

“What Should Go Here? A Community Conversation on the Future of the Marston Farm Property”

A NH Listens Summary Report

December 2014



ABOUT NH LISTENS



New Hampshire Listens is a civic engagement initiative of the Carsey School of Public Policy at the University of New Hampshire.

Our Mission:

To bring people together for engaged conversations

Our Work:

- Create engaged community conversations on local and statewide issues
- Serve as a resource and support network for new local Listens groups
- Cultivate a network of facilitators for public engagement and action

Our Principles:

- Bring people together from all walks of life
- Provide time for in-depth, informed conversations
- Respect differences as well as seek common ground
- Achieve outcomes that lead to informed community solutions

New Hampshire Listens

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EVENT HIGHLIGHTS

Event

What Should Go Here? A Community Conversation on the Future of the Marston Farm Property

Date

October 24, 2014

Duration

Three hours

Participants

93 Community Members

Project Team

Michele Holt-Shannon
Bruce Mallory
Quixada Moore-Vissing
Eleanor Kane

Location

Nottingham School

Question

What are the most important criteria for determining the best use of the Marston Property?

Background

The Marston Property, also known as the Lee Farm, is located at 229 Mill Pond Road. In 2014, the Nottingham Board of Selectmen established a sub-committee named the Marston Property Exploratory Committee (MPEC). The Committee is chaired by Selectmen Donna Danis, and its goal is to gather community input and develop a recommendation for the best public use of the property. More information may be found on the website at www.nottingham-nh.gov/Pages/NottinghamNH_BComm/mpec or on the Facebook page found at www.facebook.com/NottinghamMPEC.

Starting in the late 1990s, the Town of Nottingham worked with the NH Department of Environmental Services to clean up hazardous waste and materials located on the property. In 2001, the NH Department of Environmental Services issued an administrative order to property owner Mr. Lee regarding the clean-up of the hazardous material and placed a lien on the property for repayment of the cleanup costs. The Town acquired the property in 2009.

An agreement between the Town of Nottingham and the NH Department of Environmental Services took place in 2013 for release of the lien. The agreement stated the Town would own the property on a permanent basis and it would be used only for public purposes.

SUMMARY FINDINGS

The conversations converged around six primary sets of findings, including:

1. The Marston Property as a Space with Multiple Uses

There was an overwhelming sense that the Marston Property should not be used in just one way, but in several different ways. Although participants had different views about how to use the property, the most widely suggested uses include athletic fields, gardening and farming, building a community center, and trails that could be used for walking, skiing, and other uses.

2. A Financial Plan for the Short and Long Term

Participants indicated a need for more financial information about potential plans for the Marston Property including overall costs of prospective projects as well as the impact on taxes over time. There was talk about how the property could generate revenue to sustain itself and benefit the community. Participants indicated the need for both short- and long-term financial plans that address details of the property such as approximating the cost of maintenance and upkeep over time.

3. Clear Goals with Distinct, Achievable Steps

Participants talked about the need for Nottingham to create plans for the property with clear goals and distinct phases that correspond to achieving these goals. There was a desire for the town leaders to consider existing resources and deficiencies in the community and to create a plan for the property that is responsive to the overall needs of the town. Participants expressed value in plans that provide details about a funding strategy, the design of the property, including potential development of the grounds, and an approach to sustaining and maintaining the property over time.

4. The Marston Property as a Space for Everyone

Participants expressed a desire for the Marston Property to be a space where an array of populations in the community from different backgrounds and age groups can come together to celebrate community life in Nottingham. There was an interest in framing the Marston Property as a hub of the community.

