

Agriculture and Food Production Breakout Group Notes:

Potential Agricultural or Food Production Uses of the property that would serve the Newport region?

Diversified vegetables

Greenhouses

Community Gardens

Native Species Gardens

Longhorn Beef (or other beef)

Apples, Grapes, other fruit tree crops

People seemed to be interested in exploring alternative management or ownership of the farm. This could be in the form of one farmer-owner who conserves the farm as a community resource in some form or another. It could also mean multiple farmers sharing the land—using physically distinct parts of the property for their highest and best use. Or it could mean cooperative or non-profit management, which would keep an educational mission as an integral part of any agricultural activity.

What's missing and what would be a great addition?

The two large road-side fields are ready for many kinds of ag production and have been actively managed. The middle field directly behind the buildings is not easily managed as a cultivated field and should probably be put into some kind of perennial production—we discussed an orchard during our breakout session but several voices started mentioning the viability of grapes towards the end of the evening.

We need more information on the lake-side fields—they have been hayed in the past but fertilized less frequently. Moreover there is a question of whether there is sufficient access to these fields for tractors, spreaders, and machinery

What farm uses might fit well with your vision of the property?

It would be nice to see a farm that didn't require a lot of off-farm inputs, but that might be challenging given the high-need nature of the soils present. The land is excessively well drained, and sandy, and nutrients quickly leach out.

Given the diversity of the land base, a diversified farm would take most advantage of the property and allow the greatest portion of it to be intensively managed. This is a priority since the challenge of making a business viable on this small a farm.

How can active farm use of the property stimulate the economy or benefit Newport?

Our group saw a lot of value in finding a farm business that is motivated to work with other ag businesses in the region—whether it's apple sales to Eden Cider, educational collaborations with Sterling, VTC, UVM Extension, or the Career Center. Collaboration among businesses could have a multiplicative benefit for the Newport region.

What are your concerns about ag uses of the property?

There was some question about whether the city water would suffice for any significant agricultural activity. Andrew De La Bruere and Kristy Scott discussed two possible sites on the land that they thought might likely be reliable water sources. More investigation is needed.

Dairy is likely not a viable enterprise on the farm, unless it is on a micro-scale. But because microdairies often include a value-added component, water needs and wastewater management might make this prohibitively difficult.

Another concern is that any significant livestock presence while romantic in theory, might meet with resistance and be seen as a nuisance by the neighborhood without due diligence beforehand.

Agriculture can co-exist with recreational use of the property. The group did lodge some significant resistance to any notion of the land being developed with new tourism-based structures—particularly parking lots near the lake or hotels/cabins. It's logical that a shoreline trail be accessible to the public and that the woodland near the water be only selectively logged. But the integrity of the road-side farm fields needs to be preserved and probably shouldn't have conflicting uses.

Are there community food security needs that the property could help address?

Yes, the farmers market is very sparsely supplied and could use another significant veggie supplier. Citizens would like to see more local food availability in local groceries—the food

insecurity of the region is very high. It sounded like people would like to see if this farm could produce affordable food for the community.

Are there other local people or groups/organizations Vermont Land Trust should be talking with about this opportunity?

We should consult with successful working lands businesses in the region about whether vegetables, apples, grapes etc. work well on this land base. Groups people would like to consult with included Eden Ice Cider, the Abenaki community, Pete's Greens, Vermont Youth Conservation Corps, Green Mountain Farm-to-School, and Sterling College, along with any other education-focused groups that might be interested in collaborating.

