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TO: Peter Berry, Chair, Board of Selectmen  
FROM: Nancy Tavernier, Chair, Acton Community Housing Corporation  
SUBJECT: Response to request for recommendations on Morrison Farmhouse reuse  
DATE: August 21, 2016

On January 22, 2016 the Acton Community Housing Corporation submitted a recommendation to the Board of Selectmen to address the proposal by the Morrison Committee to demolish the Morrison Farmhouse. We opposed the demolition proposal then and we continue to oppose it now. At the July 18 ACHC meeting we reaffirmed our previous position.

We had urged the Selectmen to stay the course on the action plan in place at that time, to carve out a legal house lot, to issue a Request for Proposals (RFP), and to ultimately convey the Morrison Farmhouse to an income eligible first time homebuyer. This action would create a countable affordable unit. Your recommendation was detailed here in the BOS minutes:

*Selectmen's Business 10/19/15*

*Morrison Farm Discussion -Mr. Ledoux gave an overview regarding the use for Morrison Farmhouse. Andrea Ristine, Municipal Properties Superintendent was tasked to find out what it would cost to bring the farmhouse up to code. The new estimate is now \$109,000.*

*Recently Habitat for Humanity came by to inspect the house and was very excited about potentially taking it on as a project. Ms. Adachi questioned about the legal lot issue could be worked around and issue of access be worked out. Thinks we should pursue the Habitat for Humanity it puts the Town being put out as being a landlord with a tenant. Mr. Chang commented that the offer is more attractive than original plan. KG access is an issue with the Town being a landlord and having traffic going in and out all times of the day and having a disgruntled tenant. Maybe Habitat can do something with the barn as well preserve it and use for storage. Ms. Osman stated it's a good idea for affordable housing. Mr. Ledoux stated that he will be working with counsel over the next couple of months and work with Morrison Farm Committee for future discussions. Board agrees with moving forward with the Habitat for Humanity, and will start working with the Morrison Farm Committee.*

Based on the direction from the Board, in November 2015, Town Counsel Steve Anderson began to meet with town officials and gather information to prepare the RFP and to determine the necessary actions to create a house lot. Town staff, members of the Regional Housing Services Office, Habitat for Humanity, and I attended one or more meetings to work out the details of the proposal. An aggressive schedule was established with the expectation that the property would be ready for two Town Meeting votes in April, the vote to rezone the lot and the vote to authorize the disposition of the property to the successful responder. By the beginning of January everything was ready for release. However on January 14, the Morrison Committee voted to recommend the demolition of the farmhouse and that resulted in the RFP being put on hold until the Selectmen could address their recommendation. The

Board of Selectmen is now soliciting comments from all town boards and members of the public about the future use of the farmhouse and barn.

ACHC is submitting these updated comments from our January memo.

In regard to the RFP, the purpose of an RFP is to give public notice to anyone who might wish to bid on the Proposal. While we know Habitat for Humanity was and hopefully still is very interested in the opportunity to rehab and sell the farmhouse, we cannot design an RFP tailored to their program. However, we assume they will certainly be one of the responders. This is a viable plan according to their initial assessment of the property. We strongly recommend that the BOS be provided with the final draft RFP prepared by Town Counsel last January. We think it will help you to understand the responsibilities that will rest with the successful bidder.

In January 2014 there was a proposal that the house be used as a rental property with conditions. The rental plan did not work out because it would have been costly to the town to renovate the house and would be a complicated leasing arrangement. The Selectmen decided instead in October 2015 to create a home ownership unit.

The main point ACHC would like to stress is that the Town of Acton, acting through its Board of Selectmen and Planning Board, has a brand new Housing Production Plan (HPP) approved in November 2015 by the MA Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD). With this Plan in hand, we as a Town are in a position to achieve our housing production goals. Strategies referenced in the Plan aim to create a more varied housing stock and increase affordability to support householders at different income levels and in different stages of life.

We are currently at 6.5% in our affordable housing count. The only way we can quickly get to 10% is with a large 300+ unit rental project but we don't want that and neither did the residents who participated in our public forums and surveys for the HPP and the Acton2020 process. Instead we prefer to find creative ways to produce new units, one at a time, if that's what it takes. One of the strategies identified is to seek out opportunities for affordable housing to be built on town-owned land. The Morrison Farmhouse is just such a creative opportunity. Imagine the surprise at DHCD if we were to demolish a town-owned house that had a willing party to rehab, market and sell it to an income eligible first time homebuyer. The creation of this unit will make a strong community statement of support for affordable housing.

One of the Morrison Committee's concerns was about the high cost to make the farmhouse suitable for housing. The numbers were generated by Town Consultant LLB Architects who did a Town Wide Facility Study presented to the Selectmen on 9/8/15. The numbers are based on quotes received if the Town were to bring the house to code under the public construction rules, prevailing wages, and procurement laws. These renovation numbers are at least 25% higher for a public entity doing the work than if the property is conveyed and rehabbed by a private party or non-profit entity which is not bound by the procurement laws. But regardless of the cost estimates, the RFP stipulates the following:

The RFP Respondent shall be solely responsible for all costs and expenses of the Work, including without limitation, rehabilitation of the existing building and improvements on the Property, the design and construction of the new residential unit in the house, the installation of all utilities

and site work required for the proposed housing use, and any other measures necessary to construct and occupy the house in compliance with all applicable federal, state and local laws, bylaws, ordinances, rules, regulations and codes for the proposed use.

So it is true the numbers are high but the Town does not incur that expense, the successful responder does. If the successful bidder is Habitat, (or any other non-profit) they will seek donations, services in kind and grants to do the work. And as a point in fact, the total cost to renovate the house, money spent before and after, would bring the value equal to what the selling price of a deed restricted, 3BR, affordable home is today, which is approximately \$200,000.

The second main concern of the Morrison Committee was the inappropriateness of creating a privately owned ½ acre parcel within the large Morrison town owned parcel of 50 acres. I am not sure if the town Plan of the Land was made available to the Morrison Committee at the time of their comments but I attach it here for you. You can see that the proposed home site is in the front far left corner of the vast acreage, not in the middle of anything. There is a significant need for a new access point to the whole property in any case, which would also provide privacy to the house and create an actual safe yard for the use of the new buyer.

We trust the Board of Selectmen to move forward on its October 2015 recommendation on the Morrison Farmhouse to create an affordable unit by forming a legal parcel and conveying it to a successful responder to the RFP. We are concerned about the delay in making a decision as the house continues to lie vacant.

We thank you for your continued support of affordable housing.