



# CITY OF CONCORD

*New Hampshire's Main Street™*

## REPORT TO THE MAYOR AND CITY COUNCIL

**FROM:** Councilor Jennifer Kretovic, Chair of the Ad hoc Gully Hill Road Committee  
**DATE:** March 16, 2022  
**SUBJECT:** Recommendations to City Council

### **Recommendation:**

Accept this report.

### **Background:**

From 2007 to 2012, the City acquired several land parcels ultimately totaling 114 acres along the eastern bank of the Merrimack River between Loudon Road and Manchester Street with dollars from the Conservation Trust Fund. The prime portion of this land—65 acres—has been farmed commercially via leases with the City throughout this period.

Upon the acquisition of the last parcel in 2012, the City Council was asked by the Conservation Commission to grant an easement to the Society for the Protection of New Hampshire Forests (SPNHF) to manage and protect the entire 114 acres. In 2013, an ad hoc committee was convened to review the proposed easement terms. That committee did not ultimately arrive at consensus as to the easement terms but determined that no action was needed relative to accepting an easement since the land was leased to farmers for the foreseeable future.

In 2017, with the retirement of the commercial farming tenant, a second ad hoc committee was formed. That committee reviewed various options for the land including farming as well as recreation and public uses such as an amphitheater or festival space. Ultimately the committee felt that further study was needed and perhaps a master plan for the property. In the interim, the committee recommended that a new 3-year lease be pursued with the option to renew for an additional 3 years. A Request for Proposals (RFP) was issued and the lease was granted to Sloping Acres Farm. This lease renewal expires on December 31, 2022.

With the pending expiration of the current lease, Mayor Bouley appointed a third ad hoc committee to review the use of this property.

**Discussion:**

The current committee, comprised of Councilors Kretovic, Bouchard and Brown, met two times. It received testimony from about a dozen farmers and residents. The farmers universally felt that a longer-term lease was the most viable alternative due to the significant investment needed to make the land financially viable.

One resident and the non-profit Organization of Refugee and Immigrant Success (ORIS) provided testimony supportive of community gardens in some portion of this property. Councilor Brown, in particular, felt that such gardens would be well-positioned to provide food sustainability opportunities for New Americans, many of whom live along the Loudon Road corridor. Although no commercial farmer was explicitly opposed to this concept, there was some hesitation expressed by several with the type of fertilizers and pesticides that unregulated community gardeners might use and what impacts that could have on the farmer's nearby crops. Additional concerns stemmed from parking, litter, and access for the numbers of people that might be involved in community gardens. These concerns were echoed by another resident who manages the Birch Street community gardens and who cautioned that such gardens require a tremendous amount of time-intensive oversight.

One resident advocated for recreational ball fields on the property although several others felt that such an installation would significantly and negatively impact the future of ever again using the land for agriculture.

**Committee Recommendations:**

The committee, generally, expressed support for the concept of community gardens but the majority did not feel that this location was appropriate for such an activity. The majority ultimately agreed that maintaining and maximizing commercial farming at this location would provide the best stewardship of the land and keep farming as a prominent feature of the Capital City's landscape. However, it was evident that more education for the general public as to the benefits of this land and its farming practices was needed. As a result, the committee voted to recommend the following:

1. The Council should consider offering the current tenants, Sloping Acres Farms, a new lease with a 5-year term and four 5-year renewal options.
2. The Council should consider directing staff to explore the installation of signage educating the public as to the benefits and practices of farming. In addition, the City should seek out a possible private sector/non-profit partner who would be willing to install an observation deck on a portion of the land to allow for contemplation and bird-watching.