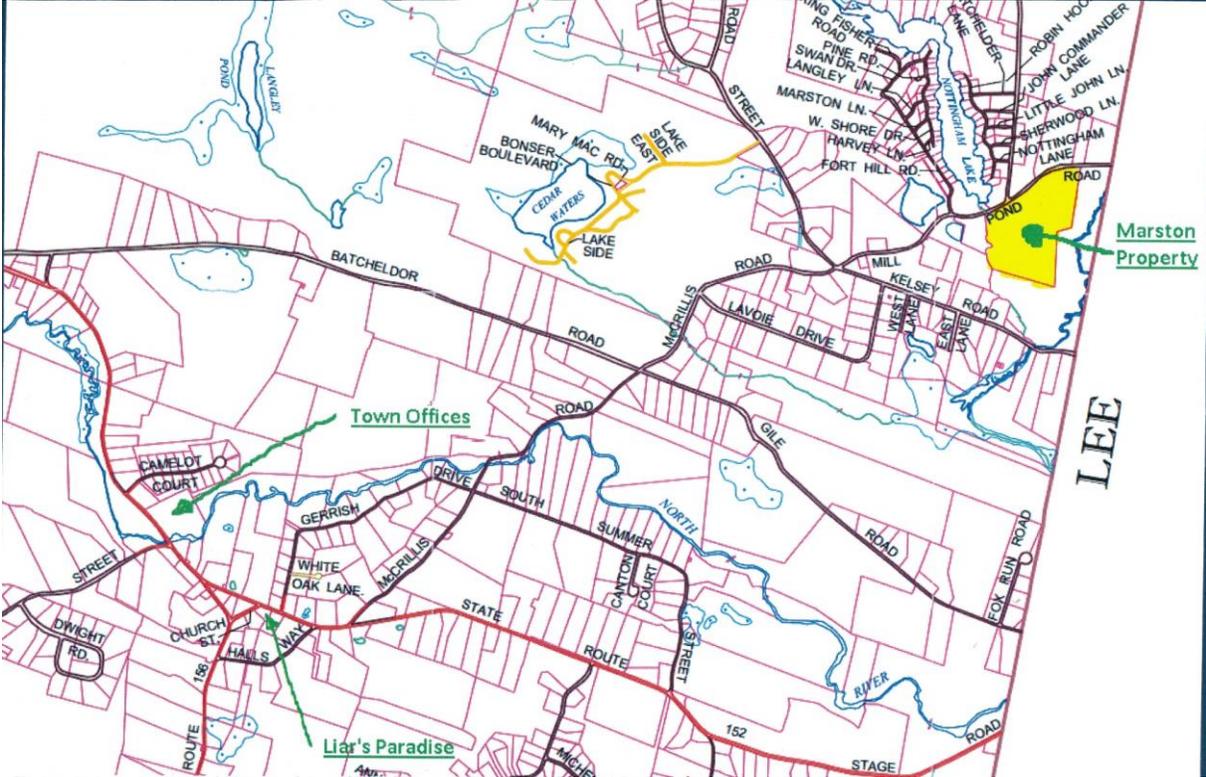
5. Parking and Other Developments

Many participants talked about the need for a parking lot so that people could come to enjoy the Marston Property. Bathrooms, a community center, and a concession stand were discussed in addition to other potential development plans for the property such as athletic fields, farms, and gardens.

6. Keeping Marston Safe for Everyone

Participants commented on the need to ensure that the Marston Property is a safe place for a range of people to come together. These concerns ranged from evening security to environmental impacts from hazardous waste to traffic issues. Rules for use were discussed as a way to address safety concerns.

MARSTON PROPERTY



OCTOBER GATHERING



Nottingham Residents Discuss Marston Property at October, 24 Community Conversation

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The complete set of appendices for this report are located at <http://nhlistens.org>:

- Appendix A: Committee Membership**
- Appendix B: Summary of Participant Evaluations**
- Appendix C: How NH Listens Collects and Reports Findings**
- Appendix D: Invitation to Participants**
- Appendix E: Discussion Guide**
- Appendix F: Small Group Notes**

The Community Conversations

The Marston Property Exploratory Committee worked with New Hampshire Listens to design a community conversation on the future use of the Marston Property. The property was recently acquired by the community, and the committee was formed to explore what uses the property would best serve the residents of Nottingham. Prior to the Community Conversation, Committee members hosted a table at Nottingham Day where over 125 community members posted ideas for the property on a large white board. Ideas ranged from gardens and athletic fields to a skate park and community brewery. The conversations were open to anyone who wanted to attend them on the evening of October 24, 2014, from 6:00 to 9:00 at night. The participants in the conversations spent three hours in a facilitated discussion about their priorities and concerns for the future use of the Marston Property. Over 52 people registered in advance to participate in these conversations, and 93 people total attended the event. Participants were randomly assigned to one of eight small discussion groups. On October 15, 2014, members of the Committee met with 14 older residents at a Senior Luncheon. Input from that group is integrated into the report below and serves as the ninth small group. Children's remarks at the end of the evening are indicated as such.

