

Great Meadowbrook Farm



Hardwick, Massachusetts

7 October 2022

Julie M. Quink, Chair
Select Board
Town of Hardwick
307 Main Street
Gilbertville, MA 01031

Dear Chair Quink, honorable board members, and Hardwick residents:

Thank you for joining us this week at the Informational Forum and the Select Board Public Hearing. Your comments and questions have provided valuable input as we go through this process together.

Our proposal is for a Thoroughbred facility at Great Meadowbrook Farm. The Great Meadowbrook Farm project intentionally integrates breeding, training, farming, and thoroughbred care with a racing element. Our concept is not to create a gaming facility or racino, but rather to create an agritourism destination in which racing is an important, but not dominant, ingredient.

It will be a year-round facility for all to learn about and enjoy farming and horses:

- Thoroughbred breeding program
- Agricultural and equestrian festivals
- Off the track thoroughbred retirement
- Stables, paddocks and equestrian center
- Training and racing facilities for thoroughbreds
- Agricultural programs for local students
- Hayfields and vegetable gardens
- Includes nearby associated projects:
 - Farm to table restaurant with changing seasonal menu of local products
 - Country Inn

We are at the beginning of our process, not the end. We understand there are passionate opinions and people at both ends of this issue. We want to become part of the Hardwick community, not divide it. We see a long future here. We are one hundred percent committed to working with all of you to protect cherished open space, support our farms and horses, and contribute to Hardwick's immediate interests and your long-term vision. We want to be good stewards of the Farm.

We are going to collaborate with your town leaders to develop a plan that addresses your concerns, helps build and invest in the town, while creating a facility that is agricultural and equine driven in its mission.

We have begun drafting a Host Community Agreement, which is our contract with the Town of Hardwick. Many of your ideas from how many festival racing days to financial concerns to traffic

and road safety issues will be included. We are working with your Select Board and Town Administrator every step of the way.

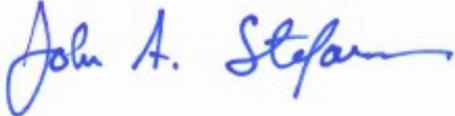
Attached are frequently asked questions we heard at the forums, and from emails we have received. This FAQ is also on our website and will be updated as the proposal develops.

Please email Mary at mary@commonwealthracingllc.com if you have further questions or comments about this proposal.

We want to do the right thing by everyone in this proposal. But we're going to need your collaboration and input to get it done.

We look forward to working with you and your colleagues in the months ahead to refine our proposals to address your concerns.

Sincerely,



John A. Stefanini
Post Office Box 2311
Framingham, MA 01703

CC: Nicole Parker, Town Administrator
Attachment

[Great Meadowbrook Farm FAQ](#)

Why Great Meadowbrook Farm and Hardwick?

Hardwick's proud agricultural legacy is found everywhere in the town, from the Hardwick Fair to the Hardwick Co-Op to its farms and artisans. As a right to farm community, this belief in the beauty of the land and animals is tightly sewn into the fabric of the community.

Twenty years ago, Great Meadowbrook Farm was the site of the Over the Walls Horse Trials, a premier series of trials that served as a qualifier for the Eventing World Cup Finals and Olympics. When we heard Great Meadowbrook Farm was available, we had to get involved to save this land, its heritage, and keep this active farm vibrant.

Hardwick's farming and equine legacy dates to Brig. General Timothy Ruggles, founder of the Hardwick Fair in 1762, known for owning the most successful horse breeding operation in the 13 colonies. Great Meadowbrook Farm is one of the oldest farms in Hardwick, and site of the former Mixter Farm, one of the largest dairy producers in the country. Today it is an active farm with two barns, a two-family house, a farm workers' residence and stables. Solar panels on the barn roof supply the electrical needs of the farm.

The farm has been under the Agricultural Preservation Restriction program since the 1980's.

What are you building?

