

Septmber 14, 2021 Meeting with Town Counsel, NINETY-FIVE LCC, and Cranberry Growers Association

Peg Arguimbau, Chair of the Sharon Conservation Commission led a meeting regarding the Cranberry Bogs adjacent to the Sharon Galleries project. Attendees included: Steven Allen of Gelerman and Cabral, John Thomas, Conservation Administrator for the Town of Sharon, David Spiegel of NINETY-FIVE, LLC, Attorney Bob Shelmerdine, Dan Wood from the Cranberry Growers Association and Mike Wainio from the Cranberry Growers Association.

Arguimbau began the meeting by stating the collaborative intention: for the Conservation Commission to take over ownership of the bogs and the ability to delegate responsibilities regarding funding for restoring the bogs to previous conditions. Prior talks included the possibility of Ward's Berry Farm taking over stewardship of the land. Arguimbau stated this is no longer an option. Arguimbau spoke with Town Counsel Dick Gelerman and Steve Allan about the Conservation Commission accepting a deed with the agreement that bog restoration work still needs to be done. This meeting is regarding negotiations so the town could own the land with the agreement NINETY-FIVE, LLC would assist with getting them in working order. John Thomas, Conservation Administrator, would be the project manager.

Thomas noted there are many avenues for pursuing funding options to bring the bogs up to speed for intended use. The town is currently putting together a grant application which is due October 1st for a state funded allocation. CPC funding may also be a potential funding source in addition to appropriations from the town. Arguimbau and Thomas have discussed the possibility of necessary additional state permitting. The Conservation Commission would oversee all tasks under Thomas' direction as project manager. There are many potential benefits to bringing the bogs into working conditions for the town, developer, and community.

Arguimbau introduced Wainio and Wood to present to the meeting what would be needed to bring bogs back into working condition. Wood is very familiar with the site layout, water, and functioning.

Spiegel made a point to inform the meeting that certain improvements have been made at the end of 2020/beginning of 2021 including: upgrades to the irrigation system, new propane gas tanks, as well as new pumps on the property. Arguimbau responded that the efforts are appreciated.

Wainio added that these improvements are the only reason the bogs are not currently considered abandoned as the dykes are in disrepair, the weeds are overgrown, portions of the vines are dead and the insect presence is overwhelming. It would be impossible to pick berries in the bogs' current state. Wainio stated that in his opinion the bog would need to be rebuilt to be considered in running conditions. The bog is currently out of grade and needs to be rebuilt. He commended the newly added pump but said adding to the already existing infrastructure would not be enough to restore the bogs.

Arguimbau asked Wainio if he had experience renovating bogs. She said she received information from the Cranberry Growers Association in Wareham estimating the cost per acre to renovate an existing bog

to be about \$50,000 per acre. Wainio agreed. Arguimbau restated the focus of the meeting: how to create a legal agreement granting the Conservation Commission ownership of the bogs with the understanding the developer would still be working with the commission or the town on restoring the bogs to their former conditions.

On behalf of Town Counsel, Steve Allen described the possibility of working out the details with Bob Shelmerdine on a contract specifying funding responsibilities and timelines. He believed it would be possible to put something together by October 1, 2021.

Arguimbau was curious about timeline estimates from a grower's perspective. Wainio answered that if the bogs were his own his aim would be by the spring of 2022. He also noted the eyesore the bogs are currently and how beautiful a well-maintained bog is.

Arguimbau stated that she was hopeful the Conservation Commission may be able to accept a deed at their next meeting on September 23, 2021. Another meeting or zoom call and a site visit would have to occur in the meantime.

Shelmerdine expressed his appreciation for the Conservation Commission and noted the high cost per acre was unexpected and would like to see a better understanding of how costs would be divided. He also noted that the high financial cost for something aesthetic might be worth reviewing.

Arguimbau stated that in discussions with the Cranberry Growers Association it was understood that the improvements would not be putting back the same thing; they would be bringing updated plans to fruition. The Conservation Commission believes these changes will bring in profits within 3-4 years.

Shelmerdine and Spiegel discussed the likelihood of getting something in writing by the Conservation Commission's September 23rd meeting. Spiegel asked Arguimbau if it would be beneficial to the Conservation Commission to convert the bogs into wetlands. She answered that due to the historical significance, maintaining the bogs is a priority in town. Many residents were in favor of the zoning change that allowed for development on nearby property because they believed the conditions were as such that the bogs would be preserved. Spiegel noted that he grew up in Sharon and remembers the bogs' beauty.

Wainio stated that the cost would not necessarily have to be \$50,000 an acre as the most expensive part of the job is getting the sand to the site. He also noted another big cost: dyke improvements and installation at certain points. There is currently no dyke by the chain-link fence on the side abutting I-95. He recommended Spiegel explore funding options with the town for sand, dykes, and a new irrigation layout. He restated that trucking in sand from Wareham is where costs add up and an alternative may be viable. The estimated cost for vines is \$15,000. As far as irrigation, he would need to see the new entrance layout. He also discussed the difference between pop up sprinklers and impact sprinklers, which are there now. Pop up sprinklers use less water, increase efficiency, and disappear underground. They are plastic. The current irrigation system uses aluminum risers which are often stolen for scrap metal. He recommended getting rid of the pump house in the middle of the property and building up the dykes around the rest of it so Spiegel's road would not need to be utilized for maintenance.

Arguimbau and Shelmerdine summarized action items: spreading sand, stripping soil, creating a berm/dyke, and creating a turnaround for the truck near the highway. Shelmerdine noted that the turnaround is in the plans submitted to MA DOT which are currently being reviewed. Shelmerdine also noted that an easement or two may be needed for the commercial project being able to provide access to the bogs in relations to a 2007 MOU. If necessary, language addressing this matter would be included in the deed.

A tentative meeting at the cranberry bogs was set for Thursday, September 16, 2021 with Bill Moriano.

Allen asked Wainio if specifications for a project like this would be put together with line item estimates. Wainio answered that because most work would be done by cranberry growers, it would not. He noted that some costs can be itemized, for example a special bulldozer would be needed as the bogs date back to the 1700s and likely are currently subgrade. He noted there are only a few bulldozers specially equipped to handle such landscape and they are in high demand.

The meeting ended after identifying the following next steps: a meeting to take place at the cranberry bogs on Thursday, September 15, 2021.