We note with interest your news that the Kent State University Board of Trustees approved a motion to sell about 63 acres to Mercy Health Youngstown. If, as we interpret it, this will be good news for our community. We think this is a better location for Mercy Health for environmental health. We hope that this means that an ecologically important Mosquito Creek wetlands segment will be conserved. We note that the Mosquito Creek watershed is designated as the Mosquito Creek Corridor IBA (Important Bird Area), an important flyway and resting area for diverse waterfowl.

The presumed land in question is at higher elevation, not in wetlands, and has ready, probably better, vehicle access, especially during high shopping traffic times. It has many amenities nearby. It seems to us to meet the stated requirements of the alternative site analysis.

The Mosquito Creek watershed wetlands and floodplains also have potentially significant economic value to the entire downstream watershed in flood control. Even in its current configuration, flooding at the Eastwoods complex is an issue, without withdrawing more flood-retaining capacity. Destruction of the forested wetlands also reduces carbon-sequestering capacity of the watershed by 100 T per year.

We note the comment that “the new campus could include a relocated St. Joseph Warren Hospital.” While our primary focus is on the health of the Mahoning watershed, both the apparent former and this development seem to us to risk essential medical services being further from disadvantaged areas of Warren with large minority populations, loss of an essential employment generator in City of Warren, and potentially leave another abandoned hospital property for demolition in the city. Other hospital systems manage to improve hospital facilities on their original footprints. Our experts note that changes in healthcare delivery hastened by technological advances due to the pandemic and new advancements in telemedicine and outpatient services likely make large new hospital footprints obsolete.

We commend Mercy Health Youngstown for this prudent move that conserves land with ecologically important economic value that will avoid degradation of human and other environmental health. We would also call on management of other medical facilities that may be considering the idea of building a large, potentially obsolescent medical facilities in a “swamp” to reconsider. This “building a hospital in a swamp” frankly puzzles us for many reasons listed above, plus economics and verbal feedback from the Corps of Engineers that any alternative hospital would have to be of a similar size and profile requirement. This besides watershed health.

We stand ready to work with the community, developers and property owners to find a positive win-win purpose for flood plain lands in the Mosquito watershed. ###