

Bean Farm 12/7/2009 Forum: Questions and Responses (1/8/2010)

Questions Related to Acquiring Bean Farm Property

1. Is it necessary to determine ultimate use in order to decide to purchase?

Partial Response:

- Not. However, this is a policy question for the Task Force and City Council. The Agriculture Commission, Recreation Commission, Conservation Commission, and Zoning Revisions Committee have all recommended that City Council purchase the property even while the use discussion plays out. Use does need to be determined before long term Community Preservation Act bonds are sold.

2. Have you explored partnering with a land trust that specializes in farmland protection to secure the Bean Farm?

Partial Response:

- The City has a long history of such partnerships, with multiple land trusts, conservation groups, state and federal agencies and other partners. Most land trusts can help put together a package and often provide gap financing, but can't provide permanent financing. The first questions are what does the Task Force want the final package to be and what will permanent financing be. Once those are answered, it is easy to figure out the best way to get there.

3. Will this require site plan approval?

Partial Response:

- Depends on the type of use. The housing aspects of the project along the road will definitely require site plan approval. Agriculture and recreation may be exempt or require permits depending on details of the project.

4. Why is assistance needed for building permits?

Partial Response:

- No assistance is offered for building permits, but assistance is offered to the Bean Family for site plans and wetlands permits. This is being offered for two reasons. First, in order to carve off small lots along the road that do not eat up the farmland, an "open space residential" permit is required that will cover both the Bean Family retained land and the perspective city land. Without this, significant portions of the field would be lost to house lots. Second, the Bean Family agreed to sell the property at a substantial discount in return for the City obtaining these permits.

Questions Related to Funding

5. What are funding source potential for each use? In terms of requested dollars, how could a CPA application for purchasing the Bean Farm look different if the land were to be preserved exclusively for agriculture vs for sports fields? Please speak to the leveraging of non-CPA funds such as state APR \$\$, DCR \$\$, land trust \$\$, private foundations, and federal grant money.

Partial Response:

- Recreation and agriculture uses are eligible for Community Preservation Funding on this site.

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- Active recreation (playing fields) and passive recreation (including community gardens) are eligible for competitive state grants of up to 66%.
 - Agriculture Preservation funding is available for farmland preservation, but given the site and arrangements with the seller, would be limited. APR is based on the development value, but in moving much of the development value from expensive but hard to develop lots in the field to lots along the road, the potential for APR is less than if no homes were developed. However, the price drop more than compensates for this approach, which is why this approach was selected.
 - Several foundations and public grants exist and could provide small grants.
 - Army National Guard engineers in Florence might be available for some in-kind earth moving services.
 - Users (agriculture or recreation) could be charged user fees.
6. How much of my tax dollars uses to develop, maintain the fields and are we going to ask for another override in the future that extends over the life of our taxes? Where will ongoing maintenance dollars come from? How much will it cost to develop the fields? Provide a cost chart to clearly delineate the cost per type of athletic field of its construction and maintenance – and a cost comparison of 3 current options: 1) only agriculture 2) sports only 3) mixed usage. How much can other recreation organizations contribute?

Partial Response:

- Development of fields could be city capital improvement dollars, Community Preservation Funds, and/or state and federal grants. We assume that all or almost all of these funds would be state grants (up to 66% available for capital costs as a competitive grant), fundraising, and Community Preservation Fund contributions and that general fund monies will be extremely small or nonexistent. The average cost of one soccer field is \$88,000-\$130,000 depending on conditions. The assumption has been that none of this would be general revenue funds.
 - Maintenance traditionally has been done with general taxpayer dollars. Other options that can be considered are to fund more of the cost from user fees and/or require a farmer using farmland on the site to provide a portion of field maintenance as part of their rent.
 - Fewer fields throughout the city means the city does not have the opportunity to let fields rest. This can create larger costs to offset the overuse these fields get (more injuries from more compact fields, greater maintenance costs per field, and the need to irrigate fields elsewhere to allow more intense usage).
 - Construction would be in phases as state and federal grants are available, so any buildout of fields is likely to happen over some number of years. Much more site assessment (e.g., soils, topography, identification of what kind of fields are wanted, construction estimates) to fully answer.
 - Recreation leagues are a part of ongoing discussions. Once use is determined, league fees, rentals and other fundraising would take place.
7. Did the City purposefully negotiate out most of the frontage from the bid to purchase the Bean property? If so, why? How will this affect the state APR \$\$ we could get for the property if we had kept the frontage in the deal?

