

SOUTH WINDSOR AGRICULTURE, ARTS & NATURE CENTER COMMITTEE

TOWN OF SOUTH WINDSOR

Minutes

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February 10, 2016

South Windsor Town Hall – Madden Room

1. Call Meeting to Order

The meeting was called to order at 5:32 p.m.

2. Roll Call

Members Present: Pat Botteron, Open Space Task Force

Ray Favreau, Director of Parks & Recreation
Jeff Folger, Senior Environmental Planner
Katie Graham, Park & Recreation Commission
Michele Lipe, Director of Planning
Virginia Macro, Historic District Commission
Andrew Paterna, South Windsor Food Alliance
Tim Shepard, South Windsor Land Trust

Members Absent: M. Saud Anwar, Town Council
John Caldwell, Park & Recreation Department
Mayor Tom Delnicki, Town Council
Stephanie Dexter, Planning & Zoning Commission
Mary Etter, Director of S. W. Public Library
Sandy Jeski, SWALPAC
John Mitchell, Economic Development Commission
Councilor Liz Pendleton, Town Council
Councilor Jan Snyder, Town Council
Betty Warren, IWA/CC

3. Approval of Minutes (1-13-16)

The January 13, 2016 minutes were approved

5. Discussion items

1. Development of SWAAN Ctr Webpage/Michele Lipe, Deborah Reid, Andy Paterna

The development of a webpage for the Priest project has begun to be discussed. Pictures and a narrative (**Exhibit A**) of the project will be put onto the webpage which will give the public more historical information regarding the

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ITEM:

5. Discussion items (Continued)

property as well as information of what ideas there are for the property and what will be happening on this property. Committee members should review this information and information can be added/eliminated to this narrative. The webpage will follow the Main Street Preservation Study. Ms. Lipe felt that the project should have a logo in the future. There will be a follow up next month.

3. Reports:

- a. Research on CSA – chair/Mary Etter
- b. Referendum Funding – legal opinion – Michele Lipe
- c. Historical Info. – Ginny Macro/Jeff Folger/Mary Etter/Andy Paterna
- d. Site Plan for Property – Jeff Folger/Michele Lipe/John Caldwell

Ms. Lipe handed out the legal opinion regarding the referendum funding from Bond Counsel. When the Committee knows how it is going to move forward, a legal opinion can be given to inform the Committee if it is an allowed use. This legal opinion as well as the historical information has been sent to the Consultants.

Ms. Macro stated that she has sent historical information to Jeff Folger and will send additional information to him.

Ms. Lipe said she would discuss with the Town Manager the status of the Town of South Windsor granting a permanent easement to Eversource Energy for access to their existing right of way on the Priest Property.

Committee members discussed getting water to the site. Mr. Folger explained that the Town is looking at the options available. Ms. Lipe explained that if it is for public use the process will be more lengthy than if just for the house use.

Committee members discussed the ability for the property to use the light on Ellington Road for access to the property. Ms. Lipe stated she would discuss this with Jeff Doolittle and the Police Department.

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ITEM:

5. (Continued)

After meeting with our Consultants, a reassessment:

- Questions to be address:
1. Where are we now?
 2. Where are we going?
 3. What is the vision for this project?
 4. What are short-term and long-range goals?

A comment made by the Consultant is that the project should be unique to other activities in the area. The idea of having animals is something that the

Committee should consider. Mr. Paterna informed the Committee that he received an email from Massaro Farm who is hiring an Education Director who will oversee farming field trips, after school programs, and a two week summer camp. They currently serve 1,000 to their farm which includes surrounding Towns that use this farm for field trips.

Committee members discussed the historical trails around the property. If bikes are allowed to use these trails the surface would have to be a different surface. There could also be portions to accommodate pedestrians and portions to accommodate bikes who could use the trail as a connection to other portions of Town. Mr. Shepard felt that keeping the path a dirt path is also a good idea environmentally.

