

12/16 (5) 040

**Acton Community Housing Corporation**

**Nancy Tavernier, Chairman**

**TOWN OF ACTON**

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TO: Acton Board of Selectmen  
Morrison Farm Committee

FROM: Acton Community Housing Corporation

SUBJECT: Recommendations for use of the Morrison Farmhouse

DATE: December 5, 2013

The members of the Acton Community Housing Corporation are pleased to present their recommendations to you in regard to the future use of the Morrison Farmhouse at 116 Concord Rd. Our recommendation is to use the farmhouse as a residential rental property with certain assumptions and conditions included with the recommendation. In developing this recommendation, ACHC members were assisted by Regional Housing Services consultant Dan Gaulin. ACHC members visited the property, read the 2010 Kelleher report, sought input from Municipal Properties Director Dean Charter, and collected information from other towns with similar rental properties. We focused only on the feasibility of a residential use and make no recommendation for any other proposed uses that may have been considered over the years including those from the current Morrison Farm Committee. We apologize for an overly long memo but since we spent so much time in our deliberations we feel it might be helpful to give you as much rationale for our conclusions as possible.

The Morrison Farm was purchased by the town in 1997 with the condition that the owner's wife, Betty Morrison, be granted a life tenancy which she maintained until 2003. The house has been vacant ever since. The total land area of the farm is 32 acres. The only access to the farm is via the driveway built for the farmhouse and its out buildings.

The house was built in the early 1930's. It is a 1565 s.f. two-story house with a full unfinished basement, unfinished attic, enclosed sun porch and vestibule. The first floor contains a kitchen, pantry, dining room, living room with fireplace, and sunroom/porch. The second floor contains 3 bedrooms although one is small and without a closet so technically it is not a bedroom, and a full but small bathroom. Considering how many years the house has been vacant, members found it to be in remarkable condition enhanced by a lot of natural light from the many windows and beautiful hard wood floors throughout. According to the 2010 Kelleher Report, the house has been found to be structurally sound for residential use. In its deliberations, the ACHC discussed and came to consensus on ten issues listed below.

**1. Occupy or remain vacant? Conclusion: Occupy**

- A vacant building is a high risk for the Town
- It is costly to keep the house heated just to keep the pipes from freezing
- It is a perfectly fine home that can house someone in need of housing

**2. Sell or Rent? Conclusion: Rent**

**Sell:**

- To sell would require that a separate lot be carved out to meet zoning requirements for lot square footage and frontage
- Town Meeting would have to vote to convey the parcel
- A series of easements would be required to allow the Town to access the barn and land, including the community gardens. This would reduce the value of the house and would make it difficult for a buyer to finance the house
- It would create a situation of potential conflict between the desires of the town and the homeowner

**Rent:**

- This gives maximum flexibility to both the Town and the tenant. If either decides it is not working out, it can be terminated.
- The rent charged can cover the cost to the Town for a property management company and for repairs and future upkeep as needed

**3. Repairs and upgrades needed to make house move-in ready**

- Most major repairs have been done by the Town or a local developer, they are:
  1. Lead paint abatement primarily by rehabbing windows
  2. New paint in and out, new roof, rehabbed windows
  3. New furnace, new oil tank, heating system OK
  4. Kitchen cabinets and laminated countertops installed
  5. New toilet
- Work that still needs to be done:
  1. Bulk head may need to be replaced
  2. Kitchen appliances (refrigerator, stove) need to be installed
  3. Kitchen cabinets need to be reconfigured slightly
  4. Vinyl flooring in kitchen and bath needs to be replaced
  5. House needs to be rewired and electrical service upgraded
  6. Bathroom needs to be upgraded, remove tub, put in shower and new sink
  7. Exterior trim needs to be scraped and repainted.
  8. New storm door could be added to rear entrance
  9. Chimney needs to be inspected
  10. Consider adding insulation to attic, walls, basement ceiling

#### **4. Cost and funding of repairs**

- Key repairs identified in the site visit are estimated at \$25,000 when prevailing wage and procurement is factored in but could be more:
  1. Electric Service upgrade: GFI's, upgrade to 200 amp (\$5000-\$7000)
  2. Bathroom upgrades: new flooring, new anti-scald valve, replace tub with new shower or combo (~\$10,000)
  3. New kitchen appliances (\$2000), washer and dryer not included
  4. Miscellaneous repairs (\$5000)
  
- Funding sources for repairs
  1. There are ample housing gift funds to cover this cost accessed with ACHC recommendation and BOS approval. The funds are loosely defined as being for "affordable housing."
  2. A small mortgage could be taken out and paid back from the monthly rental income.
  3. CPA funds cannot be used to renovate a building for housing purposes unless the building was purchased with CPA funds but historic preservation funds could be used as long as repairs were eligible as preservation. However, we are not seeking CPA funding.
  4. A revolving fund must be set up at Town Meeting to allow the rental income to be earmarked for spending on the house.

