

Nagog Orchard Working Group - January 31st, 2024

Meeting called to order at 7:00pm

Present: Sarah Seaward, Jen Clancy, Amy Tarlow Lewis, Karen Morrison, Brad Mitchell, Matthew Nordhaus

Will Picket arrived at 7:12

Minutes

The Group reviewed the meeting minutes of November 29th, 2023. There were no changes suggested.

Motion to approve the minutes was made by Amy Tarlow Lewis, seconded by Jen Clancy

Motion passed 6-0

RFI

Karen Morrison finished the initial version of the RFI. Amy Tarlow Lewis has been tracking the interest and engagement after it was posted to the website.

There have been two ways that interest is being tracked:

1. 32 people have emailed the orchard_responses@littletonma.org email address and requested the RFI.
2. The RFI document has been downloaded 316 times from the town website

Amy Tarlow Lewis discussed the need to amend the RFI to clarify the process for responding based on feedback from some who had expressed interest. Karen Morrison stated that the best way to provide this update was to amend the RFI and upload the amendment to the web page.

Karen Morrison clarified the information that would be updated:

- Submission should be in pdf format.
- Submission must be sent as an attachment.
- Submission must answer all the questions in the RFI.
- If there is an incomplete submission the submitter will be notified and the submission will not be considered.

Amy Tarlow Lewis suggested that respondents work through the RFI and answer every single question in order to make it clear their submission satisfies all the requirements. The group discussed the best method to accept submissions. Karen Morrison stated that she had investigated a submission portal, but that it was not ideal as it did not create notifications when someone submitted. The Group agreed to continue accepting submissions through the email address.

Advertising:

The Group discussed more places that we could advertise the RFI. The Farm Bureau might provide a free ad, if not, the cost would be roughly \$80. NOFA will post a notification for approx \$100. Amy Tarlow Lewis suggested a national organization similar to NOFA (name TBD) that would advertise through February for approx \$150. To date the Group has spent \$1025 on

advertising. She also uploaded an advertisement to New England Farmland Finder. Brad Mitchell suggested that we add photos to the New England Farmland Finder as it makes the listing much more likely to be seen.

Matthew Nordhaus made a motion authorizing Amy Tarlow Lewis to spend up to \$150 to advertise with NOFA, and up to \$250 to advertise with the national organization. Sarah Seaward seconded. The motion passed 7-0

Amy Tarlow Lewis mentioned that a wide range of people have inquired for more information. Some have farms, some don't, some are part of large organization, some aren't, some have agricultural experience, some do not. The Group discussed how to evaluate the respondents and decided that we are currently not vetting anyone or any submissions, and that the group will only evaluate after the deadline for submissions.

Facilitation services

Matthew Nordhaus, Karen Morrison, and Brad Mitchell met with MAPC to discuss whether that organization can help with writing the RFP. It was hoped that the MAPC could help with drafting, or would provide us with a resource to spearhead the RFP process. During the meeting it was determined that MAPC is not a good fit for that work. The MAPC representatives offered help later in the process, such as public feedback during the FRP process, or possibly to review responses. Brad Mitchell suggested that the Operational Services department of the State Government might be able to suggest someone. He also stated that MDAR will review the RFP but will not write it. Amy Tarlow Lewis suggested that an org that responds to many RFPs could be able to help write an RFP. Brad Mitchell suggested Land for Good or the New England Farmland Trust as organizations with agriculture specific experience.

Budget Request

The Group agreed in general that there should be spend on property if we do not have to. Asbestos remediation in the house can wait until the determination of the house is complete. Examples of work that should be done ASAP are patches for the siding on the top barn, lower barn, and cottage. The Group agreed that these fixes should be covered by the town. \$5000 was determined as a fair ballpark amount for this work. The group also agreed that mowing for the upcoming summer is necessary and that \$15000 should be allocated. Karen Morrison asked that money for RFP drafting was included, and the group settled on \$10,000 for that work.

Other costs were discussed such as testing the well, but it was decided not to ask for any additional funds. Matthew Nordhaus suggested that Littleton Light and Water could test the well. Sarah Seaward said that she would ask them. Jen Clancy stated that the Landvest report included costs of \$200,000 to remove 8000 trees [the working group believes that the Landvest report is incorrect in this regard, and that there are 5000 - 5500 trees], and \$250,000 for barn renovation, with additional costs for updating the septic system, and that If the town decides to keep the property there will be significant costs.