Focus Questions

The Marston Property Exploratory Committee and NH Listens worked collaboratively to develop a set of focus questions to guide the discussion. The key questions asked of participants were:

- What are the most important criteria for determining the best use of the Marston Property?
- What community values should be considered (recreation, frugality, health, etc.)?
- How could the Marston Property address some of the needs of the town of Nottingham?
- What ideas for the property would allow the most people in the community to use and enjoy the land? (Consider families, older adults, scouts, school children, etc.)
- When considering mixed use options, what criteria should be used to determine the balance of the mix? What options for shared use come to mind (for example, shared school use, rental space, trails, open space, or community farm)?
- How might the past history of the Marston Property in connection with hazardous waste and materials affect future land use decisions?
- What are your thoughts on funding options and the use of volunteers, civic organizations, and other ways to offset hard cash investments? What are you willing to contribute?
- What are your thoughts about revenue generating activity to benefit the town?
- What are your priorities if changes are implemented and phased in over time?

The information section of the discussion guide (Appendix E) was used to expose participants to a variety of data, but the focus of the conversation followed the participants' interests and concerns. Facilitators asked questions like "What do you notice about this information?" They often followed up with prompting questions, such as "What stands out to you?" or "What is most important to you?" or "What seems like the most critical aspects of this opportunity?"

Key Findings

Participants at the conversation on the future of the Marston Farm Property expressed a range of perspectives, all of which were recorded by facilitators and are provided in Appendix F of this report. Some of the most commonly discussed topics include the following, although even within these topics a range of values were expressed:

- **The Marston Property as a Space with Multiple Uses**
- **A Financial Plan for the Short and Long Term**
- **Clear Goals with Distinct, Achievable Steps**
- **The Marston Property as a Space for Everyone**
- **Parking and Other Developments**
- **Keeping Marston Safe for Everyone**

Other issues that were still valued but discussed with less frequency include concerns about the environment and responsible land use, a need to explore the legal ramifications of taking on various uses of the Marston Property, and a desire to include more people in the community in final decision making than were able to attend the October 24th event. These conversations help to augment (not replace) traditional forms of government and policy making. What follows is a detailed description of the process, outcomes of the conversations, and an analysis of all small group notes to identify areas for further consideration and action (all small group notes may be found in Appendix F). The results of the conversations, as presented in this report, will be shared with all those who participated, as well as with the Marston Property Exploratory Committee and town leaders in Nottingham.

The Marston Property as a Space with Multiple Uses

The most frequently expressed idea among all groups in all conversations was the importance of using the Marston Property in many ways rather than one unified use. All of the groups (9/9) discussed the value of multiple uses of the property. Uses ranged within groups, but the most frequently expressed ideas are discussed below.

Athletic Fields

Athletic fields were the most frequently discussed use for the Marston Property (8/9), both in group conversations throughout the evening and in the group's final priorities that were reported out to others at the end of the evening. In terms of uses for the fields, groups frequently mentioned baseball, softball, and soccer fields. Some groups mentioned how athletic fields were a relatively low-cost investment for the town. Other groups questioned if the Marston Property was the best place for athletic fields. Participants in one group questioned if other existing or prospective locations in the community might be a better fit for athletic fields. Some participants in groups questioned complications about using the Marston fields for athletics, such as the distance from the school, the traffic on the road, and the noise from the race track. Some groups questioned what regulations would need to be fulfilled to meet athletic field standards and sizes.

Gardens and Farms

All of the groups (9/9) mentioned gardening as a potential use for the property. A community garden was of specific interest—allowing people in the community to come together and use the land. Many groups (6/8) specifically discussed farming as a potential use of the land, which could include a greenhouse, raising animals, and/or growing produce. Some groups saw farms and gardens as a potential revenue generator—products from farms and gardens could either be sold directly or people using the land could be charged a fee as a way to generate funds. One group mentioned potential USDA funds to help fund gardens. One group suggested that the gardens or farms could be used for agricultural education through 4-H or other services. Farms and gardens were seen as a way to bring people together, use the land in environmentally friendly ways, and as a potential food and revenue generator for the community.

A Community Center

Almost all of the groups (8/9) discussed building a community center on the property. The details of this community center varied. Some participants were interested in using the space as a place for town meetings, community events, and educational opportunities. Other participants saw the community center as more of a recreational sports center that might have an indoor track, skating rink, theater, or indoor athletic courts such as a basketball or soccer court. Some groups touched on concerns that a center could be costly to build and maintain. However, groups also discussed potential revenue that could be generated by renting the space out for special events.

Multi-Use Trails

The majority of groups (7/9) expressed interest in trails on the Marston Property. Participants mentioned various uses for the trails which included walking, biking, skiing, snowshoeing, and enjoying time with pets. Some groups talked about the value of trails that would be open for inter-generational use by a range of populations, for instance, paved, dirt, or gravel trails might make it easier for seniors, moms with strollers, or disabled folks to enjoy the outdoors. One group mentioned trails leading to the river to allow access for fishing. Two groups recommended benches or resting spots for people along the trails. Northwood Meadows was mentioned as a model for the trails by one participant. One group felt that the trails could be a low-impact development for the property. Another group suggested the Scouts could help to build the trails.

