

Town of North Stonington, CT
HEWITT FARM COMMITTEE

REGULAR MEETING MINUTES

Monday, December 5, 2011 at 3:00 p.m
New Town Hall Conference Room

The meeting of the Hewitt Farm Committee was called to order by Nita Kincaid at 3:04 p.m. in the New Town Hall Conference Room with members Ellie Banker, Jack Brown, Dick (Coop) Cooper, Ed Harasimowitz, Nita Kincaid and Eddie McGowan present.

1. Approve 11/28/11 Regular Meeting Minutes.

Under Item 4, Ellie noted that Nita's suggestion had been to call the pond "Lower Hewitt Pond", if a name change was necessary. This correction was agreed upon. Ellie motioned and Eddie seconded to approve the 11/28/2011 Minutes as corrected.

2. Identify next steps for defining the committee's "vision of Hewitt farm."

Nita reviewed the reason the group had decided to describe their individual "visions" for Hewitt Farm. The goal was to determine in what areas there was agreement and disagreement and then to allow the group to build a shared vision for the future of Hewitt Farm. She proposed that each member of the committee take up to 15 minutes to express their "vision" without interruption and that other committee members then be allowed to ask them questions.

Ed Harasimowitz

Ed began the round-table discussion by stating the he hopes the farm will remain pretty much "as is" for at least the next five years. Recognizing that the dam will be repaired and the road over it open to traffic by then, he would like to see the farm continue to be maintained at minimum cost to the Town. He envisions that the hiking trails will remain pretty much as they currently are and that they will receive year-round use by residents and visitors.

Ed noted that because "things change" in so many respects over time, it is very difficult to forecast what the Town will want to do with Hewitt Farm in the future, particularly into the way distant future.

Eddie McGowan

Eddie spoke next. He stated that he would like to see the Route 2 entrance to Hewitt Farm improved significantly to make it more visible and inviting to visitors. He is anticipating the evaluation of Greene Gables to determine if the structure is salvageable. If it is, he foresees a parking area constructed in that area to provide visitors with access both to it and to that area of the property.

Eddie described his vision for a boat launch along the west shore of the pond just north of the dam and a "dry hydrant" in that same area for use by the Fire Company.

Eddie stated that the 1750 Farm House could be renovated to accommodate uses by the Town such as for administrative offices, meetings, or similar community purposes. He suggested that the Carriage House could be used to store maintenance equipment.

Eddie stated that the Amphitheater should be used for entertainment and that this could become a very popular location for concerts and outdoor performances. Eddie also spoke to a request to build a Frisbee golf course on Hewitt Farm.

Nita Kincaid

Nita stated that her near-term vision for Hewitt Farm goes out from five to ten years. She noted that Hewitt Farm has been protected thanks to the foresight of the Hewitt family. This protection will continue thanks to restrictions imposed by the deed and the committee needs to be conscious of this background.

Nita, pointing to an aerial-photo map of the property, continued her "vision" by stating that she sees Hewitt Farm as having three diverse characteristics - trails and natural areas, a farm and a recreation area. She noted the committee should approach each differently to improve upon all that exists with careful planning and thought.

As far as trails are concerned, Nita stated they are in good shape and already attracting much use, but more could be done. In particular, she noted the lack of marked horse trails and the potential for constructing such trails around the edges of the hayfields and other areas on the property. For hiking the Bicentennial Trail is the best developed and popular for its signage and views. Other trails on the property could be improved by descriptive signs and more trails could be constructed, including connections to nearby public trails (owned by the town and land conservancies).

Returning Hewitt Farm to a true farmstead could be accomplished and would be desirable, but generally such public farms require an on-site farmer/caretaker. Nita suggested that Hewitt Farm could become a "demonstration" farm and noted the state of CT has programs to encourage future farmers. The 1750 Farm House is historically significant and must receive careful attention by its inhabitants and any professionals who work on it.

Nita noted that if Greene Gables is not salvageable, a new simple barn-type structure might be erected in that area in the future that would serve the same public use functions that people envision for a restored Greene Gables.

