

16 December 2010

To: Busa Land Use Proposal Committee

From: Ginna Johnson, Committee Member, Precinct 5

### **Preliminary Recommendation**

Perhaps because serving on this committee makes you feel a little like Solomon struggling for good judgment, it occurred to me that Lexington Farm Coalition demonstrated their respect for the site's history and its potential to serve the community by keeping the parcel intact, the "baby whole." After much consideration, I support the use of the Busa land for farming. If available for sale, I would also encourage the Town to purchase the Goldinger property to protect the resource areas, expand the farm acreage and provide adequate space for a few units of affordable housing that in my view would be integral to the farm operation. I suggest that the housing would be along Lowell Street adjacent to the farm entry and the Goldinger property used for crops and perhaps at its southern end the overlook the Farm Coalition proposed in their program.

As I mentioned, I am a soccer mom. I am also a baseball mom; my husband has coached Little League for several years. I have seen my husband and all the baseball AND soccer coaches teach sportsmanship, courage, discipline, generosity, patience and respect. And they are just coaching parents like me!! Imagine what they have done for our children. Here is community: We freeze, we swelter. We laugh, we chat, we cheer, we cry. Last spring one of my son's teammates, who had been legally blind the year before, caught a fly ball during a playoff game. Can you imagine the hugs? I am so grateful to the Recreation Department and the countless volunteer coaches that have enriched our families' lives year-round. But what of the families that don't have children? Or empty nesters? Or families who have children that are not competitive or just disinterested in organized sports?

I agree with those who consider a farming operation a great and necessary complement to Lexington's extraordinary active recreation programs. So much so, that I could envision some farming programs being organized in conjunction with the Recreation Department. Moreover, I think there is a great opportunity for active recreation to link open space trails in the area and create another cross country track and cross country ski circuit. The bottom line: I tried to layout the 195' x 330' field with 40' buffers—as stipulated by the Recreation Department—and even with the Goldinger property, the field is shoehorned in between the farm access road and the resource buffer zones. I really bemoan the loss of Lexington Gardens which would have been perfect for a multi-use field. I am still in the denial stage, imagining an angel appearing and purchasing the property for the Town, but that dream may evaporate tomorrow with the

excavation for house foundations. I understand the need for additional fields and if I can volunteer to contribute to that effort I would welcome the invitation.

Affordable housing is not an abstract statistic to me; I have struggled with that challenge. There is a happy ending for me and my family, but there are so many others who might not have found the apartment or tiny house.... To meet the Town's objective for diversified housing and to support the farm operation, I suggest building housing for the farm manager's family and perhaps an additional one or two apartments on the farm. It would be wonderful if a co-housing model could be used, where living spaces and chores are shared among residents. The Lexington Housing Partnership proposed the "extended farmhouse" at Battle Road Farm in Lincoln as a prototype. I actually studied the project in graduate school and think it would fit in well along Lowell Street. Alternatively, a barn-type structure, providing farm operation as well as community gathering space below and living space above could help meet the programming needs of the farm (like restrooms), and perhaps even create more visibility for Busa Farm along Lowell Street. By the way, the barn idea came from a speaker who felt that the Busa barn, which burned in the 1950s, should be replaced—and would be a great place for contra-dancing. What a great image! In any case, it seems to me that the existing farm stand needs renovation if not reconstruction and the Lowell Street building could provide that swing space (no pun intended).

You would have to be under a rock not to have heard the call for a new ethic for land use and food production. It is astounding to me that TWO of the prophets of this movement, Bill McKibben, author of the *End of Nature* and E.O. Wilson, author of *The Future of Life*, have close ties to Lexington. Interestingly, *The Future of Life* begins with a letter to Thoreau, another local luminary:

A Letter to Thoreau

Excerpted from the Prologue, *The Future of Life* by E. O Wilson

Henry!

I am at the site of your cabin on the edge of Walden Pond. I came because of your stature in literature and the conservation movement, but also less nobly, I confess—because my home is in Lexington, two towns over. . .I came because of all your contemporaries, you are the one I most need to understand...

I am here for a purpose: to become more Thoreauvian, and with that perspective better to explain to you, and in reality to others and not least to myself, what has happened to the world we both have loved. . .

The natural world in the year 2001 is everywhere disappearing before our eyes--cut to pieces, mowed down, plowed under, gobbled up, replaced by human artifacts.

No one in your time could imagine a disaster of this magnitude. Little more than a billion people were

alive in the 1840s. They were overwhelmingly agricultural, and few families needed more than two or three acres to survive. The American frontier was still wide open. And far away on continents to the south, up great rivers, beyond unclimbed mountain ranges, stretched unspoiled equatorial forests brimming with the maximum diversity of life. These wildernesses seemed as unattainable and timeless as the planets and stars...

Now, more than six billion people fill the world. The great majority are very poor; nearly one billion exist on the edge of starvation. All are struggling to raise the quality of their lives any way they can. That unfortunately includes the conversion of the surviving remnants of the natural environment. Half of the great tropical forests have been cleared. The last frontiers of the world are effectively gone. Species of plants and animals are disappearing a hundred or more times faster than before the coming of humanity, and as many as half may be gone by the end of this century. An Armageddon is approaching at the beginning of the third millennium. But it is not the cosmic war and fiery collapse of mankind foretold in sacred scripture. It is the wreckage of the planet by an exuberantly plentiful and ingenious humanity.

The situation is desperate--but there are encouraging signs that the race can be won. Population growth has slowed, and if the present trajectory holds, it is likely to peak between eight and ten billion people by century's end. That many people, experts tell us, can be accommodated with a decent standard of living, but just barely: the amount of arable land and water available per person, globally, is already declining. In solving the problem, other experts tell us, it should also be possible to shelter most of the vulnerable plant and animal species.

In order to pass through the bottleneck, a global land ethic is urgently needed. Not just any global land ethic that might happen to enjoy agreeable sentiment, but one based on the best understanding of ourselves and the world around us that science and technology can provide. Surely the rest of life matters. Surely our stewardship is its only hope. We will be wise to listen carefully to the heart, then act with rational intention with all the tools we can gather and bring to bear.

Henry, my friend, thank you for putting the first element of that ethic in place. Now it is up to us to summon a more encompassing wisdom. The living world is dying; the natural economy is crumbling beneath our busy feet. We have been too self-absorbed to foresee the long-term consequences of our actions, and we will suffer a terrible loss unless we shake off our delusions and move quickly to a solution. Science and technology led us into this bottleneck. Now science and technology must help us find our way through and out.

The bumper sticker sums it up: "No farms no food." What a wonderful opportunity we have to be part of this new land ethic, to preserve farmland, to educate ourselves and our children, to create community across ages, religions and boundaries, to feed ourselves.

Thanks for listening. I look forward to crafting a consensus recommendation over the coming weeks.