

Public Hearing Comments

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Are you a
resident of
the
Town
of
Plainfield?
Yes

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Public
Hearing
Topic
Residential Rezoning and Altura Development

Public
Hearing
Date
7/6/2026

Questions or
Comments for
My name is Grace Estes, and I am a Herman B. Wells Scholar at Indiana University Bloomington. I graduated with honors from Plainfield High School in 2023, and have resided on Black Oak Drive since I was ten years old. I'm writing in opposition to Trico Real Estate's rezoning request and development proposal not as a homeowner, but a young adult familiar with the site's local ecology. Growing up outside of Plainfield's trail

the
Town
of
Plainfield

system, I busied the woodland that surrounds Black Oak and On Eagles Wings. I shared this land with wildlife like red foxes and bobcats, who tenant our woods for easy access to White Lick Creek. (A tributary -- Clarks Creek -- runs through the woodland and gathers at On Eagles Wings.) Soon, I learned to characterize this woodland as a living classroom. I learned red foxes build dens in our backyards to evade coyotes, who eat kits but avoid humans; I learned I could tap any maple for syrup, and distill black walnuts into oil; and I learned our woods act as foraging grounds for the community of bats surrounding the Indianapolis airport. This includes state endangered species: the Indiana bat, little brown bat, and tri-colored bat. (Sources: <https://www.in.gov/dnr/fish-and-wildlife/nongame-and-endangered-wildlife/bats-of-indiana/> <https://scholars.indianastate.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=3217&context=etds>)

Protecting endangered bats not only means preserving summer roosting sites, like Echo Hollow Nature Park, but limiting residential and commercial development in their foraging areas. (They venture outside of their roosting areas to find food!) This 2013 foraging range map for Indiana bats includes Black Oak Drive, our woodlands, and all 29 acres of On Eagles Wings. (Source: https://academic.oup.com/view-large/figure/27936656/jmamma_gyv036_f0001.jpg) As researcher Jared Scot Helm remarks in a study on Indianapolis airport bats, “development within foraging areas” could make “foraging areas inaccessible” or “remov[e] them altogether” (7). Bats roosting in Echo Hollow currently travel over On Eagles Wings to reach our woodland; this aligns with research on the Indianapolis airport bat community, which show they frequent “agriculture” and “over grown fields” that provide some cover (Helm 7). (Source: <https://scholars.indianastate.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=3217&context=etds>). Research on our community’s endangered Indiana bats shows they avoid traveling over commercial and high-density residential structures, because artificial light and little forest cover expose bats to predators (Sparks). (Source: [https://doi.org/10.1644/1545-1542\(2005\)086\[0713:FHOTIB\]2.0.CO;2](https://doi.org/10.1644/1545-1542(2005)086[0713:FHOTIB]2.0.CO;2)) If Altura moves forward, I suspect the bats will no longer forage in our woodlands (their north entrances are already blocked by the warehouse district and Wawa), which would worsen territorial competition around and inside Echo Hollow (a leading cause of disease occurrence). Also, without our bats, we’d have no summer pest control! The US Forestry Service estimates their summer feeding equates to “more than \$3.7 billion worth of pest control each year in the United States” (Source: <https://www.fs.usda.gov/r08/animals-plants/animals>). It’s imperative Plainfield township not only sets aside nature preserves, but limits residential and commercial development in regions the endangered bats frequent.

Altura not only incites concerns about our endangered bats, but our woodland’s health. Growing up, I learned my actions not only impacted animals’ quality of life, but their likelihood of life. I learned invasive plants my parents bought from Lowe’s and Menards would escape backyard “containment” and infest our woods, limiting food sources for animals and outcompeting native species like white ash, a critically endangered tree (and preferred nesting site for Indiana bats). (Source: <https://www.iucnredlist.org/ja/species/61918430/61918432>). I learned our nighttime porch lights attracted the insects our bats eat, and disrupted bird migration. (Source: <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1186/s13717-024-00491-y>). Construction taught me the consequences of infrastructural change. I learned animals can’t adapt to periods of high traffic through Black Oak, resulting in road injuries and deaths that orphan animal young (and overwhelm our local wildlife rehabilitators). And I learned that, although Sycamore Estates introduced noise, light, and trash pollution to the woodland, the lack

of further residential development since ~1970 has buffered the region from significant population loss. Observing a population influx of foxes, deer, and coyote since 2020, I learned this site serves as a migration hotspot for animals displaced by nearby construction projects.