#### **5. Count as an affordable unit toward the Town's 10%? Conclusion: No**

- In order to count on the Town's Subsidized Housing Inventory (SHI), an application would be submitted to the Department of Housing and Community Development requesting a Local Action Unit be created.
- A regulatory agreement would be required between DHCD and the Town which would set a 30 year term. A future Board of Selectmen could vote to remove the unit from the SHI however.
- DHCD would require a full marketing plan with income restrictions, household size preferences and sets the rents charged.
- Income restriction would be 80% of area median income
  - 1 person Household: \$47,150
  - 2 person Household: \$53,900
  - 3 person Household: \$60,650
  - 4 person Household: \$67,350
- DHCD would set the gross rent at \$1326 (total monthly cost including utilities).
- Acton currently has 6.5% of its housing stock (8475 units) as restricted affordable housing units, both rental and home ownership. Adding one more unit is not going to make a dent in that percentage.

- ACHC recommends against counting the unit toward the 10% since it would remove a degree of flexibility and control that the Town should retain.

## **6. Preference or Restrictions for tenants**

- Any preferences established for tenants must comply with Fair Housing laws
- ACHC recommends giving Local Preferences consistent with our Local Connection definition approved by DHCD:
  - (a) at least one applicant is currently a legal resident of the Town of Acton.
  - (b) at least one applicant is an employee of the Town of Acton, the Acton Public Schools, the Acton-Boxborough Regional School District, or the Acton Water District.
  - (c) at least one applicant is currently privately employed within the Town of Acton.
- ACHC recommends that town employees be given first priority
- ACHC recommends that preference be given to households of no more than 3 but with 4 as an absolute maximum due to the small size of the 3<sup>rd</sup> bedroom
- ACHC recommends the allowable household income be no more than 120% of the Area Median Income.
  - 1 person HH: \$66,100
  - 2 person HH: \$75,505
  - 3 person HH: \$84,950
  - 4 person HH: \$94,400
- This rental might present an opportunity for single professionals especially those interested in the environment and active outdoor activities such as gardening.
- It would also be ideal for a couple or an adult child of Acton residents needing to fly the coop but not too far away.
- Other housing needs we see are for displaced parents (divorce) who want to stay in the community with their children nearby, this would be an ideal weekend visiting location.
- The Town may want to put out a notice about its plans to find a tenant to measure the interest in the area.
- We do not envision a family with small children as tenants due to safety concerns caused by the public surroundings

## **7. Terms of lease and rent.**

- A standard 1 year lease is recommended with terms that allow a more flexible lease termination than is normal given the unusual living situation that will be encountered by both the tenants and the Town.
- ACHC recommends a monthly rent of \$1200 with the tenant paying the utilities.

- The cost of maintenance and repairs would be the responsibility of the Town but would not necessarily be done by the Town since we also recommend contracting with a Property Management Company.be.
- The Town should continue to plow the driveway since they would need access to the barn

#### **8. Tenant responsibilities**

- Due to the very public presence on the property, ACHC feels the tenants are providing a valuable service just by being present on the site.
- ACHC does not recommend that the tenant be expected to be a formal caretaker but it is quite natural to assume he or she would be a look-out of sorts to report problems to the proper authorities.
- Caretaking duties could be negotiated but should be offset with a reduced rent.

#### **9. Property Management and tenant selection services**

- The Town may be reluctant to be a landlord of a residential property, justifiably so.
- ACHC recommends contracting with a residential property management company to maintain the property and to select and monitor tenants. It is possible that an RFP be required although it is a small expense. The annual estimated cost would be about \$6000 which could be funded from the \$1200 a month rental income.
- Typically a Management Company responds to emergencies and maintenance issues. The contract should have a provision that sets a dollar amount that the property manager can spend and amounts above that would require the review and approval of the appropriate town department.

