

UPPER VALLEY LAND TRUST

March 29, 2021

To: Senator Robert Starr, Chair
Vermont Senate Agriculture Committee

From: Jeanie McIntyre, President, Upper Valley Land Trust

Re: Vermont Technical College sale of "Norwich Farm," 6-acre property in Norwich

Dear Senators:

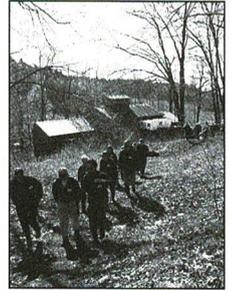
I appreciate your inquiry into the circumstances of the proposed sale of property in Norwich owned by Vermont Technical College (VTC). Thank you for the time your committee gave to this matter March 18th. I am writing to follow up my verbal testimony and add, for the record, information regarding the land surrounding VTC's 6-acre property that is owned and managed by the Upper Valley Land Trust (UVLT).

UVLT is a regional land conservancy serving 45 towns in the Connecticut River valley of Vermont and New Hampshire. UVLT was established in 1985 and holds conservation interests on nearly 56,000 acres including conservation easements on many working farms in both states. We also own 24 properties which we manage for long-term conservation stewardship, providing public access to trails and outdoor learning opportunities. Our Brookmead Conservation Area, adjacent to the VTC parcel, is 350+ acres with a parking area and simple, small cabin. The entirety of our ownership there is enrolled in Vermont's UVA program under the conservation category and taxed accordingly.

UVLT came to own the Brookmead Conservation Area through an arrangement with VTC that provided capital for the college to bring its dairy program to Norwich in 2015 and set up a milk processing plant utilizing (in part) a grant from the US Department of Labor. Our agreement with VTC enabled the school to use portions of our land in conjunction with the delivery of their curriculum. Since VTC discontinued its on-site academic program in 2017, the agreement has terminated and UVLT has been free of those obligations for several years. UVLT uses this land for its own programs and activities including, but not limited to, agriculture.

I bring this to your attention because the Norwich Farm Foundation plan, provided to you by Omer Trajman and incorporated into the March 18, 2021 record of your committee as "Norwich Farm Foundation Proposal," appears to rely heavily on the UVLT property to support their operation. There are numerous references to our property. For example:

- The description of the Location and Facility (top of page 3) states: "There are 30 acres of existing pastures on which to establish an intensively managed grazing system for lactating cattle, with additional pastures for dry cows and heifers during the summer months. There are 10 acres of hay land for added forage."
- Page 4 states: "Our solution is Norwich Farm: an exceptional dairy infrastructure and land base..."



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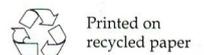
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Jeanie McIntyre



19 Buck Road
Hanover, NH 03755
603.643.6626
www.UVLT.org



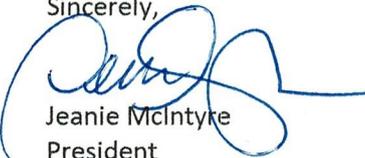
- Page 6 states: “The animals will be pasture based in summer...”
- Page 7 states: “NFF will work with the UVLT and NRCS to prepare nutrient and crop management plans that best use the land for production agriculture and meet the Vermont Dept. of Agriculture’s Required Agricultural Practices (GAPs). There will be a particular focus on creating a regenerative system, where farming practices increase biodiversity, enrich soils and improve watersheds. We will work closely with the VT Agency of Agriculture on the regenerative system best suited for the farm. NFF will consult with pasture restoration expert Sarah Flack.”
- Page 7 also states: “Manure will be managed on site, to be field applied in order to restore pasture growth and composted to be sold locally in order to provide another revenue source.”
- Page 9 contains descriptions of a number of “diversified farm initiatives” proposed for UVLT’s land including: “hogs could be raised in the forest,” “wild harvest the forest blackberry crop,” “reclaim pastures and hayland that have been stripped or forested...”, “hay the front field the old fashioned way” and using herding dogs to “work the dairy herd through its grazing rotation.”

As a point of clarification: The land base that has been offered for sale by VTC (“Norwich Farm”) is just 6 acres. The plan provided to you by Mr. Trajman relies upon access and use of land that VTC does not own. UVLT has not sought, encouraged or endorsed the work of consultants and agency advisors on its land on behalf of the Norwich Farm Foundation as described in their materials.

The Norwich Farm Foundation plan states, “We hope to partner with the Upper Valley Land Trust, as the agricultural acreage is owned and conserved under their Brookmead Conservation Management Plan.” But there does not appear to be a “Plan B” and UVLT is happily engaged in its own mission-driven activities on its land. UVLT’s land is both sides of Blood Brook (a Vermont River Corridor) and includes nationally mapped and state significant wetlands, a flood hazard area, a perennial stream along the VTC boundary and several drainages feeding Blood Brook. Much of the non-forested land surrounding VTC’s 6 acres is footnoted (wet) statewide significant agricultural soil. Reintroducing dairy as a primary use of the open land in this location – land with soil and water characteristics that (under a different owner) might qualify it for a VHCB-funded dairy retirement – is not in UVLT’s plans.

During his testimony to your committee, Chris Gray stated that he believes value-added dairy is the only agricultural business than can succeed at “Norwich Farm.” Whether that is true for VTC’s 6-acre parcel may be debatable. However, for UVLT’s land, it is certainly untrue. UVLT is engaged in other agricultural opportunities and commitments for the land we own. We have proceeded with our goals in the years since VTC discontinued its program and we expect to continue our relations with area farmers, ecologists and others after VTC’s property sells. We are confident that you can appreciate our rights and interests as a landowner despite the “hopes” that others may have to use our land for their purposes.

Sincerely,



Jeanie McIntyre
President