Now, I know our woodland sits in a state of ecological precarity. We can either exacerbate existing problems, or, in learning to cohabitate, reduce and even reverse harm. Though I appreciate Thrive!'s emphasis on mixed-used residential zones and walkability -- cornerstones for any local community -- I'd characterize these 29 acres as unsuitable for residential zoning. By introducing 312 apartments and 21 single-family homes to a wildlife-rich region, Altura would induce ecological collapse. In the remainder of this letter, I will first outline the exact risks Altura's construction poses to humans and wildlife; then, drawing on the neighborhood's "semi-rural" culture and proximity to Echo Hollow Nature Park, I will propose an alternative development idea that supports Plainfield's "Thrive!" plan. A community fruit orchard would offer the infrastructure necessary to support "high priority" investments in Plainfield Park & Recreation's 2026 Master Plan -- "community special events," "nutrition programs for all ages," and "senior fitness & wellness programs."

Woodland stretches south of the Islamic Center of North America to Black Oak Drive and On Eagles Wings. Homes on Black Oak Drive, Redbud Court, and S. CR 750 E. sit on an elevated ravine; inhabitants access the woodland by climbing down the ravine. A tributary of White Lick Creek (Clarks Creek) flows through the woodland and gathers at On Eagles Wings. The creek is home to, among other aquatic species, eastern box turtles, common snappers, and watersnakes. In the woodland and, at an increasing rate, in our neighborhood, we see small mammals (raccoons, cottontail rabbits, chipmunks, moles, red squirrels, striped skunks), large mammals (white-tailed deer, red foxes, bobcats, coyotes), and winged species -- migratory birds, owls, and bats. Our woods face three main challenges, which I believe Altura would exacerbate.

1. I admit Sycamore Estates has disrupted the health of its own woodlands, which endangered bats rely on for foraging. Plant species the DNR lists as "invasive," like amur honeysuckle and wintercreeper, have escaped backyard "containment" and infested the woodlands. (In Indiana, these plants arrived in 1900 from the ornamental trade, and, until 2020, were sold by the bulk at stores like Lowe's and Menards.) (Source: <https://www.in.gov/dnr/rules-and-regulations/invasive-species/terrestrial-invasive-species-plants/>). They limit food sources, contribute to Indiana's loss of pollinators (they host 0 caterpillar species, and are toxic to most native insects), and devastate forest health by outcompeting federally endangered species, like white ash. They also offer poor water absorption and, thus, poor erosion control; since 2015, the woodland has suffered significant erosion. The ravine is no longer safe to climb down or up; I have to use my neighbors' outdoor staircase.

While walking past the farm this week, I marveled at the 100+ year old maple trees populating the region, who offer habitat to birds. I examined Altura's "plant schedule," and while I appreciate Trico has included a few native plant species (serviceberry!!), I can't help but notice non-natives dominating the list: London plane tree, Japanese zelkov, Norway spruce, Japanese maple, Japanese lilac, Japanese spirea, and nonnative groundcovers like lilyturf and Japanese forestgrass. Creating an ecological deadzone, these would devastate the birds and insects living on the property. (The non-natives host

0 caterpillar species; birds need insects and other invertebrates that only native species can accommodate.) Squirrels might spread these cultivars' seeds, enabling naturalization in our yards and the woodland banks.

Any development should keep the region's local ecotype in mind. Dr. John O. Whitaker Jr.'s study, "Bats of the Indianapolis Airport Area, 1991-2001," lists the tree species native to the area: "box elder," "cottonwood," "hackberry," "sycamore," "green ash," "hackberry," "black walnut," "red oak," "white oak," "shagbark hickory," "bitternut hickory," "sugar maple," and "honey locust" (152). (Source: <https://scispace.com/pdf/bats-of-the-indianapolis-international-airport-area-1991-461lyybafz.pdf>). Our native groundcovers include common violets, Canadian wild ginger, and wild strawberry. These permeate On Eagles Wings, and Black Oak inhabitants have introduced native fruit trees to their lawns: American plums, hazelnut trees, and elderberry shrubs. My parents also cultivate witch hazel (which provides habitat for birds in winter months), the New Jersey tea shrub, and milkweed (for the butterflies!). We would be happy to provide cuts from our trees (however, the trees bordering On Eagles Wings' property might have what you need).

2. Food waste attracts raccoons and foxes. Some neighbors have outdoor cats (another problem), who have both seriously injured and been seriously injured by wildlife. Foraging for food in trash cans, rather than woodland, habituates animals to human contact (and, more broadly, man-made environments). These animals cozy up in our garages for the winter. Food waste attracting animals signifies a larger problem: thanks to invasive plants, our woodland habitat no longer hosts adequate food sources. The food waste from 312 apartments and 21 homes would absolutely attract the woodland mammals. Encounters with red foxes and coyote could be fatal for pets and children. Birds may get stuck inside of apartments. While unlikely, bats might roost inside.

