

Memorandum

January 19, 2016

To: Acton Board of Selectmen

From: Morrison Farm Committee

Subject: Response to Proposal to Convey Portion of Morrison Farm and Farmhouse to Habitat for Humanity, or Any Other Private Entity

At the Morrison Farm Committee meeting on January 14, 2016, the Committee heard from Town Manager Steve Ledoux and Board of Selectman Chair Katie Green about the discussions that have been underway regarding a proposal to convey the farmhouse at Morrison Farm, and a portion of the Morrison Farm land, to Habitat for Humanity. Mr. Ledoux told the Committee that the original costs to make the farmhouse suitable for housing, first estimated at \$60,000, have now grown to approximately \$109,000, with an additional \$97,000 recommended by the town's consultant. Further the Board of Selectmen had indicated that they had some concerns about the town acting as a landlord to a potential tenant; hence the suggestion of the sale, rather than rental, of the house. Mr. Ledoux has been meeting with Town Counsel to develop plans to bring two articles to Annual Town Meeting; the first would change the zoning from R8/4 to R2 allowing for a half-acre parcel; and the second would authorize the Town Manager to issue an RFP which would allow Habitat to acquire the parcel and farmhouse from the town.

The Committee's discussion included some of the following points. The Committee as a whole was vigorously opposed to selling any portion of the property, as by giving away a significant chunk of frontage we would be "giving away the front doorway" to Morrison Farm. Since the farm was purchased by the town in 1997, the movement through many different committees in town has been to aggregate the land into one coherent parcel that told the story of Acton's farming and industrial history. In contrast, the proposed sale would disaggregate the land by carving off a significant piece of the frontage. The town appears to be struggling to preserve the house which, in actuality, is an impediment to accessing and opening up the rest of the property. Furthermore, the proposal would require the construction of yet another driveway from Concord Road, resulting in an additional paved area in the front of the property.

The Committee as a whole agreed that we have exhausted the possibilities about what to do with the farmhouse, and it was time to stop trying to save the house. This Committee has been focused on making the property more accessible to more people. Carving away the frontage to the property for sale to a private entity, will simply make this lovely piece of land less welcoming for people who don't know about it. The farmhouse already makes people who come to visit think they're intruding on private

property; the conveyance of the farmhouse and surrounding land to a private owner would seal this impression.

As a consensus had emerged from the above discussions, the Morrison Farm Committee unanimously approved the following motion:

The Morrison Farm Committee is not in favor of the sale of any of the Morrison Farm property; that the committee believes that we have exhausted the possibilities about ways to use the farmhouse for housing, as town offices, or for any other uses; that the town should raze the farmhouse; and that the investment proposed for repairing the farmhouse instead be directed toward making the barn and other structures on the property useable.

The Committee further agreed that we send a letter to the Board of Selectmen summarizing our discussion, and ask that the Committee be notified when this item would be on an agenda of the Board of Selectmen so that Committee members could attend.

The Morrison Farm Committee is comprised of 10 individuals who represent a wide range of perspectives and visions of what Morrison Farm can be. We seldom have unanimous votes, but our unanimity in this vote was crystal clear. Our vision for Morrison Farm has been consistent. As we stated in our March 2015 memo regarding the concerns we had about renting the farmhouse, “the current plans for the Morrison property focus on making the property more welcoming and accessible to Acton’s residents so that more people can appreciate the unique history and qualities of the property.” We believe that selling a piece of the property to a private entity would substantially undermine this vision for moving forward with this important piece of town property.