

Bean-Allard Farm Breaks Ground; Agriculture, Sports, and Conservation to Share Property |Western MA

These horses were on hayride duty all afternoon long.
(Mary Serreze photos)

NORTHAMPTON — The sun came out just in time for Sunday's groundbreaking celebration at the Bean and Allard Farms, a 180-acre land preservation project in the Mill River floodplain here.

The large crowd represented both sides of Northampton's political aisle: there were more bicycles than cars; a bluegrass band was playing; kids wearing team gear played happily with children in boutique organic cottons; and a beautiful team of strong horses hauled folks around all afternoon long in a big hay wagon.



Over a year ago, the property in Florence was the subject of an unpleasant tug-of-war between parents wanting more playing fields for their kids and locavores insisting that the entire parcel be devoted to agriculture. But in one of the most successful public planning processes the city's seen in some time, a compromise was hammered out through the work of an appointed city task force representing diverse views. Now, soccer and baseball fields, a working farm, community gardens and conservation land will all be part of the mix.

City Planner Wayne Feiden and Recreation Director Anne-Marie Moggio were recognized by Mayor Higgins for their roles in working toward a project that serves diverse interests.

City and Land Trust Partner in Complicated Transaction

In 2009, the city approved \$910,000 in Community Preservation Act monies to pay for the 44-acre Bean Farm off of Spring Street. Soon thereafter, Mayor Higgins appointed a task force, chaired by Ward 7 councilor Gene Tacy, to resolve the sometimes heated conflict over the property's best use.



The Bean/Allard Task Force recommended a plan where 24 acres would be carved out for multi-use soccer and baseball fields, 35 acres of riparian forest conserved as part of the Mill River Greenway, with the remaining 121 acres devoted to agriculture, slated for eventual sale to an eligible farming entity.

In December of 2010, The Trust for Public Land (TPL) [purchased](#) the 44-acre Bean Farm and the adjacent 136-acre Allard Farm for \$2.46 million, sold 59 acres to the City of Northampton at \$236,000 for conservation and recreation, and soon thereafter conveyed an Agricultural Preservation Restriction (APR) on the remaining 121 acres to [Grow Food Northampton](#), a local non-profit that raised \$700,000 in six months to buy the land from TPL.

Children and adults played together at Sunday's celebration.

(To see our Dec. 14, 2010 story on the real estate deal, click [here](#).)

New community garden plots, located on the southeast side of Meadow Street, have recently been



added to the mix, thanks to CPA funding and a state grant, said city officials. Currently, the city's recreation department maintains a long waiting list for the community garden plots on Burts Pit Road.



TPL was able to convey 121 acres to Grow Food Northampton at an affordable price because it sold the property's development rights to the city and state under Massachusetts' Agricultural Preservation Restriction (APR) program, said Clem Clay, regional director for the Trust.

The development rights transaction cost \$1.135 million; 10 percent of that cost was paid for with local Community Preservation Act monies (raised through property taxes) and the rest with a grant from the Mass. Department of Agricultural Resources. The program pays owners the difference between the fair market and agricultural value of their land in exchange for a deed restriction that protects farming.

On the recreation field side, city officials pointed to a \$500,000 Park Grant Program from the state Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs that will pay for the design and planning of five soccer fields and two baseball diamonds on the property.

"A Virtual Beehive"

The Trust, through its ability to purchase land quickly and take it off the market while local fundraising takes place, was key to the success of the preservation effort, said Elizabeth "Lilly" Lombard, executive director and founder of Grow Food Northampton.

Ward 7 councilor Gene Tacy (left) chaired the Bean/Allard Task Force, which helped reconcile competing interests for the land

"It took measured risk-taking, guidance, creativity, and constant problem solving — Clem Clay from the Trust for Public Land provided all these things and more," she said.

Grow Food's six-month fundraising sprint was a nail-biter, said Lombard. She thanked the Trust for agreeing to work with the small, upstart group as it pulled in money for the purchase price.

Grow Food bought the farmland in February, and soon thereafter negotiated a 99-year lease of eight acres to farming couple Nate Frigard and Jen Smith, who will work [Crimson and Clover Farm](#) as a community-supported agriculture (CSA) venture.



