

Emerson Field Committee

Work to date & key timelines:

2014 – 2016: CCoT leadership explored the possibility of developing the fields into a farm. A feasibility study, financed through a grant from a local foundation, was done in 2016. The study indicated that substantial investment would be needed and that significant volunteer hours plus continuous financial support decreased the suitability of any farm-related project.

In 2016, as part of the initiative to increase utilization of facilities, we explored the idea of providing daycare for elderly people in Fellowship Hall. Conversations between Mr. Frank Romano of the Elder Care Group took place but the idea was not pursued due to the substantial capital investment required to build an additional nine handicap accessible bathrooms required for such a program. Mr. Romano expressed interest in developing a memory care unit on the Emerson Field and indicated that he would submit a proposal in the near future. The proposal did not materialize and the conversation did not yield any result.

Currently CCoT rents the Emerson field to the Town of Topsfield for \$1,250 per year as back-up softball fields during the summer. The fields have been needed less frequently by the Recreation Committee in recent years.

November 2017: Liz Mulholland notifies BOT and Council that Benchmark Senior Living is interested in purchasing Emerson Field to build an assisted living facility.

December 4, 2017: Lisa Mead, a local real estate, land use and municipal law lawyer, meets with interested CCoT members to discuss process for selling a property such as the Emerson Field. Attorney Mead did not charge us for this informational session.

December 12, 2017: Proposal from Benchmark Living is sent to Liz Mulholland and Martha Morrison to purchase approximately 12 acres of Emerson Field to construct an assisted living facility with 90 units for the land purchase sum of \$3,000,000 subject to appropriate permitting. The offer had an expiration date of Feb 1, 2018 but during communications with them the deadline has been extended and as of Nov. 2018 the offer is still valid.

January 2018: Council moves to form an Emerson Field Committee to explore options for the field. Committee members include: Dave Read (chair), Kristin Palace, Liz Mulholland, Martha Morrison, Martin Riekert, Mary Jelinek, Dolly MacIlvaine, Guido Voss and David Barnard. BOT allocates \$10,000 to start the work.

February 25, 2018: First meeting of Emerson Field Committee takes place and their first task is to solicit proposals from several consulting firms specializing in land planning, civil engineering permitting and project management. Also discussed is the need for a communication plan with the CCoT congregation and other key stakeholders.

February 26, 2018: Liz and Dave receive a proposal from 621 Energy Inc. about leasing the field for a large solar field array. Bob Clarke indicated with the size of the field, and with some trees removed, a solar project could yield approx. \$16,000/yr.

March 2, 2018: Letters sent to both CCoT Congregation and Topsfield Selectmen advising them that the CCoT leadership is embarking on exploring the possibilities for better uses for the Emerson Field.

March 11, 2018: The committee reviews proposals from 4 consulting firms, interviews 3 of them and agrees to engage the consulting firm of Beals Associates. Martha Morrison, and Lisa Mead when we met with her, spoke positively of Beals Associates during prior professional interactions with the firm.

April – May 2018: Emerson Field Committee works with BOT to secure funding for a formal land valuation. Martha worked with Larry Beals to tweak the property boundaries given recent increased space commitments to the Joyful Noises daycare center for an expanded playground.

June 3, 2018: Larry Beals meets with Emerson Field Committee to review options for the lots. There were variations of options that include several types of residential subdivisions, expanding the downtown retail district, an assisted living facility, a 40B affordable housing proposal and a solar field array. Following Larry's presentation the committee continues the meeting and concludes that, given town politics, that developing an assisted living facility or a 40B residential development have the best chance of being successful. The total cost of the Beals Associates work came to \$8,000 (\$2,000 below the do not exceed amount as approved by the BOT).

June 18, 2018: Bruce Jones attends the Emerson Field Committee meeting to provide the most recent update on the church finances which further highlighted the importance of our work. Larry Beals is contacted for his recommendations for a commercial appraiser. The Committee seeks a proposal from real estate appraiser Greg Story based on Beal's recommendation.

July 6, 2018: Greg Story submits a proposal to conduct an evaluation of the property with regard to the committee's two preferred options: assisted living facility and 40B residential development. The cost of the proposal was \$3,500.