Health & Recreation Breakout Group Notes:

Facilitators asked each group member to introduce themselves and share their personal vision for the Bluffside property. The group did not attempt to reach conclusions. Rather folks indicated their priorities and shared their experiences of the property as is. Some of the attributes of the property and ideas for future uses included:

Recreation - trails:

- There are current footpaths meandering along the water's edge and through the woods -maintain or improve them for public use. X-C skiing and snowshoeing trails to support year-round use by public.
- Kayak and canoe launch(es) would be welcomed. A representative from the Northern Forest Canoe Trail thought that the flat section of bluff above the south facing beach would be ideal for a few primitive campsites. This could create economic benefits by bringing paddlers to Newport City.
- Some access to biking would be appreciated by many. A central stretch of hill might be the best terrain for any single track. There appeared to be more of a consensus that there is room to segregate bikes from some of the walking trail along the water, but allow them in other places.
- It was noted that this could be the opportunity to complete a traffic-free connection between Prouty Beach Park and the Derby Rec Path. A bridge from Prouty Beach to Bluffside to better connect the property to downtown area for greater walkability – help keep folks from having to walk along the road. A bridge across the narrows would likely be an expensive undertaking. But putting in an improved path suitable for family biking and groomed skiing can be done relatively cheaply. A path could extend from at least the narrows to the northeast corner of the property. Putting it in the fields, along the edge of the woods would require the least work and would keep it distinct from the more intimate walking trail as mentioned above.
- MSTF could be willing to extend grooming operations to the property, especially if a connecting trail behind the hospital could be achieved. There may be room on the property to continue this path as well to the west side of the property, perhaps looping around to the parking area north of the barn.
- The public process for the spur trail is one to look to for guidance – many objected to the bike path and now they love it; lots of fear about crime that has never been realized.
- The bike trail has been a real contributor to community health and well being.
- A Parking area might be best located some yards south of the Bluff Road, north of the barn. There was concern, from a close neighbor, that we not locate any parking in the northeast corner.

- It was noted that improved trails, like the rec path, get dramatically more use than primitive trails.

Recreation – full property focus:

- Could see the property as a great place to host events for the community.
- There were a number of suggestions for other "centers" to enhance use, such as an outdoor recreation center, sports training facility, skating rink, music center. The barn could serve as a wedding/event center. More specific examples noted:
 - Could the ownership be like Craftsbury Outdoor Center? Develop a training center for skulling, long distance swimmers, etc.
 - Leverage property more fully – what about Adamant Music Center as a model?
 - Recreational Center – indoor and outdoor recreational hub for the area? The closing of IROC is a real loss to the community and how can we replace that?
- The group recognized that any of those ideas would require an interested party with deep pockets to step up to the plate.

Other ideas:

- Several folks voiced their hopes to maintain an agricultural enterprise, as the character of the property cannot be the same without that.
- Lots of berries on the property – could the farm operation focus on berry production?
- Need to be careful about phosphates and lake pollution if there is farm use of the property
- City of Newport wants to see mixed use of the property – high taxes and land poor – be careful about potential financial impacts with regard to future ownership and uses of the property
- There was some brief discussion of ways to compromise recreation and aesthetic ideals with financial realities of Newport city (avoid losing this property from the tax roles).
- Consider looking to Landmark Trust and the Scott Farm in Dummerston as a possible model for future ownership and uses

Questions this group might consider moving forward:

- What are the public health and recreation goals/needs of Newport?
- Are there gaps now and if so, what are they?
- How might Bluffside Farm serve these goals/needs or fill gaps?
- What are the economic benefits for Newport by creating public health/recreation opportunities on the property?

- With close proximity to existing trails, the hospital, the high school and Prouty Beach, how might Bluffside Farm serve to strengthen or expand on existing public health and recreational assets and use by public?
- Are there other local people or groups/organizations Vermont Land Trust should be talking with about this opportunity?