The land is protected by the Agricultural Preservation Restriction program. Our focus is on horses - namely breeding, training and retiring thoroughbred horses. We are only building a stallion barn, a broodmare barn, a community pavilion, and associated paddocks and training / racing areas.

There are discussions about building a farm to table restaurant and a country inn. Those facilities will not be built at Great Meadowbrook Farm, and maybe a restoration of another building or new construction nearby off site.

Is a casino being built? What gambling will take place at Great Meadowbrook Farm?

No. We are not nor we ever will build a casino in Hardwick. First, state gaming law divides Massachusetts into three sections with one casino license per section. The casino license for our area is already taken; the casino in Springfield is already operational. Second, it is also not allowed by APR or local bylaws.

The only wagering that will occur near this site will be at a temporary facility on race days – a few days each year.

How many days will there be festival racing?

While the Legislature has set an aspirational goal of 20 days of live racing per year, it recognized the practical challenges in achieving this goal and gave the Massachusetts Gaming Commission clear authority to “waive this requirement as necessary and appropriate to ensure the financial

ability of the licensee to develop and operate a race track.” As we discussed, we do not anticipate in the next decade sufficient horses or purses to come close to this goal. As such, over the next five years we will seek approval to race the following number of weekends (days) each year:

2023: One Weekend (two days)

2024: One Weekend (two days)

2025: One Weekend (three days)

2026: Two Weekend (four days)

2027: Two Weekend (four days)

Further, we commit to include in the Host Community Agreement an annual review of the number of days and specific dates of racing prior to filing our annual application for a Racing Meeting License, including your approval of plans for non-racing operations, parking, marketing, and hiring of workers.

Live wagering will only occur on festival days. However, 93% of wagering takes place on people's cell phones. So Hardwick will benefit through those revenues even without the overwhelming majority of wages not taking place in the town.

I have heard stories about the health and safety of horses. How will you keep them safe?

Our proposal is developed by horse and agricultural enthusiasts. The proposal is focused on preserving this beautiful open space of 359 acres for future generations and includes thoroughbred breeding and off the track thoroughbred retirement programs, training and racing facilities for thoroughbreds, an agricultural program for local students.

Our project has the full backing of the The New England Horsemen’s Benevolent and Protective Association (NEBPA) and the Massachusetts Horse Breeders Association (MHBA). Richard and Robin are very serious horse enthusiasts. Richard was one of the first to have anti-slaughter and anti-doping regulations at his facility. Both take horse safety very, very seriously.

The horseracing industry – and the care of horses – is highly regulated both on the state level (Racing Director of Mass Gaming) and on the federal level (by the newly created, July 2022, HISA – Horseracing Integrity and Safety Authority) which has been instituting even tougher and stricter protocols across the country for anything racing related.

We want Great Meadowbrook Farm to be the place for horses to breed, train, race, and retire. That is our focus.

Is horse racing even viable anymore?

Thoroughbred racing is at the center of a horse and farming ecosystem that is fast disappearing because our hay and breeding farms are being swallowed up by housing developers.

Even for two or more weekends of festival racing each year, keeps breeding and hay farmers employed and successful and it supports local stores like lumber yards, tack shops, hardware stores, restaurants, and local Veterinarians.

Do you know that from 2007-2017 the USDA reported that land across this country has been consumed by developers at the rate of 25 square miles? Massachusetts ranked 6th for disappearing open space.

That's the equivalent of 2 cities the size of Waltham and we know in the last 5 years it's increased even at a higher rate. Running an equine center on this site will help lower the sale of farms to developers.

Additionally, with the new gaming legislation passed by the legislature this year, online wagering is now legal in Massachusetts. 93% of wagering will take place on people's cell phones throughout the state. Revenue from this wagering will go to Great Meadowbrook Farm and the Town of Hardwick, which will help preserve this and other local farms.

How do we know you won't sell this to someone else?

