Morris Woods

Recently a citizen donated 250 acres (101 hectares) of nearby land to the town of Morrisville. The land, known as Morris Woods, is completely covered with forest, including about 100 acres (40.5 ha) of old-growth forest that is over 150 years old and has very large trees. A nice stream flows through the forest and it has good places for swimming. Deer, raccoon, frogs, salamanders, foxes, many different birds, and other animals live in the forest.

Morrisville is a medium-sized, middle-class town. Many people who live there work for a local lumber company, but a lot of people also work at a computer-parts plant in a neighboring town. Many people work in Morrisville itself at the schools and library and in all sorts of small businesses.

There are no zoning restrictions on Morris Woods, and the town council has to decide what to do with the land. Some people want to preserve the entire area with all of its animals and plants so that it can provide people with a "wilderness" experience close to home. A developer has offered to buy the land and build a shopping mall and luxury homes. A local forest management company has offered to buy the land and sustainably manage it to provide forest products, wildlife habitat, and scenic hiking trails.

What To Do

Imagine that you are a member of the Morrisville Town Council and it is your responsibility to approve the best plan for Morris Woods. For each of the following proposals presented to the Council, consider:
- What facts presented in the proposal support that land use?
- What opinions are presented in the proposal?
- What are the advantages of adopting the proposal?
- What would be costs to the town or negative effects of the proposal?
- Who benefits most from the proposal? Who would be most harmed by it?
- If you adopted the proposal, what changes, if any, would you want to make to it?

Based on this information, decide whether your group will select one of these proposals, or offer a compromise or alternate proposal.

Morris Woods (continued)

Proposal #1

Proposal: Morrisville should retain ownership of Morris Woods and manage it as a protected natural area. The city should build and maintain hiking trails through it so the people of Morrisville can enjoy it.

Perspective: Morris Woods is a unique area. Giant trees, some more than 100 feet (30.5 m) tall and more than 30 feet (9 m) around, make up about 100 acres (40.5 ha) of the forest. Some of these trees are over 150 years old and were growing long before Morrisville even existed. Walking among them is an incredible experience. Many other plants and many different kinds of animals also live in Morris Woods.

If we allow trees to be cleared for development, the habitat of those creatures will be destroyed. Several kinds of fish breed in the streams that flow through Morris Woods. Studies conducted in the woods just a year ago showed that those fish depend on cool water and gravel bottoms to lay their eggs. If parts of the forest are cleared and a vegetative buffer is not kept, the fish may not be able to breed because (a) soil and other debris from the cleared land may wash into the streams and cover the gravel; and (b) with fewer trees to shade the stream and condition the air, temperatures in the stream will increase. Similar problems may result if parts of the forest are managed for timber production. Morrisville doesn't need a mall. It has all the shops the townspeople need right in town. And if we did build a mall, what would happen to all those business owners downtown? They'd go out of business!

There are no forests as old and as large as Morris Woods anywhere in our region. Why should the people of Morrisville sacrifice their natural heritage so some business people can make a lot of money? Setting the land aside and maintaining hiking trails will be the best thing for the people of Morrisville today, and for future Morrisville residents.

Proposal #2

Proposal: Morrisville should sell Morris Woods to the Simpson Tree Farm, which would manage the forest for multiple uses.

Perspective: Simpson Tree Farm is owned by a family forest landowner, which owns and manages much of the forestland near Morrisville. Trees cut on the Tree Farm are processed into lumber at the mill in Morrisville. That lumber is in high demand and is used for local construction.

We, at Simpson Tree Farm, offer to buy Morris Woods from the city. We will manage it in a way that will sustain both commercial and ecological benefits. We plan to set aside an area of old-growth forest and to establish a buffer strip of forest around the stream to protect those important habitat areas. In other parts of the forest, we will practice selective cutting. We will make sure that tree cutting takes place under carefully controlled circumstances. Our regular practice is to immediately replant areas where trees have been cut to assure forest sustainability. We will allow hiking and other recreation in the forest.

The money from the sale of Morris Woods will provide a much-needed economic boost to Morrisville and could help education and social programs that have suffered. It could also provide new jobs for foresters, scientists, loggers, truckers, and mill workers.

Setting aside the entire forest as a wilderness park would lock up an important and needed supply of inexpensive, high-quality wood—and we already have several parks in and around Morrisville. The Morrisville area has plenty of retail business, and forestland is too precious to waste.

Like other natural resources, forests should provide economic, social, and ecological benefits at the same time. We can provide these benefits in a sustainable way. If the land is developed for a mall and luxury homes, valuable resources and wildlife habitat will be lost indefinitely. According to our management plan, there will be minimal environmental trade-offs, and Simpson's long history of responsible forest management speaks for itself.

Morris Woods (continued)

Proposal #3

Proposal: Morrisville should sell Morris Woods to the Morris Woods Development Company to provide a shopping mall on a large tract and new homes on the remaining portion while preserving its "forest character."

Perspective: Shopping malls are very convenient places for people to shop; all the stores are together under one roof and people can go from one store to another without going outside—a big plus, especially in bad weather. Malls often contain many national chains, offering shoppers more choices and very competitive prices. Malls draw people from a wide area, and their shopping can mean big money. So far, no one has built a shopping mall in Morrisville, or anywhere near it. The closest mall is more than an hour's drive away. The mall would take up roughly 80 acres of land.

The Morris Woods shopping mall would be a great convenience to the people of Morrisville and surrounding communities. The money generated from the sale of the land and from property taxes could be used to improve Morrisville schools and the town library, and to provide social services such as medical care and affordable housing.

After building the mall, Morris Woods Development Company would build luxury houses (either 80 homes on 3 acre plots, 50 homes on 5 acre plots, or 25 homes on 10 acre plots) in another area of Morris Woods.

Those houses would provide families with beautiful homes in a wooded setting near town. Their property taxes would also help schools, the library, and other social services. Morris Woods Development Company plans to leave a buffer strip of forest around the stream and to preserve an area of old-growth forest. The roads through our development will be pleasant for walking or bicycling.

Locking up the entire woods as wilderness for a handful of nature enthusiasts is not in the best public interest. Our development plan will make the land more accessible for many different uses: recreation, leisure, shopping, commerce, and homes. And why should Simpson Tree Farm be the sole beneficiary of land that belongs to all of us? It is only fair that Morris Woods is developed in a way that benefits the most people possible, and our proposal offers those benefits.

Proposal 1

Proposal 2

Proposal 3