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Partial Response:

- In the final P&S, the balance was buying the land that the city most wants (the farmland) for the least cost. Where the Bean Family was willing to reduce their sales price dramatically, it was worth having them keep the frontage because this reduced the sales price far more dramatically than any state APR money would bring in (i.e., for the current farmhouse and the five other lots the Beans will be retaining). Where the Bean Family would not reduce the price dramatically or where frontage was critical to give the city options for the reuse of the property (i.e., the barn lot and three other potential building lots albeit with the steep hill) it was worth having the city purchase the land.

8. According to Rick Chandler of the state APR program, if the City or a Land Trust could convince neighboring owner Wayne Goulet to put a similar amount of his land into APR at the same time we protect the Bean Farm, both the Bean Farm and the Allard Farm could get more than the standard \$10K/acre for preserving their land under APR. Is this being considered and/or coordinated?

Partial Response: Yes, it is being considered.

Questions Related to Soil and Additives

9. What impact would recreation usage have on potential agriculture use (and presumably visa versa)? If mixed use, what are the impacts (and needed guidelines) to have organic use next to recreation fields? Are there requirements for agriculture to be organic if on the Bean Farm? When houses are built on the perimeter, will they be required to limit their chemical use as well, so as not to contaminate the farm? What are acceptable maintenance chemicals/fertilizer etc. proposed uses

Partial Response:

- This is an issue both ways (chemicals from agriculture drifting towards recreation and visa versa). Chemical drift is potential problem for any non-organic use (agriculture or recreation). This can be managed based on control of chemicals, how they are applied (spray versus direct application) and buffer zones.
- “Five-fingered blight” or pilferage of crops is a problem.
- Benefit of shared use and cooperation include potential for synergy and cross pollination.
- If mixed use, what are the impacts (and needed guidelines) to have organic use next to recreation fields?
- There are not currently any requirements that agriculture be organic. Conservation Commission requires organic in two of the three farmland parcels it currently rents and has discussed this as a possible policy for all future farmland they manage.
- Houses on the land currently owned by the Beans would be built just off the road, far enough away to avoid chemical drift. The City has no control of houses built elsewhere.

10. What is chemical history of all land → implications? What are implications of former toxins (orchard) for either agriculture or recreation use?

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Partial Response:

- Testing currently underway. We expect results in early January. It depends on what we find. Root and leafy crops are more likely to uptake heavy metals than orchards, and are therefore far more sensitive to toxins that were often used in apple production.

11. Are there solutions to wet areas to improve options? Consider the amount of water flowing from top of hill behind Avery (word not clear).

Partial Response:

- No for wetlands.
- For non wetland areas, field drainage works for some soils and when there is enough topographic relief for the drains to work.
- Building up soil on top of wet soils works for some recreation uses on some soils, but is expensive.
- The wet area in the woods, the existing pond, and most of the area between the two are going to remain wet and the use of this land is severely restricted.

12. What are the compromise opportunities? I.e. smaller size fields for practicing (like batting cage style) so other sports fields can be open for games and scrimmages – also, on the agriculture side, what community garden or incubator farm opportunities exist?

Partial Response:

- There are many good compromises available, some of which were discussed at the forum. 1 baseball field, 2 multipurpose fields could be built in one isolated field and possibly one more field on the wet hayfield that has little agriculture value.
- Recreation Commission originally was looking to build 6 multipurpose and 2 baseball fields, as well as a community garden component. They have suggested a compromise of 4 multipurpose and a baseball field.