Shooting and Archery Range

Slightly over half of the groups at the event (6/9) expressed interest in using the Marston Property as a shooting range. Some groups expressed interest in an archery range. Other groups expressed concerns about locating a shooting range on the same property as the other ideas above like trails or athletic fields. The issue of safety and combining a shooting range with kid-friendly uses of the Marston Property was of particular concern. Some participants suggested that the shooting range could be open for limited hours or part-time use. Two groups discussed the NRA as a potential resource for creating a shooting range, as well as a funding source.

Other Uses

Less than half of groups (3/9) mentioned other uses for the Marston Property, which included an outdoor skating rink, an outdoor track, or outdoor athletic courts for tennis, basketball, or volleyball. Some groups (3/8) also expressed an interest in using the Marston Property as a place to build a school, either in the near or distant future. One group mentioned a senior center or senior housing. At the end of the evening, the children's group reported their ideas, many of which are mentioned above. In addition, this group mentioned arcades, rainbows, an indoor pool, and a cotton candy stand which serves blueberry pancakes. Other potential uses included an outdoor gazebo or pavilion, senior housing, a climbing wall, tree farm, summer camp, pool, dog park, playground, farmer's market, fairground, horse show ring, outdoor theater, or hunting area. Several groups discussed an interest in a concession stand, which will be further discussed in the *Parking and Other Developments* section.

A Financial Plan for the Short and Long Term

All of the groups at the conversation (9/9) discussed issues related to the funding of the Marston Property. The conversations about funding centered on several key issues including understanding the overall costs, how to sustain funding, how to generate revenue, the impact on taxes, and the potential of volunteerism. In particular, groups indicated a need for a concrete, sustainable funding plan regardless of what uses were decided for the Marston Property.

Several groups expressed a desire to better understand the cost of developing, using, and maintaining the Marston Property in both the short and long term. A couple of different groups recommended that the town embark on a thorough cost analysis to get a sense of what the costs would really be for use and development of the property. Some groups commented on the cost of maintenance, wondering how much it would cost to keep up the grounds. One group recommended that Nottingham explore how neighboring communities have developed similar projects. Two groups suggested that Nottingham pursue low-cost uses of the Marston Property.

Groups showed an interest in identifying funding sources for the Marston Property. These funding sources included federal and charitable foundation grants, corporate sponsorship, and donations. Among resources mentioned, groups discussed funds from organizations such as USDA, healthy eating and active living, the NRA, and the American College of Sports Medicine. One group commented that UNH Cooperative Extension, the Eagle Scouts, Audubon Foundation, or Army Corps Engineers may be able to donate resources, labor, or funds. Other groups discussed pursuing private fundraising from Eastern Bank or small businesses in the community. Some groups talked about the potential of offering businesses advertising in exchange for the donation of a trail, park bench, or facility. One group expressed some concern that attracting corporate sponsors or donations could create some conflicts of interest for the property.

Another concern about funding Marston development revolved around funding maintenance and other needs of the property. For instance, if there was a community center, who would clean and keep up the facility? Volunteerism emerged as a potential solution to these staffing issues. Some groups focused on volunteers to build and develop the property, while other groups saw

volunteers as a way to maintain and run facilities over time. One group mentioned how companies like Timberland might volunteer their staff for a community service day. Other groups discussed strategies to mobilize specific volunteer groups to help build facilities, fields, or trails. As one group mentioned, this could even take form as a “community building party” to engage volunteers. Volunteers were also discussed as a potential way to help the property survive over time at a low cost—for instance, volunteers could run concession stands, community spaces, or engage in clean up and maintenance. However, some groups expressed concern on relying on volunteers and questioned if there were enough willing people to build and sustain the property.

Groups discussed sources of revenue generation for the Marston Property, which included fees for the use of various services. For instance, groups recommended that the town charge fees for the use of the property for sporting events or special events. If the town decided to build a community center, groups suggested that space could also be rented for a fee. Other groups talked about fees for parking, trail use, or charges for goods from the potential concession stand. One group questioned how the town might strategically try to attract outsiders to use (and pay for) the Marston Property’s resources.

Several groups expressed a value in identifying funding or revenue sources aside from taxes. Participants feared that the Marston Property could drive up taxes for the town or for individuals, particularly through property tax increases. One participant commented that Nottingham was known for low taxes, and that the community should remain true to its historic frugality. Another group expressed a concern on how tax increases might affect certain populations in the community such as seniors. However, not all groups expressed concern about tax increases. One group discussed fears that concern about taxes might prohibit decision making about or use of the Marston Property.