Cultural and Natural Resources Breakout Group Notes:

- Possibility of re-connecting old bridge
 - This could be both a good and a bad thing, as the bridge may attract other types of users and traffic that is undesired and would change the feeling of the area.
- Focus needs on the land
 - Wetlands on property are important, need to identify them and protect them
 - Stewardship of land is important
 - Prime Ag area
 - Educational opportunities of stewardship exist
 - Shoreland protection is vital
 - Possibilities for Cultural Center to share information on working lands and the natural resources of this parcel.
- Baseline inventory is essential
 - What species (flora and fauna) are on site
 - Bio-blitz opportunities?
 - Important area for wildlife movement, corridors on parcel should be understood
- Archeological importance
 - Need to better understand past use of land – consider archeological inventory
 - Educational information on historic use, both pre and post-European
 - Access and sharing of information needs to be developed
 - Interpretative signs would be helpful explaining culturally important sites
 - Ancestral homeland of Abenaki, need to better understand the use on this land
 - Highly significant cultural site
 - Past history of fire to maintain oak and open forest conditions, might be good to explore this and better understand
 - Consider historical and/or cultural center on site to attract tourists as well as be used for local education
- Access
 - Public access is a must, but must also be defined and be regulated
 - Identify specific use areas
 - Current access to the lake from the land is difficult and this is a good thing. This should be maintained as if not run the risk of too much use and “loving the land to death”
 - Soils on site are highly erodible and steep bluffs are problematic for access, so any access would need to be carefully designed

- Forests
 - This should continue to be part of the working landscape and forests should continue to be managed
 - Sugaring should continue
- Farm
 - Working farm should continue, maybe link to school
 - Farm to school
 - Areas currently in agricultural use should remain in agricultural use.
- International footprint – this land is close to the Canadian border so any erosion to lake impacts Canada as well making it all that more important to carefully steward the land.
- Light pollution: this is one of the few dark places within the city limits and star gazing and maintaining dark night conditions is important.
- Use
 - Needs to be non-motorized
 - Pedestrian only?
 - Hunting – bow only
 - Skiing maybe, but not necessarily groomed
 - Consider snowhoeing only
 - Dogs must be leashed
 - No need to connect to the bike path, this should be a separate trail system
- Ownership
 - More than one owner, each owner would be specific to use (i.e. farm, forest, etc.)
 - Whoever owns the land must maintain the land/buildings, regulate access
 - Consider state ownership
 - Combination of multi-use is critical to community engagement, people need to be interested in the parcel to care about it
 - Foundation or other non-profit ownership
- Cultural center
 - Work with Nulhegan band of the Abenaki to consider interpretative Center options

Questions this group might focus on moving forward:

- See fact sheet with info gathered by VLT on cultural and natural resource values and other property attributes – what’s missing?
- What are the most important cultural and natural resources on the property?
- What should be protected and why?
- How would you balance these protections with other uses of the property?

- What are the potential economic benefits associated with protection of the property?
- What type of ownership makes most sense?
- How can these values be shared with the public to help generate a deeper connection with the land?
- Are there other local people or groups/organizations Vermont Land Trust should be talking with about this opportunity?

Education Breakout Group Notes:

Are there specific uses of part or all of the property or any of the buildings that could help address community needs in the education sector?

- Use maple for career center and sell through school – DECA
 - Concern about the need to operate farm in summer if associated with Career Center – other possibilities – VYCC, Sterling College, etc.
 - Can't pigeon hole to 9 month program
- A science center like ECHO
- Working farm with educational mission, like Shelburne Farms, Fresh Air possibility, Learning about agriculture – think Billings Farm
- Partner with Stewardship Center on campsites
- Think about North Branch Center (Montpelier)
- VYCC has a farm corps with a desire to expand in Newport area
- So many organizations that could make use of the property. Hoping for an outcome that can be a positive focal point.
- Model of good stewardship
- Self-sustaining business model – more substance than hobby farm
- A portion could be community gardens raised beds for elderly, training opportunities,
- Vegetables for school and hospital
- Market through tasting center
- Opportunities for interpretive information on the land about Newport and the property

What are the important values that should be protected?

- Need to carefully balance uses, development and maintaining natural values
- Restore the connection from Prouty Beach
- Bike path connection
- City has a barn they would like to move

Do you think a mix of ownership would best serve the community – if so, how and why?