Questions on Traffic and Access

13. Are there plans for having public transportation available to this area? i.e. public or private buses for the teams? Buses for the farm shareholders? A bike path or even a sidewalk would help with all the obese members of our community

Partial Response:

- This site will not get the volume of use necessary to support public transit, e.g., PVRTA, without very deep subsidies
- Car pooling is certainly viable for some uses.
- A bike path extension to the Manhan Rail Trail through Look Park is viable, but only affordable with state and federal funds.
- Bike path access is already available in the center of Florence, with a relatively short on-road ride from Florence to the site.

14. Need a traffic survey re: likely impact analyses to be done. What will the roads/access be? What would parking needs be for recreation use? How many vehicles would need to be accommodated for 7 recreation fields? What size lot would that be? Where would 'run-off' from this land go? Has the town approached

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the Allard farm owners and offered to buy a parcel to create parking areas that are less disruptive to the neighborhood?

Partial Response:

- Recreation and/or community gardens use would require some access driveway and off-street parking.
- Typical parking demand is 25 to 30 parking spaces per field that might be in concurrent use (e.g., if there are four fields but only three might be used at the same time, 75 to 90 spaces would be required). There is less parking needed per field the more fields there are (because of more efficient use of lots).
- A traffic study is necessary, but need more understanding of proposed uses from the task force before moving forward.
- Seven fields is not currently envisioned by the Recreation Commission.
- Three recreation fields, as an example, would require approximately 80 parking spaces or approximately 20,000 square feet.
- Parking lot drainage can be addressed through permeable pavement, pavement blocks, detention ponds, rain gardens, or other techniques.
- The city will look at the Allard property if it is available.

15. What has city learned from public safety issues on Island Road?

Partial Response:

- High traffic to fields is not appropriate with a single dead end narrow public road very close to homes.
- Fields that are privately owned and managed are not necessarily managed or metered as well as public recreation areas (where the city can enforce rules).

16. Spring St., as an alternate route from Look Park's roundabout – how will this impact neighborhood in addition to constructing playing fields?

Partial Response:

- The Look Park roundabout construction begins Spring of 2010 and extend through 2011, with the heaviest construction related traffic and dislocations in 2010.
- Any significant construction at Bean Farm large enough to have significant traffic impacts, if any, will happen after the peak Look Park roundabout traffic impacts (because land acquisition, design, permitting, funding, and bidding would take several years).

Questions on Conservation

17. Will there be more/too much wildlife displacement due to construction of playing fields, parking lots, chemicals, lawn mowers, more traffic? How will wildlife be impacted by athletic fields, parking lots, added traffic, noise, and possible night light? Has there been a survey of species (generally/endangered/threatened), on this land?

Partial Response:

- No full survey has been performed.
- The mapping prepared by the Massachusetts Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program (NHESP) only shows priority and estimated habitat right along

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the river (in a corridor 300' or so out from the river), so there is no need to expect such species based on available information.

- The Conservation Commission has weighed in strongly that at a minimum the 200' riparian zone along the river needs to be managed or conserved for wildlife and natural systems. Design of recreation and agricultural fields can minimize and mitigate wildlife impacts.
- Any use other than restoring a natural system will have some adverse impacts.
- No field lighting is anticipated by the Recreation Department in any scenario, so these impacts to not need to be addressed.

18. We need to be informed of all the consequences of redefining the floodplain. Is this a floodplain? Is there evidence that this land is / was found not to be, in any flood plain (please define floodplain(s))? Is there evidence that this land is surrounded by river and flood plain? Altitude/ height above river?

Partial Response:

- A portion of the site is floodplain, but the majority of the site is not. See federally mapped (FEMA) floodplain boundaries below.
- The actual floodplain (i.e., typically defined as the area with a 1% chance of flooding in any given year or 100 year floodplain) will not change as a result of this project.
- The regulatory floodplain under the state building code, wetlands protection act, and federal regulations (1% chance or 100 year floodplain) will not change.
- There is a separate zoning effort, unrelated to the Bean Farm but including this land, to update all Northampton zoning floodplain boundaries to match the federal floodplain line for consistence and accuracy.



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19. Can you give me examples of where 22+- homes have been built on a comparable piece of land (bottomland only, not the upland) this decade in W. MA?

