

Nagog Orchard Working Group Minutes

Date: April 25, 2024

Time: 6PM

Location: Sturtz Room, Reuben Hoar Library, Littleton MA

Attendees

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

Introduction and Opening Remarks

The meeting was opened with a request for attendees to state their names, addresses, and questions. Emphasis was placed on giving everyone a chance to ask their first question before proceeding to follow-up questions. Attendees were invited to ask questions and make comments.

Community Involvement and Educational Programs

An audience member raised questions about community access and educational programs for children on the property. Recommendations for RFP criteria to ensure sustainability and community benefits were provided. Emphasis on the importance of evaluating the philosophy and long-term plans of prospective buyers.

Response: The Request for Proposals (RFP) will include criteria for community involvement, and educational programs could be part of the proposals. The importance of community interaction was emphasized.

Ideas for community use, such as educational programs and access to the farm, were discussed.

Response: While community access is important, the primary focus is on finding a viable farming operation. Community programs may be considered if they align with the farm's business model.

APR Compliance and Property Use

Compliance with Agricultural Preservation Restriction (APR) was discussed. At least 50% of the APR land must be in commercial production, which cannot be a community garden or personal project. Questions were raised about the minimum technical requirements for APR compliance.

Response: The town is committed to ensuring compliance with these requirements.

Water and Irrigation Concerns

Concerns about the property's water sources and irrigation systems were discussed. The property previously used water from the reservoir and has two irrigation ponds. There are regulatory considerations for drawing water from the reservoir, especially since it is a drinking water supply. Questions about the location, depth, and quality of the well on the property were raised.

Response: The well is located near the top barn and is viable for irrigation. Detailed reports are available on the town's website.

Property Maintenance and Safety

Issues about the maintenance of fences around Goose Pond and removal of old structures and debris on the property were raised. The importance of maintaining safety around the irrigation ponds was highlighted.

Soil Quality and Testing

Soil quality testing was discussed as a potential marketing advantage for the property. Concerns about the liability of conducting soil tests and representing the results were mentioned. It was suggested that applicants be allowed to conduct their own soil tests.

Organic Certification and Chemical Use

Discussion on the property's history with chemical use and its potential for organic certification. No chemical applications have been reported since 2019. The benefits and challenges of organic farming, integrated pest management, and the potential restrictions on chemical use were explored. The current approach is to gather feedback and set criteria for future farming operations. The aim is to consider organic and sustainable practices where feasible.

Historical and Cultural Significance

The historical and cultural significance of the property, including its connection to the Native American community, was discussed. Suggestions for involving the Native American community in the property's future use were made.

Discussion on Metropolitan Commission

An inquiry was made about the role and benefits of the Metropolitan Area Planning Commission.

Response: MPAC assists towns with planning, public hearings, and meetings. They are experienced consultants used by the town for various planning activities, including the Cannabis overlay district.

Property Use and Leasing

Questions were raised about the status and future use of the property near the reservoir and barn.

Response: The property is currently under conservation and could be available for lease. It is not designated for development but rather for agricultural use.

The feasibility of the town managing the farm versus selling it was discussed.

Response: Managing the farm would require significant investment and expertise which the town currently lacks. The preference is to sell the property to a qualified buyer who can maintain its agricultural use.

Next Meeting

The date and time of the next meeting will be announced. Attendees are encouraged to send additional comments and suggestions via email.

Adjournment

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

The motion passed 6-0, meeting was adjourned at 7:54P