#### **10. Access issues – the number one problem**

- The number one issue for ACHC is access to the house and the farm itself.
- The current and sole access is a driveway off Concord Rd. to the house, the barn, the community gardens, the parking areas, the dog walking area, and the fields in general, all 32 acres of the property. All are accessed by going through the farmhouse yard.
- In the short term, the current access can be utilized and the house rented with designated spaces for the tenants to park.
- In the long term, the access to all but the house and barn must be relocated. ACHC recommends moving the driveway north along Concord Rd. From there it can hook up to the cart paths along the community gardens and to the parking areas at the rear of the property.
- Our primary concern is the safety of the tenants who would be subjected to a lot of traffic especially during the summer months.

## **SUMMARY**

In summary, the ACHC recommends that the Board of Selectmen authorize the Town to prepare the Morrison Farmhouse as a residential rental property with the following conditions:

- Repairs be completed to make it move-in ready
- Housing gift funds be accessed for repairs
- Warrant article to set up Revolving Fund, and any other authorizations needed, be prepared for April 2014 Town Meeting
- Local preference and household size be used for tenant selection
- Household income be limited up to 120% of the Area Median Income
- A lease be prepared to build in flexibility and tenant responsibilities, if any
- Rent be \$1200 per month plus utilities unless negotiated lower for caretaker duties
- Property Management company be hired
- A commitment be made to long range improvements for safer access to the farmhouse

## Christine Joyce

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**From:** Janet K Adachi [jkajeg@msn.com]  
**Sent:** Friday, December 06, 2013 1:46 PM  
**To:** Christine Joyce; Steve Ledoux  
**Cc:** Board of Selectmen  
**Subject:** Fwd: ACHC Morrison Farm visit

For 12/16 packet: Morrison farmhouse photos, to accompany ACHC's recently submitted 12/5 memorandum with recommendations for the proposed use of the house.

Janet K. Adachi  
978-340-0746  
Sent via iPhone wireless

Begin forwarded message:

**From:** Nancy Tavernier <[ntavern@comcast.net](mailto:ntavern@comcast.net)>  
**Date:** December 6, 2013 at 12:44:25 PM EST  
**To:** "Janet K Adachi" <[jkajeg@msn.com](mailto:jkajeg@msn.com)>  
**Subject:** ACHC Morrison Farm visit

Please forward this album link to the BOS to add to the ACHC memo on the farmhouse.

You are invited to view Nancy's photo album: [ACHC Morrison Farmhouse](#)



ACHC Morrison Farmhouse  
Oct 29, 2013  
by Nancy

[View Album Play slideshow](#)

Message from Nancy:

Members of the ACHC and others toured the Morrison Farm House at 116 Concord Rd. on Oct. 29, 2013. The house has hardwood floors throughout except for kitchen and bathroom. There is forced hot air oil heat with a new furnace and oil tank. The kitchen has been renovated but needs more work. The bathroom has a new toilet but needs new shower and sink. The house has been painted in and out and the windows have been rehabbed. The electrical system needs to be redone.

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### Nancy > ACHC Morrison Farmhouse

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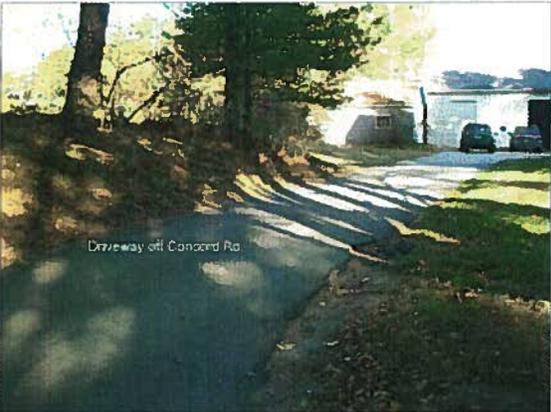
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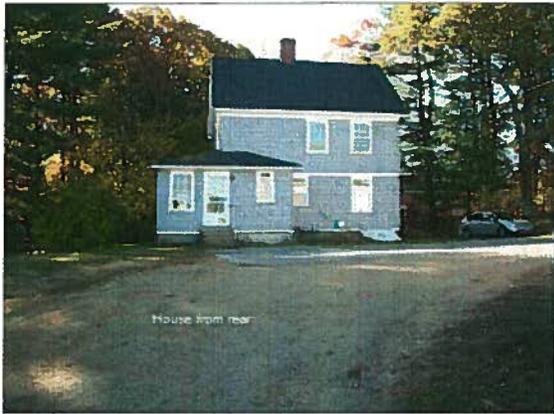
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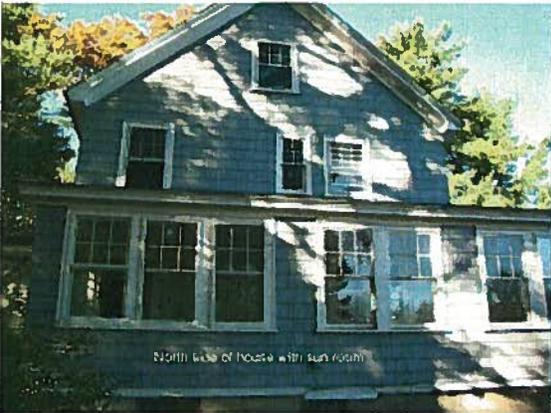
Morrison Farmhouse from Concord Rd



