

Bonenfant, Janice

From: BYRON CHAMPLIN <chamby@comcast.net>
Sent: Friday, March 21, 2025 9:56 AM
To: Bonenfant, Janice
Subject: Fwd: Sunfox Farm Events
Attachments: IMG_8073.JPG; IMG_8125.JPG; IMG_8148.JPG; IMG_8186.JPG

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Hi Janice:

Please place the request below on the April Consent Calendar for referral to the Conservation Commission.

Thanks,

Byron

----- Original Message -----

From: Greg Pollock <gregpollock@sunfoxfarm.org>
To: "chamby@comcast.net" <chamby@comcast.net>
Date: 03/19/2025 3:41 PM EDT
Subject: Sunfox Farm Events

Dear Members of the Conservation Commission,

I hope you're all doing well. Thank you again for your support last year, particularly with approving on-site vendor parking for our Sunflower Bloom Festival. We truly appreciate our working relationship and the guidance you've provided as we continue to steward the Gully Hill Road property using organic and sustainable practices.

I'm writing now to discuss the significant parking challenges we've encountered and to present an updated proposal for on-site parking for the Annual Sunflower Bloom Festival and the potential for additional agritourism events.

A Quick Recap of Our Practices

- **Crop Rotation & Cover Cropping**
We manage the City-owned 57-acre property by dividing it into three 19-acre sections. Each section is rotated annually among sunflowers, a cash crop (like popcorn), and a year of cover cropping (e.g., crimson clover or buckwheat). This rotation helps rejuvenate the soil, prevents disease and pest build-up, and aligns with our mission to farm sustainably.

- **Stewardship & Conservation**

From reduced tillage to cover cropping, we remain committed to safeguarding soil health. We strive to ensure any land use is temporary and reversible, particularly when it comes to areas that may see added foot or vehicle traffic.

The Parking Challenges

Over the past two years, the Sunflower Bloom Festival has drawn over 12,000 attendees each year. We've relied on a shuttle-bus system from the NHTI parking lots, but have experienced persistent issues:

1. **Environmental Impact & Attendee Experience**

- Continuous use of 5 full size school buses increases emissions and creates confusion. Many guests, knowing the field's location, often ignore the shuttles and instead park at places like Buffalo Wild Wings or what is now Sierra's parking, causing congestion and inconveniencing our neighbors.

2. **Emergency Response Concerns**

- Should an evacuation become necessary, waiting for buses to transport everyone from the festival grounds back to off-site parking can lead to delays and aggravation amongst attendees.

3. **Accessibility**

- We currently designate 6 Loudon Road for handicap parking, but this leads to separate parking areas, extra walking, and potential barriers for those with mobility issues, Especially if the sunflowers are toward the far end of the field as they will be this year.

4. **Parking for Other Agritourism Events**

- We'd like to expand our offerings to include a corn maze, pick-your-own pumpkins, and Amber would like to do more farm-to-table dinners. All of these draw visitors who need convenient, safe parking access.

Proposed Parking Solutions

We've given considerable thought to how we can reduce the environmental footprint of our events and make them more accessible. Below are two potential approaches, both of which respect the need to maintain healthy soil and keep land use temporary.

1. **Ideal Option: Rotating Temporary Parking (Year-by-Year)**

- **How It Works**

- Each year, one of our three 19-acre sections is in a cover crop cycle. We would continue to plant crimson clover on most of that section. However, on a small 2–3 acre subsection, we'd plant an Italian rye or another traffic-tolerant cover crop.
- This 2–3 acre subsection could serve as on-site parking for the Sunflower Bloom Festival and any additional agritourism events that year (e.g., corn maze, pick-your-own, farm-to-table dinners).

- The following year, that entire 19-acre section rotates into its next phase (e.g., sunflowers or another cash crop).
- **Why It Helps**
 - **Reduced Emissions & Confusion:** Eliminates the need for continuous shuttle buses and signs directing people to various off-site lots.
 - **Enhanced Emergency Response:** On-site parking means quicker evacuations, if ever needed.
 - **Better Accessibility:** Guests with mobility challenges can park close to the festival grounds.
 - **Sustainable Soil Management:** By limiting parking to a 2–3 acre area planted with traffic-tolerant cover crops, we have control over the potential impacts. The area will remain covered with roots in the ground to help mitigate compaction, erosion as well as help with organic weed control and soil fertility.
- 2. **Backup Option: Parking Only During the 9-Day Sunflower Festival**
 - **How It Works**
 - We'd plant our usual spring cover crop (such as crimson clover) across the entire 19-acre cover cropped section.
 - For just the nine days of the Sunflower Bloom Festival, we'd designate a 2–3 acre section for attendee parking. Immediately after the festival, we'd reseed that parking subsection with a fall cover crop (e.g., buckwheat), ensuring quick restoration.
 - Note that this would not allow for additional agritourism.
 - **Why It Helps**
 - It addresses the core festival parking needs without requiring the field to be open to parking at other times of the year.
 - Our experience with limited vendor parking last year showed minimal impact on soil health, with photos demonstrating robust growth of cover crops afterward.

Anticipated Outcomes & Commitments

1. **Soil Health**
 - If necessary, we'd subsoil the traffic area to address compaction. We've consulted NRCS about possibly using Italian rye for its deep, fibrous roots, which could help mitigate surface compaction and hold through the winter.
 - We have attached photographic evidence from last year's vendor parking showing strong cover crop regrowth post-event. You will note that the buckwheat is actually stronger in areas of high traffic.
2. **Emergency & Accessibility**
 - Faster potential evacuation and a simplified arrival process for guests and increased access for those with mobility issues.
3. **Community & Economic Benefit**

- Additional agritourism activities, such as a corn maze or pick-your-own pumpkins, would boost Concord's profile as a destination city and provide a fun, family-friendly experience.
- On-site parking reduces vehicle congestion in neighboring commercial lots and builds goodwill with local businesses.

4. **Commitment to Temporary Usage**

- Whether via a rotating section or a short-term approach for the festival, we fully intend to preserve the land for farming first. Creating a permanent parking lot does not align with our farm's goals or values.

Request for Your Guidance

We'd be grateful for the Commission's feedback on these two options and any conditions you might propose to ensure the land is protected. Our hope is to settle on a plan that addresses parking challenges while continuing to uphold the City's conservation goals.

Thank you for your time, consideration, and ongoing support. We look forward to working with you to keep this property healthy, vibrant, and a source of pride for Concord.

All the best,

Greg Pollock

Sunfox Farm

CEO/Farm manager

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