

Busa Farmland Fact Sheet

March 23, 2011

The purpose of this fact sheet is to provide basic information about the status of Lexington's Busa Farm property with respect to the town's process to determine its use. This document clarifies discussion points from LexFarm's perspective and counters inaccuracies that continue to pervade public discourse. We welcome any questions, comments, or concerns you may have with our statements.

Current Status

We are pleased to report that the Busa Land Use Proposal Committee (BLUPC) recommended to the Lexington Board of Selectmen (BoS) on Monday, March 14th, to transform the Busa Farm into a community farm with the prospect for some modest, integrated affordable housing. The committee recommends a formal RFP process to ensure oversight by the town. The BoS unanimously accepted the BLUPC report and indicated that further discussion would not occur until after Town Meeting, likely sometime in May. LexFarm is preparing for the next phase in this process which we expect will include additional questions from and deliberations by the BoS before they make their final decision. We continue to rely on the support of all those interested in preserving farmland in Lexington.

Waltham Street Farming Possibility

During the course of BLUPC's work, Lexington resident Robert Pressman submitted a proposal to allocate Lexington conservation land off Waltham Street for the proposed community farm in order to free up space on the Busa property for more housing and/or recreation fields. The land in question has two areas: 8 acres of poor soil¹ and 4 acres of prime farmland. Dennis Busa currently leases this property to grow corn. The BLUPC's final report to the BoS did not include a recommendation or evaluation of this proposal. However two members of the committee strongly endorsed this idea throughout meetings and the endorsement was included in the report as a minority opinion by committee member, Albert Zabin.

Here is our position:

- (1) Our organization advocates for continued farming on **all remaining farmland in Lexington**. We remain committed to keeping as much of the Busa farmland in farm use as possible. We believe that every cubic foot of the Hinckley soil² is of great value and that value is forever lost once converted to another use.
- (2) We believe the best interests of Lexington would be served if any housing sited on the land is integrated with the farm operation. This would afford several benefits: it would minimize development on existing farmland; it could make use of water and sewer connections to provide a public restroom; and it would allow consideration of a barn or other structure to enhance the farm.
- (3) If the BoS ultimately decides to develop the farmland for other uses **and** if they would prefer a community farm that is diminished in acreage and/or split between multiple locations, then a new proposal would have to be developed. Detailed information regarding what land is available where, its suitability for growing a diversity of crops and what infrastructure would be available (farm stand, greenhouse(s), parking, water source) would all have to be provided. LexFarm decided that it was not practical to develop such a plan until decisions are made regarding the respective properties.

1 Soil classified as "Freetown Muck" by the USDA/NRCS. See <http://www2.ftw.nrcs.usda.gov/osd/dat/F/FREETOWN.html>

2 See <http://www2.ftw.nrcs.usda.gov/osd/dat/H/HINCKLEY.html>

Size of Land Required for Proposed Business Plan

Some have questioned why our proposal requires the use of all of the Busa land whereas some neighboring community farms operate on much less. The simple answer is economics. Such farms typically need large fundraising operations to sustain their programs. Also some community farms have existing assets, such as a farmhouse or barn used to support the farm operation through affordable housing or community space. To be financially self-sustaining and able to support the joint missions of operating a working farm and providing community-wide education, LexFarm's proposal requires a minimum of five acres under cultivation. Remaining acreage is needed for existing infrastructure as well as proposed walking paths for passive recreation and a "Learning Garden" dedicated to educational programs. The business plan allows the farm to operate without Town subsidies.

BLUPC member, William Dailey, has asserted, based on his experience and knowledge of local family farms, that five acres is not enough land for a farm to successfully operate. The farming model to which he refers works well for larger, for-profit, family farms (100+ acres). In contrast, LexFarm's proposed business plan is centered on the innovative Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) model suitable for the small organic farm that we propose. Several small-scale farmers experienced with the CSA model were consulted in the development of LexFarm's plan.

Private versus Public Group to Run the Farm

Some have stated that the town would have never authorized the purchase of the Busa land to turn it over to a "private group". There are two problems with this claim. First, far from a private entity, LexFarm is a group of concerned citizens who have formed a charitable non-profit organization. It bears the same responsibilities to its members and the community as other local non-profits such as the Lexington Historical Society and the Lexington Field & Garden Club: members pay dues and the primary mission supports the public good. LexFarm membership is open to anyone and is used as a means of supporting the organization's mission. Membership is not required for participation in any programs.

Second, the land is owned by the town, and there is no intent or desire for LexFarm to take possession. In fact, in order for any community farm to be successful, active engagement by its town is required. We have proposed a way that Lexington can preserve this valuable farmland to benefit its citizens, without requiring additional burden on taxpayers. All neighboring community farms operating on public land for this purpose have a supporting town government body. These farms all have non-profit entities that manage the day-to-day operations of the farm on publicly-owned land, while the town body maintains oversight. We recommend a similar arrangement for Lexington.

Open Community Access to the Farm

A BLUPC committee member has asserted that access to the farm would be restricted. This is a misperception. All public spaces have activities that are appropriate and inappropriate based on their intended use. Random people should not run across a soccer field during a game or picnic in a public garden's flowerbed. If the intended use of public land is a farm, then it would be inappropriate for people to trample on growing fields. However volunteering to work in the fields is encouraged as is recreational use of the non-crop spaces. In addition, produce from the farm would not be limited to CSA shares, but would be available to anyone who would like to purchase it at the farm stand.

Continuing Work

Thanks to tremendous grassroots support, we have come a long way in our quest to preserve the Busa farmland and transform it into a Lexington Community Farm. We rely on all those interested to continue to be engaged and to voice their opinion. We hope you have found this information useful. We welcome your feedback and encourage you to contact us with any questions or comments at info@lexfarm.org or visit us at our website: <http://www.lexfarm.org>.