Partial Response:

- If bottomland is defined as floodplain, this has not been allowed in Northampton and is not envisioned here, although it is routine in many communities around the country.
- If bottomland means alluvial (riverine) deposits that are not currently floodplain, examples abound. Sites that are likely alluvial soils (without only a cursory look) include Fairway Village in Leeds, Alvord Place in South Hadley, and many of the developments in many areas of Hadley in recent years. We could overlay NRCS soil mapping on an air photo of the valley to find more examples.

20. Has the Conservation Commission or another city body verified that this land is available for development as envisioned by your possible plan?

Partial Response:

- No, not yet. More surveying is required before this request can be filed.

21. Have you weighed the “conservation value” (e.g., habitat and food) of recreation fields versus farmland?

Partial Response:

- This is for the Bean Farm Task Force to weigh. Comparing two public goods is a normative (value) question not a factual question.
- The three agriculture, conservation, and recreation commissions have weighed this and believe that mixed agriculture, conservation, and recreation uses provide the best balance.

Questions on Control of Use

22. Can the city, as owner of the property, dictate to farmers who lease the land what to grow OR will the land be put to its BEST agricultural use as determined by the farmer? Who would actually manage agricultural land? What are implications for future use?

Partial Response:

- The City could dictate, which would limit interest, or leave it to a farmer.
- Currently, the city Recreation Department and Commission manages the Community Gardens (in cooperation with a Community Gardens Committee), and the Conservation Commission/Planning Office lease three sites to local farms, with one more site currently under development. Many options are available.
- Land can be managed to allow future conversion to alternative use, although any limit on management adds costs and limits users but provides greater options for the future.

Questions on Other Agricultural Uses in the City

23. Can our existing farms be encouraged to produce local produce?

Partial Response:

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- The Agriculture Commission is working on one element of this, making farmers markets more viable to help encourage stronger local markets for local farmers.

24. Can the city do a food security plan? How much acreage to feed city if we could not import food?

Partial Response:

- Conway School of Landscape Design is doing a food security plan for Northampton. The City has agreed to contribute a small amount of money (\$500) towards this plan to help make it possible since it will inform both the Bean Farm discussion and management of other agricultural sites in other city Conservation Areas.
- The amount of acreage depends on whether we assume all other life style patterns remain the same (e.g., meat and dairy consumption) or whether we are assuming intensely cultivated farm parcels and whether this production is in addition to current export farming or replaces that.

25. Are you familiar with Exec. Order 193 protecting MA {state owned} agricultural land? <http://www.lawlib.state.ma.us/source/mass/eo/eotext/EO193.txt>

Partial Response:

- Yes, this requires that the state does its best efforts to protect farmland owned by the state. The city has used this executive order in our two successful lobbying efforts to permanently preserve 300 acres of agriculture at the former Northampton State Hospital and in our current effort to preserve a small track of farmland on Hockanum Road that was once the working farm for the Hampshire County Jail. It has no legal effect for farmland not owned by the state.

Questions on Recreation

26. What's the comprehensive plan for recreation usage city wide?

Partial Response:

- The *Northampton Open Space and Recreation Plan 2005-2010*, which was adopted by City Council, Recreation Commission, Conservation Commission, and the Planning Board.

27. What are pros and cons of centralized v. distributed recreation fields?

Partial Response:

- Centralized fields have less expensive infrastructure cost per field (storage, bathrooms, parking) and are easier to manage for league sports. Centralized fields allow families to go to one place, travel easier, mowing and maintenance can be accomplished more efficiently with less travel.
- Distributed fields serve pickup games and distribute impacts over a wider area.

28. What is Look Park's connection/vision to this land – such as to extending the bike path through the park to connect – also CPA money to construct new athletic fields within the park – are these being taken into account? With respect to the recreation

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department's needs, how does the Bean Farm proposal relate to the proposal before the CPC to use dredge soil from Look Park's pond to create additional playing fields?

Partial Response:

- Once the size and configuration of the new fields at Look Park are determined, they will help to reduce the current need of 6 multipurpose fields (there is also need for additional baseball fields).

