

From: [Anne Forbes](#)
To: [Board of Selectmen](#)
Subject: Forbes-Morrison Farmhouse
Date: Monday, October 17, 2016 10:20:47 AM
Attachments: [Forbes-Morrison Farm elig 10.01.08.pdf](#)

To the Board:

In preparation for the forum on the Morrison Farmhouse, I am resubmitting my comments from last January (below). They, along with some other comments submitted in advance of the 1/25/16 Selectmen's meeting, haven't been included in the relevant background material on DocuShare. (It seems that only the memo from that time in the collection is the 1/19 submission by the so-called Morrison "Farmhouse"[!] Committee.)

I believe that what I said at that time is still relevant, and I hope you will take it into account now. In addition, I would like to add that if your conclusion from tomorrow night's discussion is that the Town should retain ownership of the building, then I'm sure, as some submitted memos have suggested, you can develop a viable plan for leasing it.

There are many good models for doing so. The Mass. DCR Stewardship Program, for instance, rents out historic buildings in state parks and other properties owned by the Commonwealth. Historic New England has long had a similar stewardship program. With both of these, the lessees bear the cost of maintenance and improvements. In addition, many of Acton's neighboring towns are currently renting out all or part of municipally-owned houses and other buildings.

You are all familiar with the town-owned Steele Farm in Boxborough, which has both a historic house and barn on 17+ town-owned acres. But the closest comparison to Morrison Farm is probably Concord's Harrington House, which stands on 15+ acres of conservation land overlooking the Assabet. It has had one set of tenants for decades, who maintain both the house and the area immediately around it. I'm sure anyone on the Concord Planning or Natural Resources staff would be glad to tell you about the arrangement.

In the event that the Town cannot find a public use for the farmhouse, carving out a small parcel with the house, either for lease or for sale, is the only responsible way to ensure the preservation of such an important building. I remind you that Morrison Farm, with its intact farmstead, has been found officially eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. Please add the attached Mass Historical Commission eligibility opinion to the background material in DocuShare. It was received in 2008, and its absence is another glaring omission from the relevant record.

Forbes-Morrison is Acton's last intact Depression-era farmstead. Please treat it with the respect that it deserves.

Anne Forbes
25 Martin Street

PS. I notice that in the 7/11/16 invitation to all Boards and Committees it is mentioned that feedback from residents will also be solicited on the 17th. However, I have seen no published public announcements about it in the usual form of newspaper publicity, posters hung around town, etc. Can you tell me how the public has been informed about the forum? Most town residents I've spoken to seem quite unaware of it.

-----Original Message-----

From: Anne Forbes
Date: Jan 25, 2016 4:28:37 PM
Subject: Forbes-Morrison Farmhouse
To: bos@acton-ma.gov

Cc: hc@acton-ma.gov

To the Board:

I was greatly alarmed to see that, after what looked like some encouraging news about a workable possibility for the use and upkeep of the Forbes-Morrison Farmhouse (and some hard work on the part of town boards and staff), the Morrison Farm Committee has taken the extraordinary step of recommending the demolition of the building.

I know you are planning to discuss this matter tonight. I hope you will not be hasty in acting on any recommendations of this advisory, clearly landscape-oriented committee. I believe that most Acton residents understand that the value of the property we call Morrison Farm lies in much more than just its open space. Preservation of the character of the farm--indeed, of any farm, historic or otherwise--involves the retention of all types of resources that contribute to that character. That includes objects, structures, and of course, buildings.

The 2008 Mass. Historical Commission statement that found the farm to be eligible for the National Register of Historic Places describes its importance in a nutshell:

"The Forbes-Morrison Farm comprises one of the last intact surviving farmsteads in Acton with original buildings dating to the 20th-century. It is recommended for National Register consideration at the local level under Criteria A for its association with the early history of Acton and Concord, and Criteria C for its historic agricultural landscape, intact since the 17th century, and the well-preserved Depression-period farmstead of house, barn and out buildings."

We all know that it is much more difficult for a municipality to preserve, and find uses for, its historic buildings than for open land. Doing so inevitably requires compromises. It also is likely to involve letting go of some reservations, such as the hesitance to become a landlord or to sell a parcel in order to save the building(s) that may stand there. Yet many communities have done so, with successful results.