We are 100% committed to Great Meadowbrook Farm and the Town of Hardwick. Our proposal is developed by horse and agricultural enthusiasts. We are focused on providing a place for thoroughbred horses and their owners, and look forward to the rebirth of thoroughbred breeding, training and racing in the Commonwealth. Furthermore, any sale or transfer would require going through a similar review process that the community and state are now going through.

What are the benefits for Hardwick?

Great Meadowbrook Farm continues Hardwick's proud agriculture and equine legacy.

We want to collaborate with surrounding farms and artisans while supporting local breeders, horse owners, farriers and veterinarians to encourage economic activity and strengthen the local agricultural community. Our proposed farm to table restaurant will bring together local produce with renowned chefs in a farm inspired setting at an adjacent location.

We are planning on significant new capital investment and creating 25 to 50 permanent and more than 100 temporary jobs in the community. These new jobs will help reduce the number of people living in poverty according to recent U.S. Census counts.

We anticipate new, unencumbered revenues to the Town of Hardwick of \$500,000 per year from our operation. As Richard Fields mentioned in his remarks at the Informational Forum, we are prepared to guarantee these estimates in the Host Community Agreement. Further, we will cover all of the costs associated with setting up, operating and cleanup after events (e.g., police and fire details, DPW crew, etc.).

We are in the process of developing a Host Community Agreement ("HCA") with the Town of Hardwick that we expect will address safety of horses, residents, patrons, and employees, and

key issues like traffic and parking. We are actively working with the Town and the Agricultural Lands Preservation Committee to secure all necessary approvals.

Will this strain our town's infrastructure?

We are in the process of developing a Host Community Agreement ("HCA") with the Town of Hardwick that we expect will address safety of horses, residents, patrons, and employees, and key issues like traffic and parking, and public infrastructure.

If we require police, fire and EMS on site for our festivals, we will 100% cover those costs. We will cover all of the costs associated with setting up, operating and cleanup after events (e.g., police and fire details, DPW crew, etc.).

What about a restaurant and country inn?

Our proposal includes associated projects adjacent to Great Meadowbrook Farm:

- A farm to table restaurant will bring together local produce with renowned chefs in a farm inspired setting at an adjacent location
- A six to ten room Country Inn for visitors to Hardwick and surrounding communities
- Both will be a collaborator with surrounding farms and artisans to encourage economic activity and strengthen the local agricultural community

These facilities will not be built at Great Meadowbrook Farm, and maybe a restoration of another building or new construction nearby in Hardwick.

What happens if the money dries up and horse racing ends? What is your longevity plan for the farm?

We believe in being in Hardwick for the long term. We want to become a part of your community, a good neighbor and steward of the land. Working with horse enthusiasts around the state, we are confident we will have a facility for horses. That said, if the equine center closes, the land remains protected by community bylaws and the APR restriction which goes with the land.

Where will festival attendees stay during the festival?

Most festival attendees will arrive and leave the same day. Horse owners and trainers with horses often stay with their horses on site for the duration of the festival.

Will your site plan show where parking will be placed? Will there be satellite lots? How will these lots be used when not required for parking?

The Host Community Agreement will require us to have an approved parking plan each and every year prior to the festival. It will include onsite and offsite parking, shuttle buses for workers, extensive signage and personnel directing visitors. We want neighbors and visitors to all have a good experience at the festival.

Will traffic control measures be in place along Rt. 32 between Route 9 and Route 2?

As part of our permitting process with the town, we will conduct a full traffic study and plan on how to best handle traffic to and from the farm. This will be a written guarantee in the Host Community Agreement with the Town of Hardwick. We will also undergo a yearly review of our traffic plans with the town. We will include with invitations to events details on how best to travel to and from the festival.

Will you install new electric power lines or water and sewer lines?

No. The location of the proposed two barns were selected because electricity and water were already available in that part of the farm. We will not install any power lines or water and sewer lines in Upper Church Street -- no wires or no trenches.

Does breeding, training and racing of horses fall within the guidelines of APR?

Absolutely. Breeding, training, and racing horses has a long and storied place in our agricultural traditions, fairs, and accompanying laws.