Clear Goals with Distinct, Achievable Steps

Most of the groups (8/9) took time to discuss the importance of a clear vision and plan for the Marston Property. Some groups expressed an urgency to get the property open and usable, while other groups felt that the town needed to have a clear plan in place before moving forward. A couple of groups felt that Nottingham needed to do research to determine where needs existed for various populations in the community (that is, children, seniors, etc.). One group suggested that Nottingham conduct an inventory of existing resources and properties in the community. In this way, the decision making about Marston could be relative to what exists in town—for instance, if athletic fields were expressed as a priority, what existing resources exist for athletic fields, why/how are they inadequate, and how could the Marston Property better address this need? Some groups expressed the need for a cost-benefit analysis of potential plans for the Marston Property. Conversations also revolved around the need to make both short- and long-term plans. In the short term, groups felt that the Marston Property could be used as a park while town leaders engaged in longer term planning for the property.

Groups were interested in various aspects of long-term planning. Some groups wanted to see design plans that would show how the space would be divided and where potential buildings, fields, and the like would be located. Groups also expressed the desire for a long-term plan for what

property use would be and how this would be achieved in phases or steps toward those greater goals. The majority of groups (6/9) expressed an interest in a plan for maintenance of the property over time. Groups also mentioned the need for a business plan, such as approximated costs, clear goals for funding, and a plan with phases to achieve these goals. Once these various plans develop, groups wanted to know what the priorities were and what the timeline was for these priorities. Many groups mentioned the value of a plan with distinct phases and steps to move the community toward the long-term goals for the Marston Property.

The Marston Property as a Space for Everyone

All of the groups (9/9) expressed interest in Marston Property as a place that everyone in town can use. Groups discussed using the land in ways that impact the broadest cross-section of people, including children, adults, and seniors. Groups also talked about the Marston Property as a place to build community, where people from different age groups and backgrounds could come together and intermix. Groups demonstrated an interest in both indoor and outdoor communal spaces. Some groups talked about uses for the property that a range of groups could enjoy such as walking trails, open green spaces, and ball parks. Other groups discussed the need for a community center where people could come together to volunteer and work toward common community-related interests, including games, knitting, and other community activities. Perhaps one group put it best in saying that the Marston Property should be “welcoming to all generations.”

Parking and Other Developments

Almost all of the groups (8/9) discussed potential development of the Marston Property. Most groups expressed an interest in parking (8/9), and many groups discussed the potential of bathrooms (6/9). Some groups expressed an interest in a bathroom facility with running water and lights, while other groups did not mention bathrooms or talked about alternatives such as a portapotty. Some groups talked about building a community center or a concession stand. Groups also discussed bleachers for sporting events or just general benches on the property where people could sit and rest. Groups who discussed these potential uses of the property also expressed an interest in understanding the costs of these developments. For instance, some groups wanted to know if volunteers or employees would be needed for concession stands. Several groups expressed an interest in exploring alternative energy sources for lighting the property such as solar panels or wind turbines as energy efficient approaches that might reduce costs over time.

Keeping Marston Safe for Everyone

The majority of groups (8/9) expressed an interest in safety and security on the Marston Property. Groups talked about potential rules governing its use. Participants expressed concern about the remoteness of the property, particularly in terms of how people might use or misuse the property at night. One group questioned if the police would supervise or provide surveillance of the area. Traffic on the main road was another concern. Participants wondered if Nottingham could handle the increased volume in traffic and how this might affect the safety of the road and nearby intersections. Other concerns about safety included the mix of guns and people if a shooting range was created, noise or conflicts from the nearby Lee Speedway, and garbage and damage that might

occur with the property being located near Route 125. Groups also expressed concern about hazardous wastes on the property, and how this might affect water quality and soils.

Environmental Concerns

The majority of groups (7/9) mentioned interest in using the Marston Property land in environmentally responsible ways. As mentioned in the *Safety* section, contamination of water quality and soils from hazardous waste were a concern. Several groups mentioned the wetlands and water on the property. Concerns related to water ranged from the flooding of fields to how legal regulations related to wetlands and shorelines might restrict or affect use of the property. There was also an interest in researching the soil to know more about its use for farming or gardening.

Liability and Legal Issues

The majority of groups (7/9) touched on the importance of learning more about the regulations associated with use of the Marston Property. For instance, groups were interested in the insurance costs, potential liabilities, and legal implications that would be associated with various uses of the property.

