

Middlesex submitted a plan in June 1993, providing for two soccer/lacrosse fields, eight tennis courts, six faculty housing units, and thirty-three parking spaces to occupy about twelve acres of its land (see Figure 11-1). Several points should be noted before continuing. First, Middlesex is a progressive institution responsible for a significant part of the ethnic diversity that might be said to exist in Concord. Moreover, the school has been a longtime protector of the Estabrook Woods; over the years it had purchased adjoining land to prevent development, and in the 1960s the school's trustees were among the leaders in the drive to acquire the large tract that was donated to Harvard.

Second, Middlesex was not proposing a toxic waste dump. Most of the area to be developed would consist of athletic fields. The school promised to use environmentally friendly grass treatments to minimize impact on the bordering woodlands. And although the new area would require a wetland crossing to reach, the school worked with town officials to minimize this impact.

Third, the area in dispute was not an old-growth redwood forest. There are stands of old-growth trees within the MCZ tract, but the disputed land lies to the settled side of the old Estabrook road, a path still used by mountain bikers and horse riders and easily passable by four-wheel drive vehicle. Plows and cows had been over much of this peripheral part of the "woods" many times in Concord's past.

For fifteen years I lived with my family about half a mile from Middlesex—close enough to hear the spectators cheering at the athletic contests. To us and our neighbors the school's proposal seemed reasonable in itself, and part of an all-around good deal for the town. The more important question, of course, is how the rest of the town felt, and on that score I have little doubt that we were more conservation-minded than average. Between deer eating the rhododendrons and coyotes eating the cats, there is a general feeling that nature is doing quite well in Concord. The fall air carries the sound of chain saws, and the spring breezes carry the smoke from open burning of brush. A sizable minority of the town feel that Thoreau was something of a ne'er-do-well. And it was a Californian, after all, who led the campaign to save Walden Woods (an earlier generation of Concordians sited the town dump a quarter-mile from the shore of the pond). In separate interviews with two town officials who were involved in the controversy, I conjectured that the Middlesex plan would have passed two or three to one in a town-wide vote; neither disagreed. This community sentiment was not apparent in the ensuing politics,