Please describe what will occur on a “Festival Day”. Will it interfere in any way with the Hardwick Fair?

A festival day will feature six to ten races in one day. Like the Over the Walls event two decades ago, we would have vendor tents to service and feed spectators while watching the horses. Also like this event, we will ask the town every year to close off Upper Church Street to bring a festival feel to the weekend and provide safety for the horses and spectators alike. We will ensure our schedule does not coincide with any Hardwick events, especially the Hardwick Fair.

What is simulcast betting? How does it work? Does the town benefit? Do people come to the farm to bet?

Simulcast betting is a simultaneous live video transmission of a race to other tracks or other outlets for the purpose of wagering, most likely on a mobile device, around the state and the country. 93% of all wagering takes place on a person’s cell phone and not in person. The town will receive a share of revenue from simulcasting races.

There will be wagering on site during only during live race festivals.

Why are you proposing a grass track? Will it degrade the environment? Will it be more harmful to horses than other surfaces?

A grass track maintains the existing 20 acre lot pasture and also provides horses with the safest racing surface. A grass track provides minimal disruption to the soil and the fields. Great Meadowbrook pastures will continue to be hay-ed as they have been for more than a century. The view from Upper Church Street will look and feel no different than it looks today (not including on festival days).

Church Street is a beautiful Street: How will you ensure that there is no trash after an event? Who will pay for it? Will the cost come from the town’s pocket?

All of the equipment and structures, from the track ring to vendor tents, are temporary and will be installed before the festival and removed quickly after the festival. We will be responsible for cleaning the area to ensure it remains the beautiful, pristine open space Hardwick expects. We will cover all of the costs associated with setting up, operating and cleanup after events (e.g., police and fire details, DPW crew, etc.).

What would be the expected capacity of visitors on Race Days? Grandstand capacity? Standing?

Crowds at horse races can vary greatly. It depends on the time and day of a race, the weather and who is racing. We would expect crowds of 50-100 at races that occur during the weekdays, to crowds of 2,000-5,000 for big races on weekends.

We are working on addressing concerns about attendance in the Host Community Agreement. We will work with the Select Board to address ways to monitor and mitigate traffic and attendance.

How will you handle animal waste and the removal of deceased horses? Concerns about animal pollution.

All animal waste will be disposed of in accordance with state and federal rules and regulations. Horse manure will be collected in an enclosed dumpster and removed from the site.

If there are any deceased horses on site, necropsy will be performed and then the horse will be removed from the site for cremation or burial.

Where will farm workers live in the town?

We envision hiring local people to fill our needs. There is some existing housing on site that could be used for workers as well.

What input and controls does Hardwick have? What is the timing of the process?

We are at the very beginning of the process. Hardwick has a series of decisions to make, some once and some each year. First, Hardwick Select Board must approve this location for horse racing subject to adoption of a contract with the Farm owner (Host Community Agreement) and approval from permitting agencies, including review of traffic studies, (e.g., Planning Board). This is similar to approving the zoning of a site before designing a facility, commencing permitting, constructing the facilities, receiving necessary permits and licenses, and ultimately operating. This is just the beginning of the process.

After this initial step, the Commonwealth will review and decided on the application for a two-day Racing Meeting next September by November 14 of this year. The Agricultural Land Preservation Committee will also review the proposal for compliance with appropriate laws and dedeed restrictions. And after all these approvals, Hardwick will need to decide on a parking plan, road closure request, and common victual and liquor licenses for festival days.

Each and every year, Hardwick will review and decide on a parking plan, road closure request, and common victual and liquor licenses for festival days. In addition, the state will conduct a hearing in Hardwick each and every year prior to making a decision on a Racing Meeting license for the Farm.

Additional Questions, Suggestions, or Comments?

Have a question, suggestion, or comment that hasn't been asked? We are happy to communicate with folks where and however they would like to communicate - send us an email, talk on the phone, meet with us or email the listserv.