

## Drew Gardens Task Force

Meeting Minutes for  
July 21, 2016  
7:00 pm, Room 217, Cameron Senior Center  
Westford, Ma 01886

### **APPROVED as amended on 8/17/16 7-0-0**

**Present:** Andrea Peraner-Sweet, Bob Webb, Keith Bohne, Joyce Minosh, Bob Waskiewicz, Jane Calvin, Bob Boonstra, Zac Cataldo (alternate), Jim Geraghty, Juliette Mount (conference).  
Staff: Chris Kluchman

**Open Forum:** Denali Delmar wanted the Task Force to understand the importance of Food sovereignty on that property. “Appropriate food for the geographical area of the population”.

**Reviewed Minutes:** of July 14<sup>th</sup>. Correction on the spelling of Bill Taffels name. Bob Boonstra made a motion to approve, Keith Bohne second. Minutes were approved unanimously.

### **Discussion of the economics of agriculture at the site:**

Elizabeth Almeida, Chairperson of the Agriculture Committee, owner Fat Moon and Farmer Dave Dumaresq, Hill Orchard manager presented. Jamie Cruz, of SpringDell Farm and Brad Mitchell from the Massachusetts Farm Bureau also made a presentation and answered questions from the Task Force.

Elizabeth and Dave estimated that with intensive vegetable and/or bed plant agriculture the parcels could generate crops with a wholesale value of \$25,000. At retail, that might result in sales as much as \$100,000. There would be significant costs including labor, seed, plants, fertilizer, equipment and many other farming, marketing and sales expenses. Elizabeth expressed that the modest agricultural profits from these parcels might support a sales price of \$150,000 to \$300,000. This would not justify the \$650,000 sale price for this land.

Dave gave examples of crop land in the area that would sell for between \$5,000 and \$13,000 per acre. Dave estimated that a high density / tensile orchard would cost about \$25,000 to \$30,000 per acre to install and would produce fruit in approximately 3 years. Both Dave and Elizabeth agreed that agricultural land similar to ours might sell for about \$300,000. Possible rent for the land might be about \$400-\$500 per acre, per year, that the small acreage was more like a community garden than a farm. He noted that when a farmer leases land for a relatively short time (less than 30 years), they won't make investments such as planting trees or bushes (such as blueberries).

Juliette Mount asked about the sale from Bohne to Goddard, which was in 2001 for \$750,000. Juliette went on to say that she believes that if this developer over-paid for the land with the intent of developing the property with a restaurant, he took a risk knowing that the property has Agricultural Preservation Restrictions. His profitability now, because of what he paid, should not be a Task Force concern. The purpose of the APR is to ensure affordable farmland. We should not be compelled to release or modify the APR due to the buyers'/sellers' price inflation, especially given that the property that has not been properly maintained.

Jim Geraghty asked Jamie what percentage of food served in the restaurant would come from the land and what would the crop mix be. The response was that the exact percentage was not known at this time, but it was understood that the Task Force would like an estimate if possible.

Jamie Cruz discussed her plan for farming the property under contract to the property owners. Jamie noted there will be two rows of high tensile fruit trees along Boston Road. The property will be intensively farmed; they would cultivate every piece of the parcel. All the land will be used. Everything they grow will go into the restaurant but not everything they serve will be grown on the property. Jamie and Brad both reiterated the condition of the property is a mess with compost and trash that needs to be removed, soil that needs amending, and other work needed to be done before farming could begin.

Andrea requested that the concept plan better reflect Jamie's description of how the planting will be laid out. There was a discussion of a way for the public to have access to the land. Response was "yes, but only for special events" since the land will be a working farm in production and there are concerns for visitor safety. Discussing the model for farming that is proposed on this site (contract farming/wholesale as opposed to retail sales), Jamie noted that she thought Elizabeth's estimate for **retail** farm sales at \$100,000 in annual gross sales was "spot on".

Brad Mitchell suggested the Task Force review the web site for MA department of Revenue which lists Chapter 61A land values. He noted the FY 17 valuations are now available for farm land under chapter 61A protection. Although this is not Chapter 61A land, the values may be similar to land covered by an APR.

Bob Jeffries (audience) said that in his opinion the Task Force should ask what the gross/net revenue of the restaurant will be when discussing agricultural economics of the site.

#### **Task Force Work Plan and Schedule:**

The TF needs to be ready to give our recommendation to the Board of Selectmen by September 20<sup>th</sup> in preparation for the Special Town Meeting on October 17<sup>th</sup>. Andrea proposed that we have a draft ready on the 8<sup>th</sup> of September.

Chris recommended that we create sub group to accomplish all necessary tasks.

To be done:

- Clarification on what changes to the negotiations were made between Ebi and the town
- Evaluate the APR
- Clarify our goal to honor the intent of the APR
- Clarify the purpose of the APR

Chris requested from Westford Gateway's counsel a sense of when the revised plan would be done. Counsel will let the TF know.

**Set Meeting Schedule:**

Next meeting is July 28<sup>th</sup>, 7:00, Room 217, Cameron Senior Center. Ebi and representatives will be presenting. Following this meeting, all future meetings have been booked at the Town Hall.

We will meet on July 28<sup>th</sup>, August 11<sup>th</sup>, August 18<sup>th</sup>, August 25<sup>th</sup>, September 8<sup>th</sup> and our last meeting will be on September 15<sup>th</sup>.

**Discussion of Agreement:**

Andrea noted that she will check with the Board of Selectmen (BOS) at their July 26<sup>th</sup> meeting about the role the Task Force should play in reviewing and commenting on the Agreement, since that is a contract between the BOS and the property owner. The question relates to the role and the process in which the Task Force will give input.

The Agenda for the July 28<sup>th</sup> meeting should include: Review of historic information, presentation of the revised plan, BOS directions on Task Force input to the Agreement, and identification of any subcommittee tasks and establish subcommittee if necessary.

Motion to adjourn, vote unanimous.

*Minutes taken by Joyce Minosh*