



**PRESENTATION TO THE TEMPLE PLANNING BOARD
Tuesday January 5, 2021**

INTRODUCTION: Thank you for the invitation to update you tonight. A great deal of planning and hard work has happened since I was with you last February. It was only a fledging idea that was forming 11 months ago. I appreciated your support and encouragement at that meeting. I continue to be grateful for your interest and help to make the farm a success. I appreciate your willingness to work together to keep the rural nature of the town, as we also live into the requirements of the state which fosters public safety. Mostly, I appreciate the collaborative way in which we are approaching the Change of Use for the farm. Please rest assured that we want nothing more than to do an excellent job of enhancing the town, creating good PR for the region, hiring local people, and running a solid business. As a for-profit business, I also fully intend to pay my property taxes. I just finished paying the bi-annual payment of over \$19,000. This is no small feat during this pandemic! Together, let's create enough solid business to generate this amount of property tax for the coming years, while honoring all the requirements of safety, historic preservation and land conservation.

OVERVIEW OF THE HISTORY OF STEPPING STONES FARM & EVENT CENTER

Our vision is to preserve the farm's historic nature and to operate a sustainable business. We are only the 5th family to ever own this farm which began in 1754. I mean to pass it on to the third generation of my family as I grow into my old age! To begin this process, let me introduce my son, Alec, who has joined this call. It is with great pride and appreciation that all four of my grown kids are helping and advising me as our business is developing.

I purchased the 28- acre farm from my parents in 1975. Prior to that, I had founded Pony Farm, a girls' riding camp, in 1971 to pay for my college tuition. I owned and operated the farm for 47 years, during which time we expanded into a therapeutic riding program called Horse Power. Because we also ran a nationally accredited therapeutic instructor training program, we built an indoor arena on the property approximately 18 years ago. At that time, Ted Petro, Chair of the Planning Board and/or ZBA, advised that I seek commercial zoning for the property so that there was never a question of the legitimacy of the business or the new Indoor Arena with future town governing boards. We received the Commercial Zoning with the blessing of the townspeople following a public hearing. It remains in place today.



In 2011, I led the merger of Pony Farm and Horse Power to become Touchstone Farm, a nonprofit. Since then, the Touchstone Board has been at the helm of the farm. In 2017, I stepped down as the Executive Director to allow the board to begin the process of purchasing the property from me so that the farm's mission could continue in perpetuity. I fully expected that this purchase would happen. Touchstone planned to keep its nonprofit tax status, relieving itself of property taxes in Temple.

After much time and effort, Touchstone decided to purchase a smaller and younger facility this October. They now own property in Lyndeboro. I wish them well.

This unexpected development left me with the dilemma of what to do with the farm. With the help family members and advisors, we decided to work to attract events such as retreats, family celebrations, weekend rentals, and weddings, instead of running a large horse farm and summer camp. It was at this early juncture that I asked to present this plan to you last February. I thought it better "to ask permission than to beg forgiveness".

At that Select Board meeting, I outlined what we were planning. I answered your questions. The three abutters, Nicole Concordia, Bill Ezell and Randy Martin, all endorsed the idea with Bill asking "How can we help you?" The group enthusiastically approved of these plans and said "Temple is lucky to have you and that farm in our town. Good luck." I was most grateful.

With these blessings, our team moved forward with our plans, honing them as we repaired the facility to get it back to being able to welcome guests. We did not build anything new, nor do we have any future plans to do so. We are simply maintaining what is in place so that we can preserve the beautiful and historic feel of the farm.

This November, I was asked by Ken Caisse to present our plans to the Select Board. Again, I was pleased to receive a collaborative and enthusiastic reception. I presented our plans for Stepping Stones and again met with approval. However, they felt that I should return to present to you so that 'all the I's could be dotted and T's crossed'. Thus, I here I am.

CURRENT PLANS FOR THE FARM

The plan I present to you today is not very different than the one I presented you last February when it was just a hope with fingers crossed. We have done our business planning and budgeting. We have begun to build our team. We are still planning to use the lodge for retreats and veterans' weekends. We have had a good response from potential guests. We have hosted some community events, and birthdays and anniversaries, with a careful eye to Covid mandates. We hosted one wedding with four guests in attendance. Thus far, we are just breaking even financially but we have been able to pay our taxes!



With our website and a lot of hard work, we are attracting future weddings and small family gatherings, as Covid still lingers. It appears that the new business at the farm can be viable and sustainable. I feel more confident of that than when I spoke to you in February. It seems that people are hungry for connection and celebration on a family farm.

