaming or the trucks barreling down the road, my neighbors, the Krans', dogs seem to hear the activities at HUME and become so agitated or territorial that they bark continuously for hours on end as by product of the continual noise being generated from the construction.

Now I find that the town is planning to erect 8 electric poles on my property either on Sandisfield Rd. or worse potentially on Cronk all the way across the entire front of my home at the expense of ruining the natural beauty of the road I share with my neighbors.

I am beginning to feel that after 26 years of caring for my beloved home in Monterey, the quality of my life here is being destroyed. I am realizing too that my property may no longer have any value to anyone who might want to buy it or rent it, if I were to feel I could no longer live here because of this constant disturbance.

I never imagined something like this could happen in Monterey. I stopped at the Town Hall to ask about my rights in terms of noise violations and was told that only before 7am or after 10pm at night could a formal complaint be made and that if HUME decided to scream on loudspeakers for 15 hours straight every day, that was within their rights. Could this really be true? I feel as though I have entered the twilight zone and I have no idea what I can do to escape. I am hoping you will find a way to come to my aid and of my neighbors and that our peace of mind and the serenity of our homes will be seen as having at least an equal value to the proprietors of HUME and their ongoing activities with the vacationers that join them there briefly and then leave possibly never to return. I think that as members of the community and people who have chosen to live here, we deserve consideration and information to address our concerns and hope that our lives and the value of our properties are not being dismissed and possibly permanently damaged.

Sincerely,



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An update:

Since writing my first letter to you, I went with Bettina Swartz, Mark Firth and the Schnyders who live on Chestnut Hill Rd, to meet with the people who are presently running HUME. The man who owns the property was not present, but we have been told he will meet with us when he is in the area.

The most alarming things that we learned during this meeting were that both a large dormitory and a gymnasium are in the process of being planned to be built in the near future and that there is now beds for 150 children, but HUME hopes to accomodate possibly 500 in the future.

The people from HUME seemed genuienely concerned that the noise they are making is disturbing our peace of mind and our quality of life, and yet on another level they defended their need to teach in a high energy way that seemed to require megaphones and amplified voices and music. This was left for future discussion with the owners of HUME, since the man we spoke with did not have the authoity to alter policy.

The conversation about growth has troubled me and my neighbors a great deal. It is one thing to hear 150 childrens voices playing for hours a day and the accompanying bullhorned instructions, but qite another if that were to quadruple in size. The sound levels from my home would be unbearable all summer long.

We also spoke about the difficulty of using Cronk Rd as a major truck throughfare and we were told that there is a possibility of a new road being put in the would go directly to HUME from Rt 23. We are all very interested in tracking the progress of this road.