Lombard said that "1,300 individuals, groups, and businesses contributed to the preservation of this land.. . It was a virtual beehive."

Lombard, who sits on the city's Community Preservation Act Committee which helped in the purchase, has recused herself from votes concerning Grow Food Northampton.

Sex, Death, Fruits and Vegetables

[Audio: Alan Everett Speaks](#)



Alan Everett, who grew up on the Bean Farm, enjoined young farmers to "leave the land better than you found it."

While a half-dozen speakers graced the



podium on Sunday, set up under a big white tent, the most compelling was Williamsburg dairy farmer Alan Everett, a member of the extended Bean family, who lived on the farm with his grandparents and great uncle in the 1960s and '70s.

“It was a great place to grow up,” he said, “all the life lessons were learned here. . . , the reality of death; growing food and knowing where it comes from. . . sex. . . putting up hay, catching chickens to be made into chicken soup, picking fruit, mechanical, plumbing, and veterinary work — everyone helped out with their expertise.”



In 1902, Henry I. Bean moved here from from Stoneham with his wife, daughter and four sons, said Everett. “He was a fishmonger. Fred and Arthur became the agriculturalists of the family.”

Everett said the Beans were always ahead of their time: the brothers were founding members of the Hampshire County Farm Bureau and the Northampton Cooperative Livestock Auction, and worked with the University of Massachusetts in “many experimental trials.”

Fresh eggs were a “big thing” on the farm, as were “Chester White pigs, poultry, apples, pears, peaches, plums, grapes, strawberries, and mixed vegetables,” Everett said.

In the late 1970s, the family was offered “a tremendous sum” to sell the farm to a neighboring golf course, said Everett, but decided that they wanted to keep the farm in agriculture.

“It’s important for farmers to have community support,” concluded Everett. “We’re all but brief travelers on this earth. My message to the new generation of farmers is ‘Leave the land better than you found it.’ ”

Nathan L’Etoile, Assistant Commissioner of the Mass. Department of Agricultural Resources, said that his boss, Agriculture Commissioner Carlos Soares, was in Washington this week lobbying for a 2014 federal farm bill that will not only send money to New England but support sustainable agriculture practices.

L’Etoile thanked U.S. Congressmen Richard Neal and John Olver, as well as state representatives Peter Kocot, Stan Rosenberg, John Scibak, and Stephen Kulik for their support of multi-year environmental bond bills; he said the APR program comes from that pot of money and is treated as a capital expenditure.

Higgins: Pay it Forward

[Audio: Higgins Speaks at Bean Farm Event](#)

Clay, in introducing city Mayor Mary Clare Higgins, referred to the controversy that dogged the project early on, and praised the mayor for working through conflict with her “trademark steady hand.”



And Higgins, in her remarks, balanced the day’s effusion over local agriculture with a shout out to those who pushed for recreation fields.

Northampton’s sustainability crowd was out in force on Sunday, as evidenced by the many bicycles parked along the driveway to the Bean Farm.

“This is a place where multiple goals in our community came together — with some friction, but ultimately success,” she said.

Farmers, community gardeners, families with kids in sports programs, and conservation fans will all be well-served by the project, she said.

“People began seeing those as competing interests, but we now see that as part of a whole (and) I thank all



people who sat at the table.”



Higgins gave special thanks to Ward 7 City Councilor Eugene Tacy who, as chair of the Bean/Allard Task Force, “worked through that effort with everybody.”

She also offered special recognition to city Recreation Director Anne-Maire Moggio and Planning and Development Director Wayne Feiden.

“If you’re a planner in a community like Northampton you’re not always going to be most popular person in town, because hard decisions sometimes have to be made,” said Higgins. “But Wayne Feiden kept a clear vision,. . .which has led to a great outcome for the city.”

Higgins, since announcing that she will not run for a seventh term this fall, has taken a number of opportunities to enjoin city residents to invest in the future — and on Sunday she had the perfect opportunity to express this message.

“We have an obligation to leave not only this land, but this city and this state and this country, in better shape than it was given to us. It’s our obligation to pitch in, whether it’s time, energy or money to make a better world — and the people gathered here know that and do it every day.”

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