I am sorry that the Morrison Farm Committee sees a sale of the house as "giving away" anything, when in fact, the Habitat proposal would be one way to preserve this valuable historic resource. According to the committee's opinion of January 19 they also now seem to regard the house as an "impediment" rather than an asset. In truth, it is the committee's recommended demolition of the building that would "give away" an important piece of our history, leaving only--what? signage?--to tell its part in the "story of Acton's farming and industrial history.". And some of the concerns mentioned in the 1/19 opinion--about the need to put in a new driveway, or the fact that some visitors are confused about the farmstead, seem small in comparison to the larger question of how to preserve the farmstead. Even the projected upgrade cost of \$109,000 (which many homeowners would not consider to be very large,) may be borne by the purchaser. Alternatively, at least part of the expense would appear to qualify for CPA funds if the Town were to pay for it.

Demolition, of course, would not be covered under the CPA. And as was pointed out two years ago, CPA funds cannot be used to fulfill a plan that goes against the purposes of any of the CPA areas. One positive aspect of the potential Habitat project, as long as Secretary of the Interior's Standards are followed in any Town rehab. work, is that there would be no conflict between any of the four CPA purposes, meaning that Morrison Farm would still be eligible for CPA funds in the future.

I would submit that it is not up to the Morrison committee to determine that "possibilities about what to do with the farmhouse" have been exhausted. I urge you to take another look at the stated priorities in tandem with other Town entities, and to bring to the table not just the Selectmen, Morrison Farm Committee, and the ACHC, but also the Acton Historical Commission, who, by statute, are the protectors of Acton's historic assets.

Anne Forbes

25 Martin Street

Original yellow form: Eligibility file ____
Copies: Inventory form ____
Town file(w/corresp.) ____
Macris ____
NR director ____

Community: Acton

MHC OPINION: ELIGIBILITY FOR NATIONAL REGISTER

Date Received: 15 September 2008 Date Due: Date Reviewed: 1 October 2008

Type: __ Individual District (Attach map indicating boundaries)

Name: Forbes-Morrison Farm Inventory Form: ACT.O

Address: 116 Concord Street

Requested by: Acton Historical Commission

Action: __Honor __ITC __Grant __R & C __Other:

Agency: Staff in charge of Review:

INDIVIDUAL PROPERTIES

Eligible
 Eligible, also in district
 Eligible only in district
 Ineligible
 More information needed