Matthew Nordhaus spoke to Fincom and asked how we should present the request, and how we should handle future costs if the town retains ownership. For large amounts the Group can ask for funds at the Fall special town meeting. Matthew Nordhaus will present a summary of our budget asks at the next joint Select Board/Fincom meeting.

Walkthrough Details

The group finalized the Orchard Walkthrough dates of Thursday 8th, Saturday the 10th from 10am - noon, with a rain date of Feb 9th.

Sarah Seaward requested some tour guidelines:

- People must RSVP prior to the tour,
- There will be a limit of the number of people in a party (2-3 per respondent)
- Entry to any structure must be guided by a Group member.
- All days should be posted as a public meeting of the Working Group in case there is a quorum.

Brad Mitchell suggested we focus on the house and the upper barn, and have the cottage and lower barn be optional. Sarah Seaward felt that no one should enter the house. Brad Mitchell thought that we can let small groups in but not in the basement. Sarah Seaward proposed one committee member at each location, to include both barns, house, and cottage.

Brad Mitchell desired to clarify to attendees that leasing the buildings is optional and that we should include them all in the tour. Sarah Seaward asked that when someone RSVPs to the tour we ask them who is in your party, and remind them of the uneven terrain. Amy Tarlow Lewis will email the people who have expressed interest. Matthew Nordhaus will post to the website that everyone must RSVP

Historical Commission Meeting Update

Linda Stein, chair of the Littleton Historical Commission, joined the meeting via Zoom. Jen Clancy summarized a meeting that took place between Jen Clancy, Amy Tarlow Lewis, and the Historical Commission. Jen Clancy explained the background of the Orchard and the working group, and a desire from the group for a possible restriction for the unprotected properties (house and upper barn). Jen Clancy asked Linda Stein how we could preserve and renovate, and how to get a historical designation. Linda Stein suggested hiring Preservation Strategies to survey the property to try to get local historic designation. She also informed the group that the trigger to create the Historical Restriction is a sale, and that there are two avenues to provide strong legal protection.

1. Historical Preservation Restriction. This restriction is included with the deed and can be in perpetuity. If sold to a private owner Littleton Historical Commission would hold the restriction.
2. Declare that the house is part of a historical district, which can be a single structure. Also provides legal protections.

Brad Mitchell asked if we could attach the house to the Orchard via Historical Preservation?

Appraisal

The LandVest appraisal returned with a valuation of the APR property at \$210,000, the upper barn lot at \$300,000, and the house lot at \$400,000. The appraisal noted that the previous owner

failed to maintain the buildings. Brad Mitchell felt that was inaccurate, that the previous owner did maintain, but did not invest. He also stated that they undervalued the cost of bringing the orchard into production, because all modern orchards use dwarf trees at 800 per acre, but the appraisal priced the replacement at 250 trees per acre. He also stated that the appraisal estimates for cost covered returning the property to an orchard, which may not be the path forward. Matthew Nordhaus will post the appraisal to the websites.

The group discussed the fact that startup costs may make a lease a difficult sell. If the group determines that the Town should lease the property, there is no expertise in managing the lease. Brad Mitchell asked if we could use a non-profit to oversee the lease. There were members of the Sudbury Valley Trustees on the Zoom call. Mike Perrin from SVT was not aware of any lease oversight by SVT. Dylan from Boston Area Food Gleaners was also on the call and stated that the Boston Area Food Gleaners purchased Stonyfield farm and put most of the land into an APR with SVT. Dylan stated that SVT does an annual walkthrough with the Gleaners and the town ag commission. There is shared oversight of the land and no annual cost to any of the parties.

New Questions:

Amy Tarlow Lewis itemized new questions that had been asked, and the group agreed on answers:

Has there been soil testing for arsenic and lead?

You will need to do your own soil test, the Town will arrange access,

Can we have animals?

Yes, that is allowed as agriculture

Can we have greenhouses?

You can but you have to get permission from NRCS.

What is the status of the septic system? Can others be put in?

LandVest appraisal stated that lot 105 has soils that are suitable for septic up to 4 bedrooms

Lot 104 has soil suitable for a full renovation and full use of single family dwelling, but ultimately it must pass Title 5

Sarah Seaward stated that she would research the age of the current septic systems.

Motion to Adjourn was made by Matthew Nordhaus and seconded by Amy Tarlow Lewis

The motion passed 7-0 and the meeting adjourned at 8:23pm