6. New Business/Discussion items

Mr. Paterna informed the Committee that the Mill on the River would still like to do a Farm to Table fundraiser for the Priest Farm property.

Mr. Shepard felt that a barn should be constructed on the property that could accommodate live stock and programs within the structure. The barn could be a traditional barn with solar on the roof.

Committee members discussed the possibilities that a pond on the property could be used for. Also discussed were having pavers for the parking area rather than asphalt.

7. Next Meeting Date: March 10, 2016 at 5:30 p.m. at the South Windsor Public Library – Friends Room

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ITEM:

8. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 6:17 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,


Deborah W. Reid, Council Clerk

The Priest Farm Project: The South Windsor Agricultural, Arts, and Nature Center

The goal of this project is to commission an architectural /engineering feasibility study to evaluate restoration requirements, and costs, in order to accommodate the development of the South Windsor Agricultural, Arts and Nature Center for the Town of South Windsor.

SECTION I

Introduction to the Project

The Priest Farm (approximately 74 acres) was deeded to the town in 1998. The farmhouse dates back to 1823 and there are several barns and storage sheds on the property. *As the only publicly owned remnant of a working farm, the site will serve to help preserve the key elements of the cultural landscape of the town's history.* One of the most outstanding features of the farm is a distinctive cement silo located directly behind the farmhouse.

It is envisioned that the feasibility study funds for Phase I will be used to engage a team which could include: a planner; landscape architect; structural engineer; architect; and development consultant. Funding for the Phase I Study is being supported by a \$24,000, grant awarded by the State Office for Historic Preservation, and by a \$4,000 grant awarded by the South Windsor Community Foundation.

The major part of the Priest Farm land has been leased to local farmers and included crops such as, potatoes, corn and hay planted at the site. The location of the property is an ideal site for an educational/community farm center. It is directly adjacent to the newly proposed South Windsor 'Downtown-Center', and would provide a walkable destination for cultural programs, educational programs and commerce.

The Town of South Windsor has deep agricultural roots and the location of this property, within walking distance of the Town Hall and the newly proposed South Windsor 'Downtown Center', make it an ideal site for inclusion in this area, as recommended in the recently adopted Plan Of Conservation & Development (POCD). The addition of a unique historic component, such as the Priest Farm, will lend charm and a sense of the town's heritage to the future development of this area of town. The South Windsor Plan of Conservation & Development, adopted on August 18, 2013, promotes both the preservation of South Windsor's agricultural history and historical structures.

SECTION II**Information: Priest Farm, South Windsor**

At this time the building is in disrepair and has been vacant for fifteen years.

There is tremendous potential for the building and property as an agricultural center that would contribute to the quality of life of South Windsor residents by increasing the footprint of the town center as a walk-able destination for culture, education and commerce. Because the property is so large, there are many passive recreation uses that could be supported – from picnicking to hiking on a boardwalk that currently crosses the southern end of the property and ties into other open space properties.

The farm would provide enjoyable gathering places for the public, a new home for the South Windsor Farmers' Market, a farm/CSA facility, and Community Gardens would provide opportunities to build cohesion in the community.

The Priest property is an outstanding example of a typical farm, existing in the same configuration and in the same family for almost 200 years. South Windsor's agricultural roots are well represented not only by the modest 19th century farmhouse and related outbuildings, but also by the type of cultivation and consumption practiced throughout the town. Unique in the recent history of the property is the concentration of rare plants collected by its last owner, Norman Priest.

The property was purchased by Lawrence Stoughton and, according to Edna Priest, the last resident of the property; the house was built in 1823. It remained in the same family until it was purchased by the Town and preserved as farmland. Norman Priest grew up on the farm, where his family raised a small amount of tobacco (six to eight acres), common in South Windsor, which provided enough income for the year. But the family was mostly self-sufficient, as they also kept horses, pigs, dairy cows and chickens. When Norman Priest took over the farm he concentrated on milk production for income. He may be best remembered for his passion for horticulture and rare plant species. Local historian, Barney Daley, reported four rare trees on the Priest property to the CT Botanical Society, two of which were new state champions for the species. According to Daley, Priest supplied many botanical gardens, such as Longwood Gardens near Philadelphia, with rare plants raised in his South Windsor garden.