Outreach to the Community

The majority of groups (5/9) placed value on opening up decisions about the future of Marston Property to the greater community, including those who were not present at the community conversation. Some groups suggested a survey to the community that offered town residents a chance to give feedback on potential property uses and as a place to express concerns. Groups wanted to know in general how communication to the town about the Marston Property would be managed. Some groups suggested that the town vote on potential uses of the property.

Participant Attendance and Evaluation Summary

NH Listens gathers basic demographic data to provide information on who was interested and able to attend this event on the future of the Marston Farm Property. It's important to note that the content below has been generated from the people who attended the event and, consequently, does not represent all voices or viewpoints in Nottingham. Participants at the event expressed a special interest in making sure that more voices in the community were heard regarding final decisions for the property. Still, the demographic information presented here from the event indicates a healthy mix of backgrounds and experiences, ensuring that the conversations summarized in this report have great value.

Who Attended the Event?

Of the 93 people who attended these conversations, 78 people total completed the evaluations. The following information is generated from those 78 responses, and a full summary of the evaluation data may be found in Appendix B:

- The average age of participants was 53.9 years old. About a quarter of participants (24.3 percent) were retired, while only a few participants (3.2 percent) identified as students.
- The gender balance at the event was fairly even, but slightly more women (52.4 percent) attended the event than men (47.6 percent).
- Though participants had varying levels of education ranging from a middle school education through graduate school, the majority of participants (85 percent) had attended some college or held a college degree (see Figure 1).
- When it came to political leanings, there was a fairly even distribution of political perspectives, although slightly more conservatives than liberals attended the event. Of participants, 33.3 percent identified as somewhat conservative or conservative, 40.6 percent identified as moderate, and 26 percent identified as somewhat liberal or liberal (see Figure 2).
- 98.7 percent of participants agreed or strongly agreed that the facilitator did not impose his or her ideas or values on the group. Only 1.3 percent disagreed. This indicates that most participants felt facilitators were impartial in the process (see Figure 3).
- 98.7 percent of participants agreed or strongly agreed that the facilitator made sure everyone took part in the conversation. Only 1.3 percent disagreed. This indicates most participants felt that the conversations were inclusive (see Figure 4).
- 97.4 percent of participants agreed or strongly agreed that the group talked about the most important issues related to deciding the future of the Marston Property (see Figure 5). Only 2.6 percent of participants felt that the group did not talk about the most important issues at hand.
- 82.9 percent of participants felt they understood how the results from the conversation would be used to inform next steps (see Figure 6). However, 17 percent of participants did not feel they understood the next steps, either disagreeing or strongly disagreeing with this statement. This may indicate a need for further communication by the Marston Exploratory Committee with the community to make next steps clear.

All of the participants surveyed felt that they would consider attending another community conversation on the Marston Property or another community topic (see Figure 7). 69.7 percent said they would attend and 30.3 percent said they might attend. No participants claimed they would intentionally not attend the next conversation, which indicates participants felt the process was of some value.

Figure 1. Participants' self-reported highest levels of education achieved.