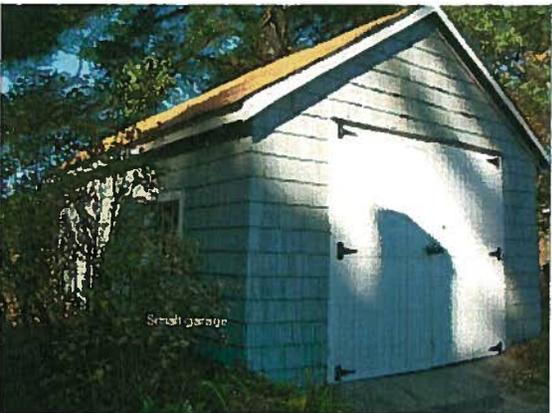
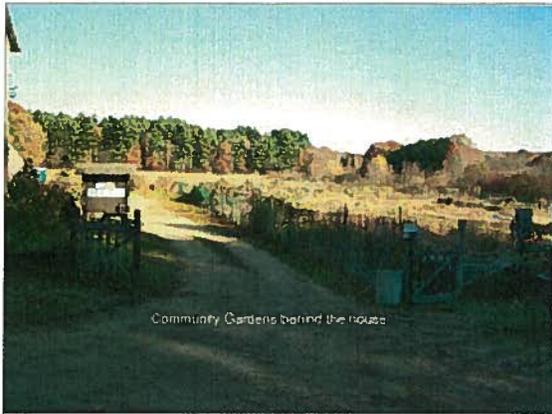
Driveway off Concord Rd

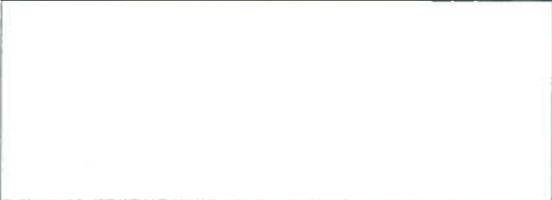
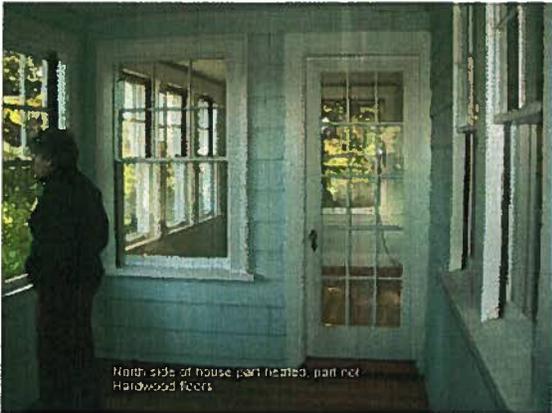
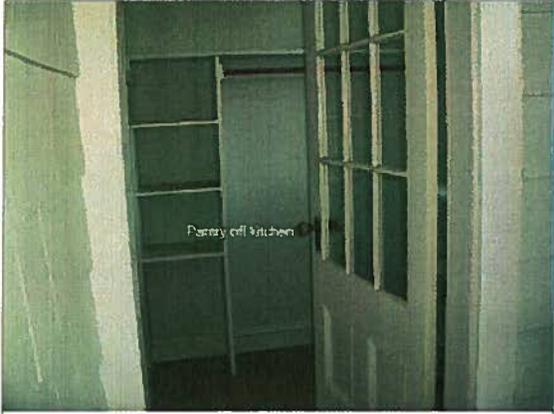


