

March 15, 2015

To: Charlotte Selectboard

From: Charlotte Park and Wildlife Refuge Oversight Committee

Regarding: Charlotte Park and Wildlife Refuge Agricultural Lease

The purpose of this memo is to make a recommendation regarding the 2015 lease payment for agricultural units at the Charlotte Park and Wildlife Refuge and to encourage the Board to finalize the renewal of the 5-year lease, as requested in a February 2 memo from Clark Hinsdale III and Michael LaClair, Nordic Holsteins to the Charlotte Park Oversight Committee and Charlotte Board of Selectmen.

The Charlotte Park and Wildlife Refuge Oversight Committee met with Mike LaClair on January 28, 2015 to discuss the farm's use of the agricultural units in the park and plans for the coming year. Mike provided information on soil tests and nutrient management. Over the last four years, fields previously used for corn have been seeded to hay. Buffer areas have been established in the southeast corner of Unit E, along the drainage ditch between Units A and B, and along the hedgerow by the Overlook field.

Unit N, used for pasture in the previous lease, has not been used by the current lessee. This area has been improved with Park budget funds and through the efforts of the Park Oversight Committee and volunteers, with brush-hogging, cutting of invasive trees and shrubs, and removal of fences. The Unit N acreage has been subtracted from the lease payment in each of the last four years. This, along with small adjustments for stream and wetland buffers, has resulted in the recommendation by the Park Committee of an annual lease payment of \$3390 for 113 acres. The Park Committee recommends that Unit N not be used for agriculture in the future, but maintained as a wildlife meadow—and that the Charlotte Park and Wildlife Refuge Management Plan be revised to reflect this change.

In spring 2014, bobolinks were seen west of the trail in Units F and G. The field was cut before June 1 and around 65 days later, an alternative mowing schedule for grassland bird management on dairy farms. The birds did not return to the field. At the January 28 meeting, the Park Committee and Mike LaClair discussed delaying the first cut until August 1 in exchange for waiver of the lease payment for the approximately 13 acres. A mowed access across the field would be retained to allow farm machinery to cross to the lower meadow (Unit H). There is no government funding available to offset the cost to the farmer of delayed cutting for grassland birds. The Park Committee recommends an additional lease payment reduction of \$390 for 2015.

The Park Oversight Committee is very pleased with the improvements made to the farm fields during the past four years. Mike LaClair and his family have been very helpful with Park Committee projects. Lease payments have been made consistently and are up-to-date. With the expiration of the current lease at the end of 2015, we strongly support renewal of the lease with Clark Hinsdale III, Managing Partner, Nordic Holsteins, LLC.