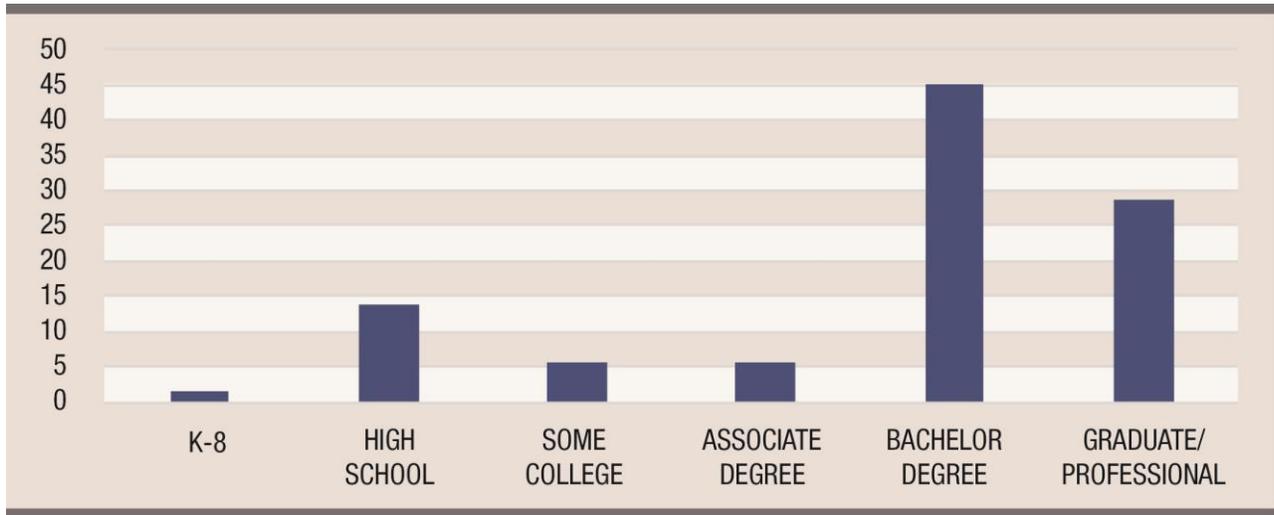


Figure 2. "How would you describe your political leanings?"

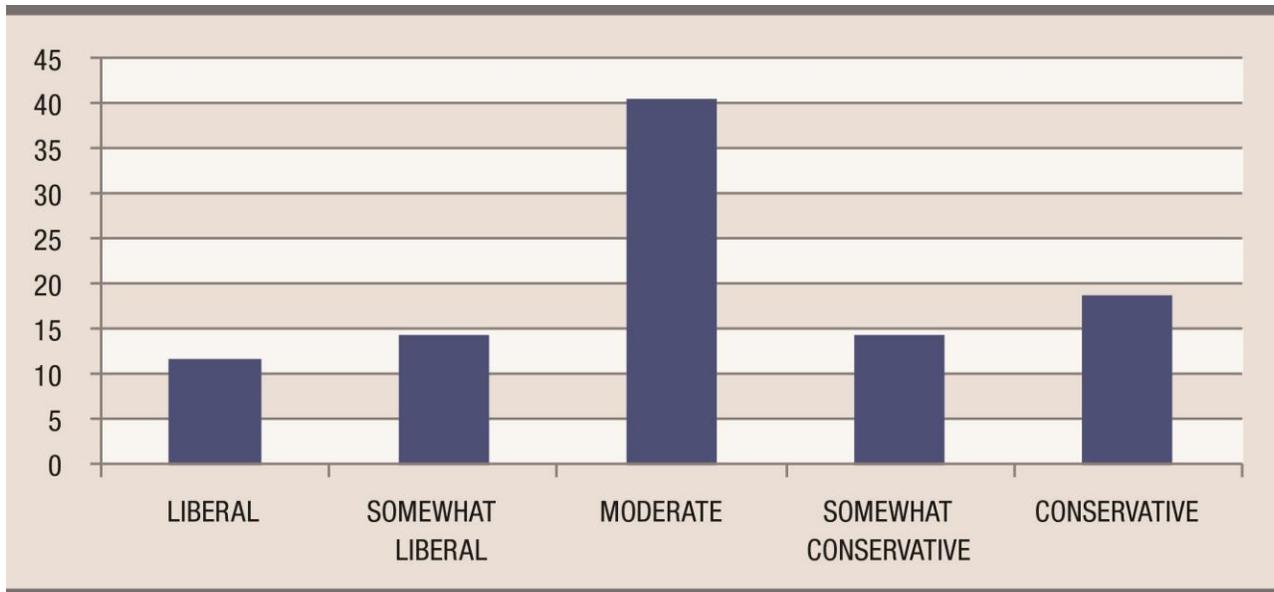


Figure 3. “The facilitator did not impose his or her ideas or values on the group.”