DISTRICTS

Eligible
 Ineligible
 More information needed

CRITERIA: A __B C __D

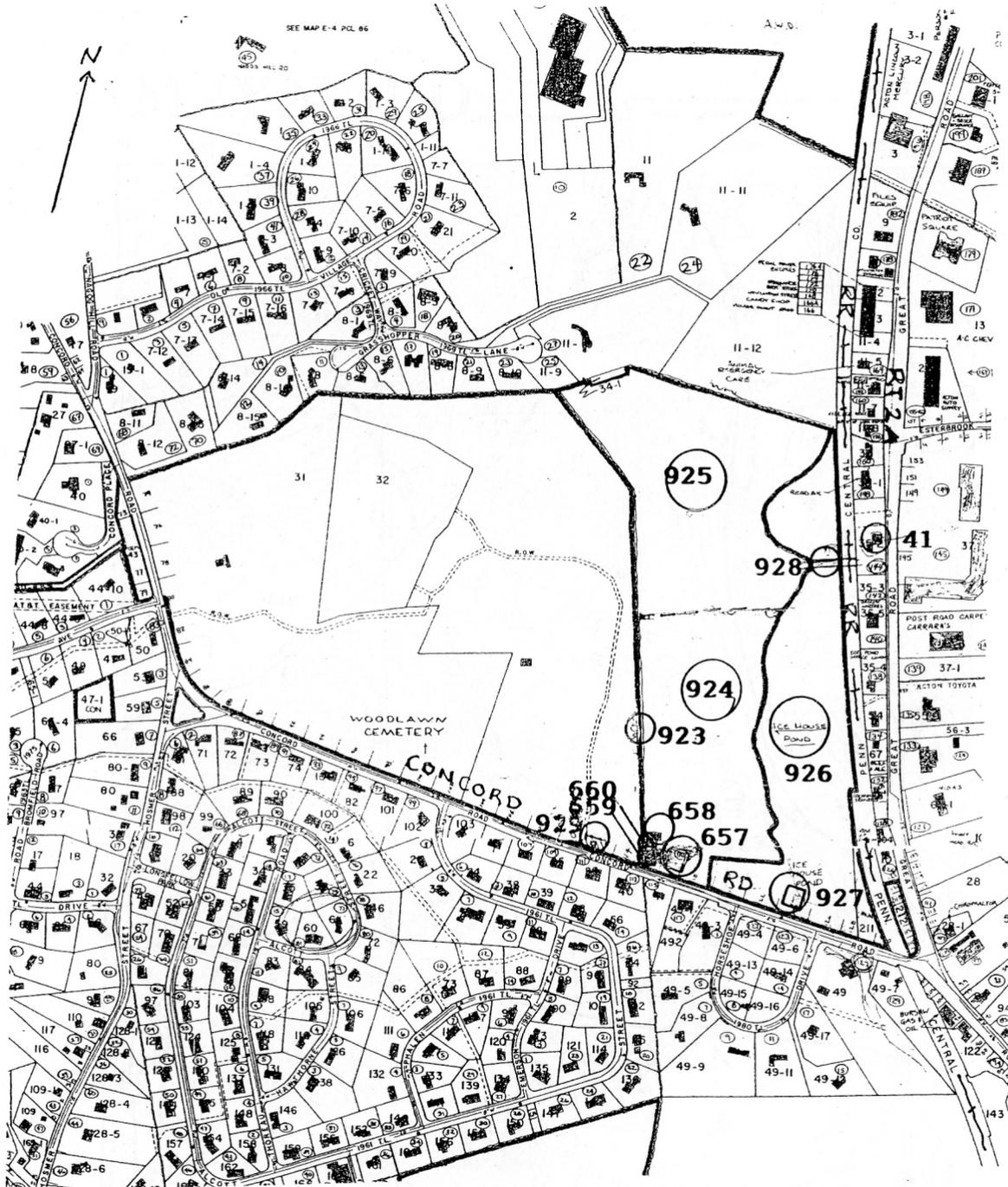
LEVEL: Local __State __National

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE by Peter Stott_____

The Forbes-Morrison Farm is a 49-acre publicly owned former farmstead at the corner of Concord Street and Great Road in Acton. Although the site has landscape features from the 18th and 19th centuries, its surviving structures date to the 1930s when Edward Forbes constructed the 2½-story farmhouse and outbuildings, following the establishment of the Concord Ice Company by his brother John Forbes on the adjoining Ice House Pond, part of the proposed nomination. Ice had been harvested from the pond since at least the 1850s when this portion of Nashoba Brook was dammed, although the concrete foundations of the most recent icehouse are thought to date to the 1920s when the Concord Ice Company was established. From 1954 to 1989 the property was used as a horse farm by John C. Morrison. The property was acquired by the Town of Acton in 1997.

The Forbes-Morrison Farm is a mid-19-century farm landscape, with a 20th-century farm complex established during the Great Depression by Edward Forbes and later owned by John Morrison after 1954. The property includes the original 1932-1933 farm house and barn with 18th-century stone walls bounding the pasture and woodland that comprise the grazing land of the 17th-century Capt. Thomas Wheeler Grant of 1669. The Ice House Pond contains the relict structures of a 20th-century ice house, built in 1929-32 by the Concord Ice Company, and a 19th-century causeway over Nashoba Brook behind the John Robbins House at 144 Great Road [NR, 2003; ACT.41]. The ice pond was created sometime after 1830 and before 1856 for commercial ice harvesting that continued until ca.1955. The Forbes-Morrison Farm comprises one of the last intact surviving farmsteads in Acton with original buildings dating to the 20th-century. It is recommended for National Register consideration at the local level under Criteria A for its association with the early history of Acton and Concord, and Criteria C for its historic agricultural landscape, intact since the 17th century, and the well-preserved Depression-period farmstead of house, barn and out buildings.

LOCATION MAP



Acton Assessors Maps F-4, G-4