29. Are there other areas in Northampton (e.g., Army National Guard) with available acreage? Can Smith College fields be used as a recreation resource? Village Hill, Kollmorgan, Industrial Drive, Hill and Dale Mall on King Street as a potential for recreation? Has the city considered the vast amounts of unused land (parking lots) on King St.?

Partial Response:

- There are other areas available for both recreation and agriculture uses. In Northampton, the only viable sites for multi-field recreation and for large agriculture is on prime agricultural lands.
- Single fields are possible, although limited, on some non-agricultural sites.
- The Army National Guard site is not appropriate for multiple fields nor is it available.
- Smith College fields are already used as a recreation resource, especially for track uses. Their fields are heavily used by collegiate teams in spring and fall and need to rest during the summer.
- Land on King Street in large tracts is probably worth in the neighborhood of \$800,000 an acre, if it is for sale. Industrial Drive is largely built out (except for wetlands) and does not have room for playing fields. Village Hill is owned by a master developer and not available for development. Kollmorgen has indicated that they need their entire site and none of it is available.
- King Street, Industrial Park, and south campus of Village Hill also generate large amounts of property taxes and generate a large number of jobs, which pay for things like recreation and education.

30. Have you consulted with other communities facing similar recreation pressures to see how they have solved that problem? Have you consulted with other communities (or outside experts) facing similar rec. pressures to see how they creatively solved their problems? Has the city pursued the option of renting field time from other towns?

Partial Response:

- Renting recreation land in other communities is not feasible. It would not serve Northampton residents as well and would create increases in travel time, gas and costs. The city pays property taxes on land we own in other communities.
- Recreation staff regularly attends meetings that include Recreation Depts. from Western Mass and throughout New England. Most New England communities are faced with the same problem of not enough space to play. Amherst and South Hadley have both created playing fields on property that was formerly farm land
- We know how to allow greater use of existing fields, but it requires artificial turf, under-field drainage, irrigation, and field lighting, which are extremely expensive approaches more appropriate to urban areas.

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31. What % of {recreation use is from} out of town?

Partial Response:

- All leagues on City owned recreation areas (unlike on the private Oxbow Marina site) are Northampton based, but do have some out of town players on them. No out of town teams will use the facility unless playing Northampton teams, or participating in Northampton sponsored tournaments.

32. What are the statistics about numbers of boys v. number of girls that are served currently by competitive sports programs in Northampton?

Partial Response:

- Not available without some research. Over 3,600 youth and adults played on City fields in 2009.

33. What impact (loss of topsoil) in grading and construction of field?

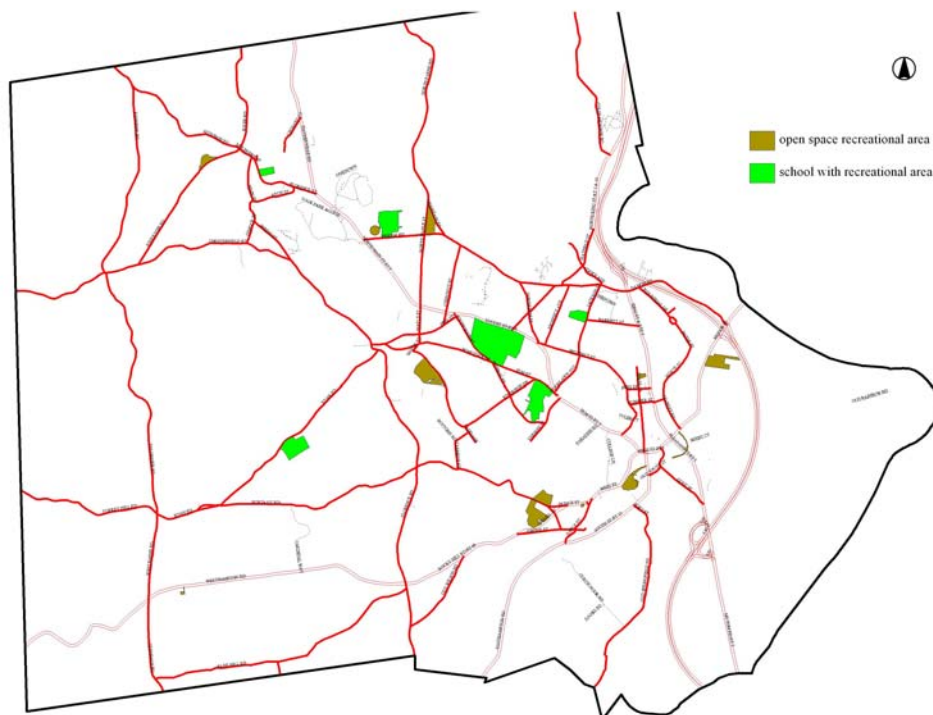
Partial Response:

- It depends on the type of fields and construction methods. There are some options, all of which have cost effects. More information is necessary to fully determine.

34. Please assess the distribution of playing fields within the city limits. It seems that Florence is unduly burdened with more than its share of fields, traffic, and noise at Bridge St., Look Park, Riverside, and Burts Pit Rds.

Partial Response:

- Map below that shows recreation areas managed by the city on recreation commission and school department holdings. It does not show fields managed by others, most notably Look Memorial Park and the Island Road soccer fields.



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35. Is the formal assessment of potential recreational fields will be made public, and who is conducting it.

Partial Response:

- The Citywide assessment has been completed and was presented to City Council, the Recreation Commission, the Conservation Commission, and the Bean Farm public forum and is on the Bean Farm website. A written report version is underway and will be available by January 19, 2010.
- More specific assessments of specific sites will be done by the city and consultants as sites are ready.

Information and Process

36. Please post the offer to purchase and purchase and sale agreement on the city website.

Partial Response:

- The Offer to Purchase and Purchase and Sale Agreement are so posted.

37. What are carbon footprint implications for each possibility?

Partial Response:

- We need more information to address this. The upcoming Conway School of Landscape Design Plan may be able to address these questions.

38. How realistic to do all this by Feb. 1st?

Partial Response:

- February 4th is only a deadline for City Council to authorize the purchase. Actual purchase doesn't have to happen until June. There is no legal requirement, although there are policy reasons, for understanding all uses before purchasing the property. Bean Farm Task Force has not yet set up their schedule.

39. What other examples exist around New England for community farm?

Partial Response:

- Some examples, prepared by agriculture advocates, are included in the final slides of the Bean Forum Presentation that is on the City's Bean Farm website landing page. There are literally hundreds of CSAs on New England, with many of these on public land or publically protected land.

40. Please identify the other options besides competitive sports that provide leadership skills, community spirit, personal empowerment, and self-esteem.

Partial Response:

- It would be a very long list. Many government, non-profit, educational, civic, religious, fraternal, community groups, and businesses provide these services in different ways.

41. Please visit www.growingpower.org to see a great example of the potential of urban agriculture. Agriculture education is one of the fastest growing academic areas for achieving positive academic results

Partial Response:

- Other examples abound (e.g., www.nyrp.org/,

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www.burlingtongardens.org/, www.detroitagriculture.org/, www.localharvest.org/csa/

42. How will future meetings or communications for abutters and neighbors be communicated so that ALL will know about it?

Partial Response:

- Bean Farm Task Force needs to decide.

43. What concessions/accommodations will be made to the two property owners who property abuts the entrance to the fields (ex: privacy fences, sound barrier walls, etc.)

Partial Response:

- More information necessary.

44. Don't forget historical significance – include historical commission?

Partial Response:

- The Historical Commission has recommended that the City purchase the Bean Farm and keep a majority of it in agriculture.

Abutters Meeting: issues raised by abutters

- A. Traffic
- B. Noise
- C. Maintenance
- D. Access from Look Park Bridge
- E. Parking
- F. Size, # fields
- G. Security ?s
- H. Viability of farming
- I. Mix of use
- J. Reps on committee include local neighbors
- K. Backyards
- L. Bicycle safety
- M. Access on Spring St.
- N. Housing – what could be
- O. Lights on field: probably not
- P. Community gardens
- Q. Locally grown food