With regard to using Hewitt Farm for recreation, Nita stated that it should not be used for organized sports that require a structure or "playing field." Any recreation equipment brought onto the property for whatever purpose should be removed at the end of the day.

Nita then concluded her "vision" for Hewitt Farm by saying that whatever is done on the property care must always be taken to avoid impacts that "last beyond current fads."

Jack Brown

Jack began his "vision" by stating he agreed with much already said and would not repeat it. He would like to see Hewitt Farm include a "mini" farm (a snapshot of a farm) that would be open to the public. This could provide an appreciation of "Farm Life" up close. Visitors could feed a sampling of animals, pick eggs and view first hand the life and surroundings of farm life.

Jack stated that he believes The Green and eventually most or all of the fields and meadows should be cleared back to the stonewalls. Using the aerial-photo map, Jack showed locations where he proposes clearing and maintenance of tree rows and wall lines. He would use forest management practices to improve the quality of the woodlands throughout the property.

Jack revealed that he had located a beautiful white oak tree that he believes should be preserved with prominence - possibly by calling it the "Bicentennial Oak." He responded to several questions about his "vision" for improving the fishing experience on Hewitt Farm by stating that this, as well as the current trail system, seems to be in good order at the present time and can be addressed on a later occasion.

Ellie Banker

Ellie stated that her "vision" goes out 100 years to where North Stonington is built-out. She sees Hewitt Farm as a "green spot" within a community full of development. Ellie sees the need to preserve Hewitt Farm much as it is today, while encouraging the preservation of wildlife and offering it a refuge. She also sees the opportunity to use the farm for educational purposes, particularly on the subjects of agriculture and history.

Ellie recognizes that this will have to be tempered with the desires of town residents to conduct other uses such as community gardens. She believes any changes to existing policy should be made slowly and incrementally "a small step at a time." This will afford the committee and town residents the opportunity to evaluate different proposals before they are permanently adopted.

Ellie expressed her sadness over the condition of Greene Gables and the problem of resolving its future. She simply wants to be certain that whatever decisions are made for Hewitt Farm, both now and in the future, do not detract from its ability to be that "green spot," which will be so sorely needed in 100 years.

Dick Cooper

Coop began his "vision" as a follow-on to what Ellie had said about development that could surround Hewitt Farm in the future. Using the *Assessor's Property Boundary Map* and applying current *Zoning Regulations*, Coop showed the committee where future development could occur near Hewitt Farm and the type of development it would most likely be. He further expressed his concern over the opening of the dam to vehicular traffic and the likely pressure that will be exerted to pave Hewitt Road and turn it into a two-lane road.

Coop noted that if this were to happen, the Hewitt farm road would become a major thoroughfare akin to what existed before Mystic Seaport closed it off back in the 1980's. This would have a significant negative impact on Hewitt Farm and the "farm" image that the town is trying to portray. It will be up to the Hewitt Farm Committee to see to it that the Planning and Zoning Commission who controls Town-designated Scenic Roads, never allows this to happen.

Coop also noted that here are many opportunities to expand or extend some of the trails on the property to connect with others outside the property and to create continuous hiking corridors across Town with Hewitt Farm as a hub.

Coop concluded his "vision" by stating that he does not see Hewitt Farm as a "park" with manicured gardens, trimmed trees and shrubs, pristine lawns, etc., but he also agrees that as long as reversible changes are made, and particularly if they are made incrementally, they can be tried.

Wrap-up

In ending the meeting, Nita stated that she and Coop would attempt to sum-up what everyone had said about their "vision" for Hewitt Farm, write it up, and return it to committee members for further discussion at the next Regular Meeting. This meeting is scheduled for **December 12, 2011 at 3:00 p.m. in the New Town Hall Conference Room**. Committee members will then continue the work to formulate an overall "vision" that all can agree upon and that can be used to guide the group in future decisions with regard to improvements, policies, operation and maintenance of Hewitt Farm.

The meeting adjourned at 5:00 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted, Richard B. Cooper