

Michigan Department of Natural Resources
Grants Management Office
P.O. Box 30425
Lansing, MI 48909

August 28, 2025

Subject: Opposition to DNR Passport Grant Application (ID: RP25-0028) – Concerns Over Village of Caledonia's Misrepresentation

Dear DNR Grants Office, I am writing to express serious concerns regarding the Village of Caledonia's application for a DNR Passport Grant to fund a 23-space parking lot at Kinsey and Main Streets. The application, submitted under Reference ID RP25-0028, raises significant issues of transparency, accuracy, and ethical conduct by the Village Council, which warrant your immediate attention.

First, the Village Council has not demonstrated clear site control, a critical requirement for DNR grant approval. The proposed lot is on land owned by Caledonia Community Schools, with a permanent easement held by Kent County for the Paul Henry Trail. The Village claimed a written commitment to lease the land from the school, yet a letter from Superintendent Dirk Weeldreyer states no final agreement exists, and any lease is contingent on grant approval and council discussion and approval. Furthermore, Kent County officials were unaware of the project, indicating no evidence of their approval was included. This omission calls into question the application's compliance with DNR guidelines.

Second, the Council's public engagement has been non-existent to inadequate and misleading. The application included only eight letters of support-primarily from local businesses and their employees-while ignoring over 500 petition signatures, approximately 300 from Caledonia residents, opposing the project. The Village failed to acknowledge and submit these dissenting public comments, misrepresenting community sentiment. Additionally, meeting minutes have been criticized for blatant inaccuracies, and residents report a lack of notification or meaningful opportunities for input, undermining the transparency expected of ethical governance.

Third, the project's purpose appears misaligned with the DNR Passport Grant's intent for recreational development. The proposed parking lot will primarily serve merchant interests rather than enhancing public recreational access, raising concerns about the misuse of public funds. The Village Council's actions suggest a failure to uphold its own Code of Ethics and Conduct, marked by misleading statements and a lack of accountability, and recently by multiple formal Violations of Village Ethics Codes revealed for exactly this, and specifically regarding Trustee comments and veiled intentions for business benefits, including Planning Commissioners apparent Conflict of Interest filing against Stephon Baird.

I urge the DNR to closely scrutinize this application for factual, procedural and ethical deficiencies. Specifically, I request that you:

1. Verify the Village's site control claims, ensuring compliance with grant requirements.
2. Investigate the exclusion of significant and overwhelming public opposition from the application.
3. Reassess the project's alignment with the grant's recreational objectives. The community of Caledonia deserves a transparent and responsible process, which to date has not been.

Approving this grant without addressing these issues risks endorsing a flawed and potentially illegal application that does not reflect the public's voice or interest. Please contact me for additional documentation or to discuss this matter further.

You can also reach the Stop the Lot campaign directly at StopTheLot25@gmail.com for community input and supporting materials. Thank you for your attention to this critical matter.

Sincerely,

Jeffrey Kusmierz, Resident and Village Business Owner