

**Morrison Farm Master Plan Committee
Public Forum -- February 2, 2006
7:30 PM at Town Hall - Faulkner room 204**

**Everyone Is Invited!
Give us your feedback and opinion on the proposals to date.**

The Morrison Farm Master Plan Committee was appointed by the Board of Selectmen as an advisory committee of representatives of various constituencies interested in the future uses and/or preservation of the Morrison Farm property.

Background:

The Morrison Farm property on Concord Road was listed as the highest priority for Town acquisition in both the Town's Master Plan and the Open Space and Recreation Plan. In late 1996, the property became available for purchase by the Town through its 61A "first right of refusal" option. At the 1997 Annual Town Meeting (and capital override ballot vote), Acton voters appropriated \$1.3 million to purchase the 32.56 acre Morrison Farm. In addition to purchasing the property, Town Meeting also zoned the Morrison Farm land parcel for "General Municipal", which could include a variety of municipal uses.

A planning effort preceded the 1997 Annual Town Meeting to determine what types of uses could be feasible on the Morrison property. A conceptual use plan was prepared and showed that the property could support some playing fields in the upper meadow area immediately behind the barn, and that it could support necessary parking. During Town Meeting, proponents for the purchase of the Morrison property noted that due to the unique features of the parcel, the property could support a variety of uses, especially recreational activities. In addition, the East Acton Village Plan (January, 2004) urged that playgrounds be considered as an additional use for the property.

Although the property was purchased in 1997, Mrs. Morrison retained the right, through a life estate, to continue to live in the farmhouse. In 2003, Mrs. Morrison vacated the farmhouse and it then came under the control of the Town of Acton. Since that time, citizens of every age use the property for walking, hiking, horse riding, dog walking, bird watching and plant and wildlife observation. A number of citizens have come forward advocating for the construction of badly needed playing fields, while other citizens have advocated for complete preservation of the property.

Mission of the Morrison Farm Master Plan Committee:

The advisory committee was charged as its principal mission to develop a Master Plan for Morrison Farm according to the intent of the purchase of the property at the 1997 Annual Town Meeting and according to the following goals:

1. Provide for active recreation-play space (1 or 2 soccer play-fields, preferably in the upper field area behind the barn).
2. Maintain the existing system of walking trails and construct a trail connection to the future Bruce Freeman Rail Trail and to East Acton Village.
3. Preserve the lower meadows, areas bordering Ice House Pond, woodland areas and other environmentally sensitive areas on the Morrison property.
4. Preserve the characteristics of the Morrison Farm and the views looking at the property from Concord Road.
5. Provide space for equestrian activities such as trail riding
6. Provide for Community Garden space.
7. Provide space for a playground.
8. Determine the future use of the farmhouse, barn and any other out buildings.
9. Prioritize any development plans and include cost estimates and general construction timelines.

The Town citizens voted CPA funds for the purposes of engaging a Land Use consultant to assist the Morrison Farm Master Plan advisory committee and Town Staff to develop the Morrison Farm Master Plan.

As part of its charge the Committee is to review all available information and data available about the Morrison parcel and update the information as appropriate for reference during the development of the Master Plan and to prepare a comprehensive Morrison Farm Master Plan that is:

- a. Consistent with the vote of the 1997 Annual Town Meeting;
- b. Achieves the outlined goals, to the extent feasible;
- c. Leverages the unique features of the property for the benefit of future generations.

The Morrison Farm Master Planning Committee as appointed consists of 10 representatives of the following Boards, Commissions, and citizen interest groups:

2 Selectmen (co-chairs of the committee); Bob Johnson (who has resigned),

Walter Foster

1 Recreation Commission member; Alison Gallagher

1 Cemetery Commission member; Brewster Conant

1 Conservation Commission member: Julia Miles

1 Acton Land Steward member; Linda McElroy

1 East Acton Village Committee member: David Brown

1 Neighbor; Ethan Baxter

1 At-large representative; Bonnie Geithner

Staff support has been provided by Tom Tidman of the Natural Resources and Recreation Department

Throughout its tenure the Committee has sought broad citizen input and recommendations through the Feb. 2nd public forum, a publicized site tour and newspaper articles. Additionally, the committee co-chairs have updated the Board of Selectmen at public meetings that are televised.

Current proposals:

To date, the following presentations and proposals have been heard

Presentations:

History of the Morrison Farm and surrounding properties

Wildlife habitats and trails on the Morrison Farm and surrounding properties

Cemetery Commission report concerning the use of cemetery land and future cemetery expansion

East Acton Village Plan including integration with the future Bruce Freeman Rail Trail

Bruce Freeman Rail trail report

Proposals:

Dog Park proposal

Frisbee Golf proposal

Recreation Department proposal for field space

Community Farm proposal from the Land Stewardship Committee

Multi-use proposal

Horse riding access and trailer access request

Acton Barn Cooperative Nursery School proposal

The Committee has identified two overall trends consistent with the goals of the Committee:

First, for the most part, active recreation is recommended for the front part of the property with passive recreation recommended for the remainder. Delineating exactly where the active recreation ends and passive recreation begins will be an important part of the Master Plan design and will depend on what types of activities are desired.

The second trend identified to date, is the overriding desire of most people involved with the property to maintain the rural character of the property and the integrity of the farm scenery.

Providing parking space on the property in a visually inoffensive way appears to be one of the big challenges. Exact parking requirements will depend on the activities decided upon. The Committee has discussed the idea of “pocket parking” as a possible avenue to pursue.

At the Feb. 2, 2006, public forum, the committee will summarize the information and ideas proposed to date and invites everyone in attendance and all those who cannot make the forum to offer feedback and input to the committee on the proposals or to make any suggestion or comment about the use of the Morrison Farm.

Following the public forum the committee will continue to meet and based on the public feedback will strive to develop a comprehensive Morrison Farm Master Plan designed to benefit the entire community. This recommendation will be presented to the Board of Selectmen for presentation at the Annual Town meeting.