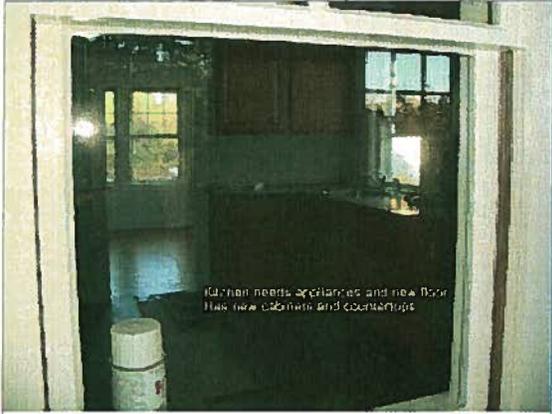
House from rear



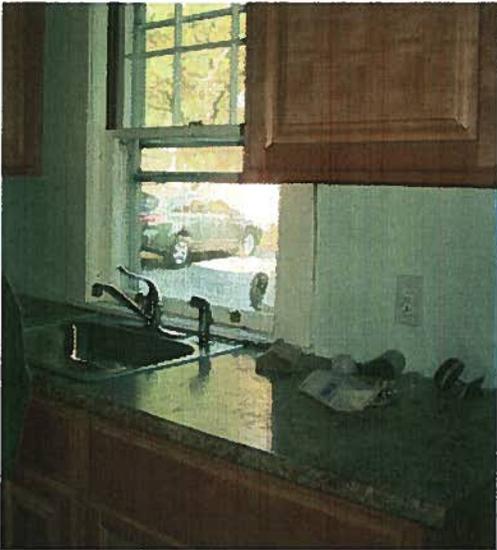
North side of house with sun room

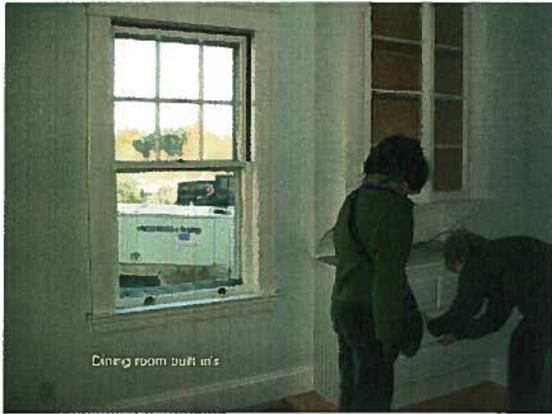


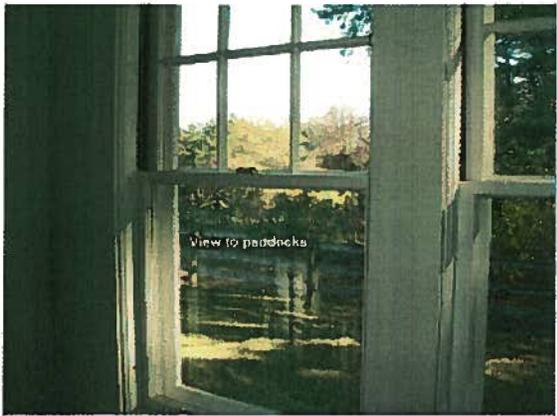




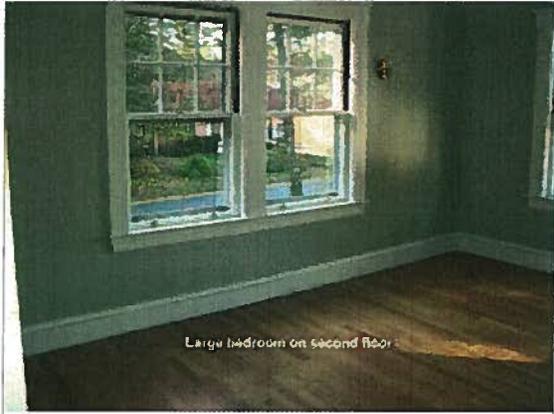
John needs appliances and new floor.  
Has new cabinets and countertops











Large bedroom on second floor



Walk-in closet in bedroom