- Preference for mixed ownership model

What are some of the ways in which you envision the Bluffside Farm contributing to the quality of life of Newport residents?

- Just having it accessible would be a positive change

Are there ways in which educational uses of the property could enhance Newport or contribute to the economic needs of the community?

- Can tourism be a draw, a source of revenue?
 - Feature local chefs and/or culinary arts students utilizing farm products
 - An indoor farmers market?
 - Package deal with local hotels, etc for educational workshops
 - Do some “high end” events that subsidize events for locals

Are there other local people or groups/organizations Vermont Land Trust should be talking with about this opportunity?

Need a list of existing groups

- Farm to plate may be a resource
- Green Mountain Farm to School
- Tasting Center
- Shelburne Farms
- Billings Farms
- Northwoods Stewardship Center
- Memphremagog Watershed Association
- UVM Extension
- Fresh Start – Newport Community Gardens
- Vermont Fish & Wildlife – Buck Lake
- 4H
- Coutts-Moriarity
- FFA
- Northern Forest Canoe Trail
- Hospital
- School

A summary of feedback and ideas from 27 emails and calls received by VLT since September 2015 regarding Bluffside Farm. Repeated ideas are only listed once.

Recreation:

- A walking trail of some kind along the edge of the property and connecting it with
- Prouty campground and Bigelow Bluff Drive would benefit many people and fit well with bike/XC path
- A new walking/cycling/XC-skiing bridge should be constructed. This bridge would continue the community's commitment to a bike/walking/skiing path. The locals would be connected to the farm via the walking paths. The bridge should be wide enough to accommodate a minimum of two lanes of foot and bike traffic.
- Fishermen should have a designated fishing pier.
- A non-motorized boating zone should be established within the cove!
- Walking, cycling, and XC skiing trails should be built near the waterfront respecting the state and federal guidelines.
- Keep recreation around the edges with a farm in the interior
- There is very little access to the Lake that is in a natural setting – this could be the benefit of Bluffside Farm
- There are two biking organizations that use the local trail systems now – would like to be considered in access to Bluffside trails – there is an after school bike club at NCUHS as well as a PE unit
- Allow the waterfront area to be used for outdoor recreational purposes in a profitable way
- A campground could be viable use

Agriculture:

- Leave and use the house, tillable fields, barns, and out buildings to support a working farm, this is the most profitable area agriculturally
- Bed and breakfast/restaurant
- Farm should be integrated within the school systems, to include high schools (NCUHS, LRUHS) state, local, and provincial colleges and universities (UVM, Lyndon, Johnson, Sterling, Bishops), and the Northern Correctional Facility
- There could be multiple opportunities to have farm related businesses. The production of milk, ice cream and a creamery, beef; wool, lamb; goat products; and maple syrup production create a small working farm with public access to the lakefront in its natural
- Educational farm with collaborative relationships
- Create our own Shelburne or Billings Farm
- Attract an Amish buyer to operate the farm

Natural & Cultural resources:

- The Cove - this is a true gem!

- The beach facing west should be accessed only by the paths. The beach should be open to the public during appropriate hours and days.
- Would love to see the history of the location explored, researched and preserved
- Bluffside farm as it keeps the area peaceful

Education:

- student groups might be able to participate in trail building or other projects on the farm

Development:

- The City of Newport and its residence should derive some benefit from this purchase. Sell building lots along Bluff Road and Bigelow Bluff Road, thus, increasing the tax rolls. The lots should exceed the minimal depth requirements of the city. The infrastructure along Bluff Road should be upgraded to include sidewalks, water and possibly extension of the sewer system. The quality of Lake Memphremagog would be improved if the city sewage system was extended to the end of Bigelow Bluff Road and included all of the new and existing homes, thus eliminating all of the existing septic systems.
- The view from the city of this lakeside property enhances the charm and beauty of the city
- Be mindful of the narrow roads and how they could accommodate traffic created from various scenarios