3. Animal migration to our woodland has rapidly increased since 2020, and now, foxes build their dens in our backyards. This suggests a high concentration of animals; a high concentration means territorial competition and stress, which can "increase disease occurrence within species" (Newsome). (Source: <https://doi.org/10.3390/su9071269>). 312 apartments and 21 homes can "help the transmission of mange mites to new hosts" (Wildlife Center) (Source: <https://wildlifecenter.org/help-advice/sick-and-injured-wildlife/mange-wildlife>).

One might argue the retention ponds will offer habitat or food for displaced wildlife, and de-concentrate the woodland. Retention ponds attract wildlife, but their designers have intended a single purpose: containing pollutants. Rife with heavy metals, car antifreeze, and lawn pesticides, retention ponds host toxic environments unsuitable for animal recreation. Pollutants aside, stagnant water produces algae blooms, hosts for toxic cyanobacteria. If human contact with retention pond water can cause "skin irritation and illness" (Winnipeg), and subdivisions ban residents from ingesting the water or its contents -- what health consequences for animals (aquatic and land) can we infer? (Source: <https://legacy.winnipeg.ca/waterandwaste/retentionPonds/safety.stm>) Wildlife might eat pond mosquitoes, but will they get sick in the process? It's likely! Ponds will also alter the entire local ecosystem: birds will fish in the pond, they will consume sick fish, and, as the American Bird Conservancy outlines, experience "seizures and kidney failure" until "death." (Source: <https://abcbirds.org/threats/pesticides-and-toxins/>).

I'm raising these concerns because the region has not experienced residential development since ~1970 and, consequently, we have a high concentration of wildlife (likely the highest count in a Plainfield residential area). Introducing the apartments would convert our region into a hostile artificial environment; these environments induce sickness like mange, or injury (from outdoor cats or, most commonly, from cars); wildlife rehabbers trap and heal the animal (away from the environment, and orphans may miss key development milestones); animals will return to the hostile environment; the cycle repeats. Our wildlife rehabilitators are already overwhelmed. As of June 12th, "Paws, Wings & Other Things" (our nearest wildlife rehabilitator) has closed 2026 intakes. Owner Katja Kimball states she is "considering to retire" (Source: <https://www.facebook.com/share/p/17jprRFJdG/>). It is our township's responsibility to ensure liveable environments (environments animals have willingly sought out) stay liveable.

When considering how to develop On Eagles Wings, we should ask: what development ideas support the needs Plainfield outlined in our 2026 Thrive! plan, while suiting the landscape's existing terrain? What uses does this land already serve, and what uses can we exploit? How can we develop a site while retaining both its original character and uses? Having spent 20 years as a horse farm, the land could not be more suitable for community-agriculture. Our Thrive! plan reads, "As Plainfield grows...environmental resources should be considered as potential natural boundaries for development and as opportunities to provide amenities to new residents" (69). On Eagles Wings served our community by providing horse-riding and boarding services for youth. Why not continue their mission -- education, mentorship, servitude -- by sharing what this soil can offer with Plainfield's community? Why not designate (at least a few acres) as a community-run native fruit orchard, an extension of Echo Hollow Nature Park?

Our 2026 "Comprehensive Parks & Recreation Master Plan" estimates Plainfield's population will reach 45,263 by 2037. A chart titled "Top Priorities for Investment for Plainfield Programs" lists all-age "nutrition programs," "adult fitness & wellness programs," and "senior fitness & wellness programs" as high priority investments. Medium-priority investments include after-school programming for youth of all ages and youth fitness & wellness programming. As a community fruit orchard, this land could provide the infrastructure to support these educational programs. Here, Plainfield's families could pluck fresh, free fruit, and learn how to grow fruit trees in their own yards. Allowing residents to harvest free fruit could help us tackle existing socioeconomic problems, like food poverty, while offering locally-grown and healthy nutrition options. The Thrive! comprehensive plan proposes a trail through Black Oak Drive to Echo Hollow Nature Park. Families riding bikes to Echo Hollow Nature Park could stop by and snack, and the orchard could even increase tourism to Plainfield's south side. If Plainfield were to create a community fruit orchard, On Eagles Wings is the best location. A lack of residential development has kept air pollution levels low; here, the trees have a high chance of survival, and low chance of acquiring disease.

Bloomington Community Orchard offers resources for communities, townships, and cities interested in creating their own orchards. Here are a few relevant links: "Starting a Community Orchard" (<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1R0O26u-w0uetDh0sl1vKChYW67v5mpAD/view?usp=sharing>), A Community Orchard Handbook (<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1beX2Ko0TNQKrID93SETlq0Ry-NUc-3K1/edit>).

I thank the Plainfield Town Council for their time, and urge them to thoughtfully develop this region I've called home.

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