July and August 2018: Given the cost of the Story estimate, the Emerson Field Committee agrees to solicit a second estimate for the appraisal work. Larry Beals also recommends Avery Associates – he says both Greg Story and Jon Avery are excellent local real estate appraisers ('best in the business') and he's seen each successfully defend their work in court.

August 15, 2018: Avery Associates submits a proposal to conduct the appraisal work. The cost estimate from Avery Associates was \$5,750.

August 29, 2018: BOT members respond in favor of appropriating the additional \$1500 to combine with the remaining \$2,000 to fund the appraisal work by Greg Story. After 7 weeks the Committee decides to engage Greg Story in the appraisal work for the sum of \$3,500.

September 9, 2018: Greg Story meets with Emerson Field Committee where he addresses several questions regarding a possible 40B option. Following the meeting the Committee agrees to press on with the services of Greg Story for both an assisted living facility and a 40B residential option. This starts the 60 day assessment evaluation period. The committee now enters a two month waiting phase for the estimates.

September 10, 2018: A sub-group of the Committee met with Eli Small, a camp consultant, to discuss the idea of creating a summer camp on the property.

October 1, 2018: Our committee discussed information provided by Eli Small that indicated that we would need about \$100K to start up a camp. An email from the director of La Vida Camp (Gordon College, Wenham) indicated that the church should not expect a quick return on investment from any attempt to run a camp. The group decided to abandon the idea of running a camp ourselves and to see if a tenant to run a camp could be located. That effort has been unsuccessful to date as the only party located withdrew when it became clear that we could not offer overnight accommodations.

November 4, 2018: Greg Story sends his report to the Emerson Field Committee. The 105 page report is very detailed with several comparator assisted living and 40B options in nearby towns and their associated selling prices for the parcels of land. The bottom line is that his valuation for the Emerson Field if sold for an assisted living facility with 90 units should yield \$3,150,000 and for a 40B residential development with 50 units (37 to be offered at market rates) would yield approximately \$2,405,000 at current market rates. The committee notes how close the Benchmark offer is to the land valuation for an assisted living facility.

November 28, 2018: Committee presented its recommendation to Council that the CCoT congregation be asked at a business meeting to vote on a warrant article to approve the church to enter into negotiations to sell the land for the purpose of an assisted living facility and also to retain counsel to assist in that process.

November 30, 2018: We receive an estimation of the closing and land-use permitting costs from attorney Lisa Mead. She estimates these will not exceed 45 hours and at her non-profit rate would cost approx. \$12,375.

December 9, 2018: First informational session for the CCoT congregation was held. Between 70 – 80 people attended this first session where both an overview of the church's financial situation was detailed and the work to date by the Emerson Field Committee was discussed. The congregation asked many questions about the church's finances, options for raising additional revenue, options for cutting costs, other possibilities for Emerson Field and about the process going forward.

January 3, 2019: Inquiry to Essex County Greenbelt Association regarding the Emerson Field property: Dave led a conversation with Chris LaPointe at ECGA. Chris indicated he knew about the Emerson Field and that the church wanted to do something with it but he indicated that likely Essex Greenbelt would likely not be interested as these types of properties are not the highest value/impact for Greenbelt's

work. Chris said “This field doesn’t percolate to the top of our priority list’ for the following three reasons:

- The Emerson Field is not connected to larger plot of land that is mostly forest
- A field like ours would require maintenance costs (mowing) to maintain its current state
- There’s a density of retail buildings and residents with the nearby town center

Chris did, though, indicate that if the town wanted to purchase the field and include a conservation restriction/easement on the land, there could be a role for Essex Greenbelt in helping facilitate those discussions or help raise some funds but that that purchase price by the town likely won’t approach what the land was appraised for if an assisted living facility were built on it.

January 6, 2019: Second informational session was held for the CCoT congregation. Approximately 60 people attended this second session where both a similar overview of the church’s financial situation was detailed and the work to date by the Emerson Field Committee was discussed. The congregation asked similar questions about the church’s finances, options for raising additional revenue, options for cutting costs, other possibilities for Emerson Field and about the process going forward. The plot plan of the Emerson Field Property was also displayed on the screen for review by all.

January 27, 2019: CCoT Annual meeting

Respectfully submitted,
David Read