As the only publicly owned remnant of a working farm, it preserves the key elements of a significant portion of the cultural landscape of the town. The 75-acre parcel of land is strategically located within the developing town center district of South Windsor. Its historical significance and location fits precisely in the newly adopted Plan of Conservation and Development and is integral to the center's overall plan for walk-ability and the historic preservation of South Windsor's agrarian roots.

SECTION III**Historical and Architectural Significance:**

The Priest Farm Property is an outstanding example of a typical farm, existing in the same configuration and in the same family for almost 200 years. South Windsor's agricultural roots are well represented not only by the modest 19th century farmhouse and related outbuildings, but also by the type of cultivation and consumption practiced throughout the town. Unique in the recent history of the property is the concentration of rare plants and trees collected by its last owner, Norman Priest. The property was purchased by Lawrence Stoughton and was built in 1823, according to Edna Priest, the last resident of the house. It remained in the same family until the Town of South Windsor purchased it in 1998. Norman Priest grew up on the farm, where his family raised a small amount of tobacco (six to eight acres), common in South Windsor, which provided enough income for the year. The family was mostly self-sufficient, as they also kept horses, pigs, dairy cows and chickens. When Norman Priest took over the farm he concentrated on milk production for income. He may be best remembered for his passion for horticulture and rare plant species.

Section IV

In addition to the active uses, the site is large enough to support many passive recreational uses: picnicking, hiking and walking trails (some with boardwalks) and is connected to other open space properties. This project is related to South Windsor's Plan of Conservation and Development to preserve farmland in South Windsor, as well as the South Windsor Land Conservation Trust goals of preserving farmland. The importance of preserving the house will assist in meeting the Town goals as a designated Certified Local Government and our commitment to historic preservation. This property is included in the Historic Resources Inventory, Phase II.

This vision also relates to projects of the South Windsor FOOD Alliance (a sub-committee of the South Windsor Park & Recreation Commission), and includes: community gardens, the South Windsor Farmers Market, Classroom and Laboratory Learning in Agriculture, the Arts and the Environment. It also meets a goal of the South Windsor Agricultural Land Preservation Advisory Commission in acquiring open space in South Windsor. This site is adjacent to additional property owned by the SW Conservation Land Trust (30 acres), and a new walking trail system recently constructed could connect to existing trails on the SW Land Trust site.

This plan, to develop the South Windsor Agriculture, Arts and Nature Center at the Priest Farm, can contribute to the co-curricular educational programs for K-12 students, and provide a location for development of farm camps by the SW Recreation Dept. When fully developed, the Agricultural Center will play an important role in promoting Agri-Tourism in South Windsor. This may include events such as: Agricultural Festivals; Farmers Market; Petting Zoo; Walking Trails; Living History Farm; Farm to Table Dinners; and Community Supported Agriculture.

Collaborations:

South Windsor Board of Education
University of Connecticut-Agricultural Extension Service
Manchester Community College
CT-Northeast Organic Farming Association
Goodwin College

Partnerships:

SW-FOOD Alliance; SW-Park & Recreation Commission
SW-Agricultural Land Preservation Advisory Commission
SW-Open Space Task Force; SW-Land Conservation Trust
SW-Historic District Commission; SW-Master Gardeners; SW-Down to Earth Garden Club

Short-Term Initiatives:

Host site for the South Windsor Farmers Market (June thru October); Community Gardens; Community Supported Agriculture (CSA); Classroom/Agriculture Education Programs; Annual Farm to Table Dinner.

Long-Term Initiatives:

Resident Farmer living at the Farmhouse as Director and Caretaker of the property/programs;
Food Venture Center with Incubator Kitchen for local farmers; Educational programs; Food-Hub for sale of local produce; SW-Farming Museum; SW-Tobacco Museum.