It is my hope that you will continue to recognize the farm's long standing commercial zoning status. However, I also realize that the current plan represent a Change of Use for the farm. I would like your permission to address this and to ask for your approval.

PAUSE: Questions thus far as to the history or how we got to this moment in time?

PLANS IN PLACE

It is our sincere intent to not only run a successful business in town but to preserve and enhance the atmosphere and ambiance of Temple. I believe that the workshops, retreats and gatherings that we will have in the Lodge are no different than what we have done in the past. The Homestead will be used for guest rentals, again no different than with students and campers living there. The guests are seeking quiet and nature, thus will not be a nuisance to any neighbors. Additionally, we believe that the traffic caused by this type of business will be significantly less than the traffic caused by an active lesson programs, horse shows, clinics, summer camp and workshops. The parking will be in the Lodge or the Homestead parking lots.

We definitely do not plan to ever have a large number of horses on the property again. At the end of the Touchstone years after I retired, they often housed 70 horses. The environmental impact was significant. We will not repeat this! While we may eventually have a few horses, they will be well managed with careful attention paid to the land.

The weddings may represent a slight change in use for the barn because we will not have tons of hay stored in the barn, or classrooms and offices for the riding and camp programming. However, concurrently we will improve the historic and scenic look of the farm in order to attract wedding business and to bring tourists and groups to the area, while boosting business for our event partners like caterers.

PROPOSED PROCEDURES & FUTURE INVESTIGATIONS

We have carefully planned and done our homework to present the following ideas as we look forward to hosting some weddings in the barn. It is our intent to to minimize the impact on our neighbors, maximize the safety of all guests, and preserve the beauty of the property to enhance our town.



1. We realize that we may not be able to host more than 100 wedding guests inside the barn without a suppression system. George Clark and I have been working to determine state regs for this. I have also contacted Alison Brackett of Triangle Fire Consultants in Hollis NH. Alison is not only the Fire Chief in Hollis but she also provides a 3rd Party Review Service as a Fire Protection Engineer. She assists both the property owner and town officials, including the Fire Department, to determine appropriate fire codes and requirements. She is willing to work with us to make a plan for the safety and well-being of our guests.
2. Until such time that these plans can be fully implemented, we propose to not allow more than 100 guests in the barn. We will contract with a tent rental company to erect a tent outside the barn for any weddings which exceed 100 guests. At this time, we will not allow weddings with more than 150 guests. We believe our 'sweet spot' is weddings of 50 to 75 guests.
3. We are also committed to determining the structural load of the barn. I have contacted Brian Hanson of Team Engineering of Bedford NH. This company performs building inspections and can assess the structural integrity of the barn. Brian is willing to work with members of the Planning Board and myself as the owner to determine appropriate number of guests.
4. To this concern, we are also anticipating putting a permanent dance floor at the end of the barn which is situated on dirt. As a bank barn, the 2nd floor where the weddings or celebrations will be held, sits at the entrance on solid ground.
5. In planning for Emergency Exits in the barn, we have three exits readily accessible that we will mark with lighted signs early this spring. All three exits are at ground level and have wide doors. The main entrance is the widest with two rolling barn doors, serving as the primary egress in case of emergency. This spring, prior to weddings, we also plan to enlarge the two other egresses with doors that open outward.
6. Parking may be another concern due to the scenic nature of our town. We have created off street parking in front of the lodge, with over flow parking in front of the indoor arena, as well as in the hay field below the barn. By this spring when the weddings take place, we will have these areas lighted with tasteful lights.
7. Noise nuisance may be of concern to our neighbors. As one of those neighbors as well, I do not want loud music in our 'hood'! We will close off music at 11:00 PM for all events. Also, note that the barn is well away from other homes, thereby minimizing the noise.
8. We are not currently, or in the near future, considering putting in a septic system for the barn. We are creating a DIY decorated permanent port-o-potty. This port-o-let will be pumped on a regular basis by Portable Privies of Lyndeboro. For larger weddings, we will require that the couple hire a professional company to provide temporary port-o-potties for use during the weekend.



SUMMARY

On behalf of my family and our team, I welcome questions and suggestions to help us run a successful, safe and sustainable business on our family farm. We have every intention to continue our long tradition of being good community members. Our legacy of customer service provided on a well-maintained property that enhances Temple while being sensitive to our friends and neighbors will continue.

Thank you for your time. May we collaborate to improve our ideas and make sure we honor the requirements of Temple. Thank you for your consideration and community service.

Sincerely, Boo