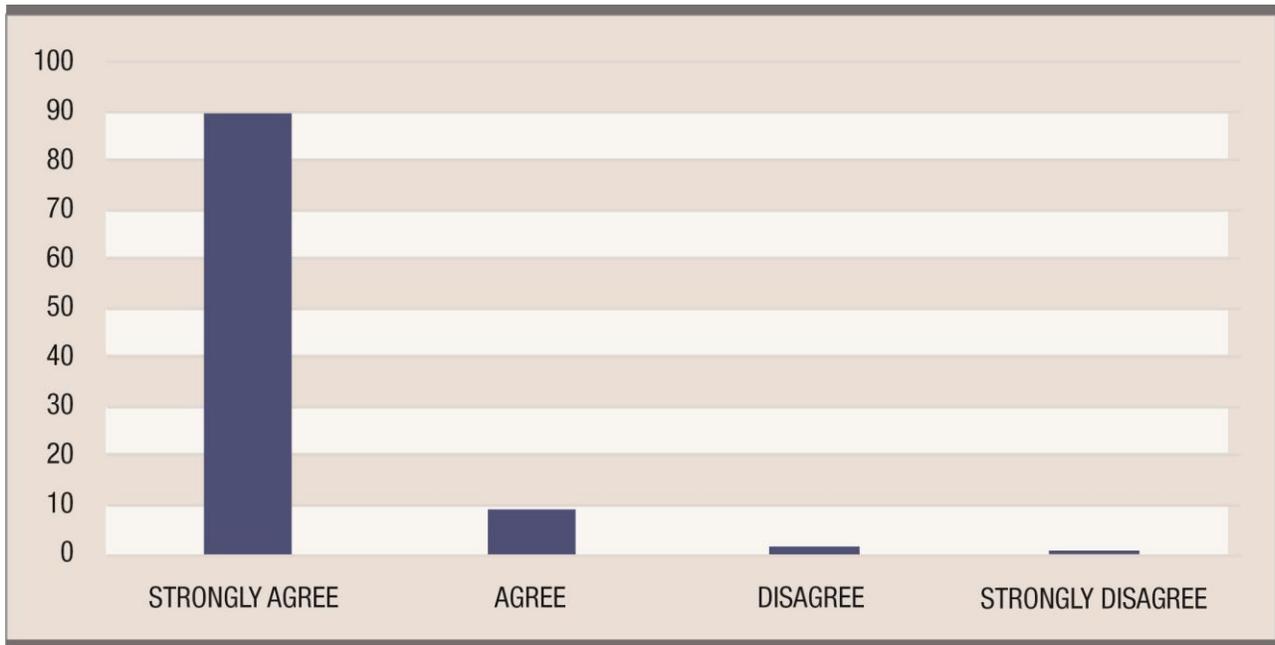


Figure 4. “The facilitator made sure everyone took part in the conversation.”

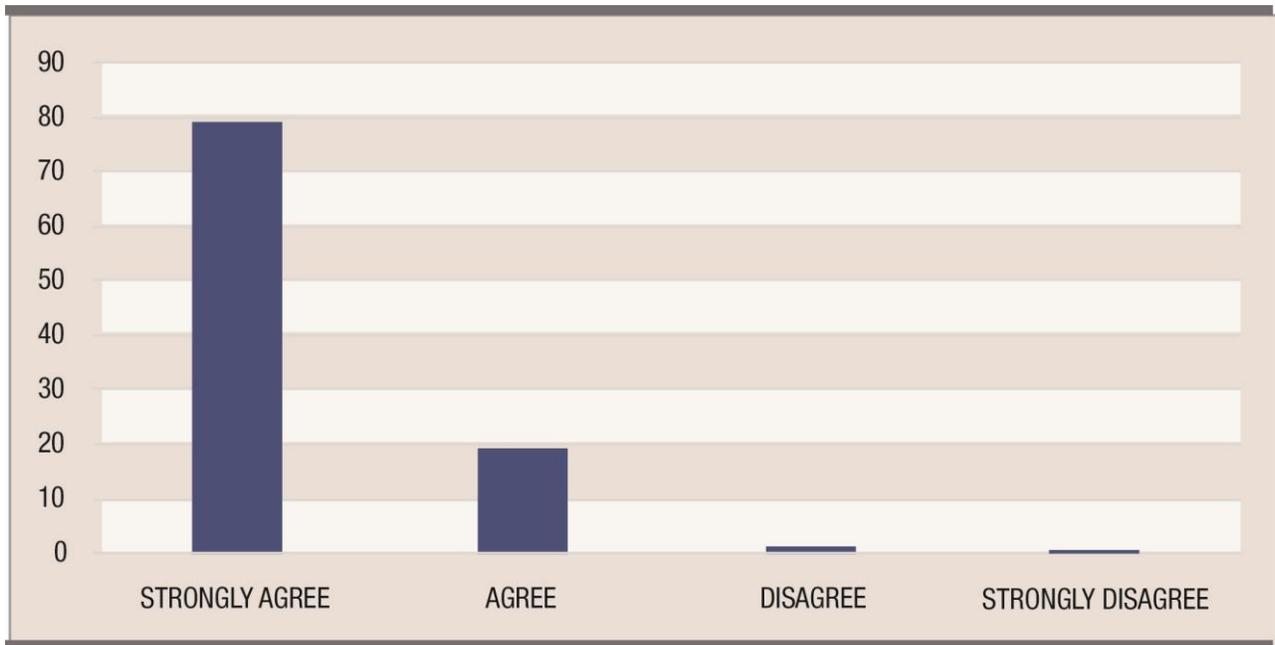


Figure 5. “Our group talked about the most important issues related to this topic.”

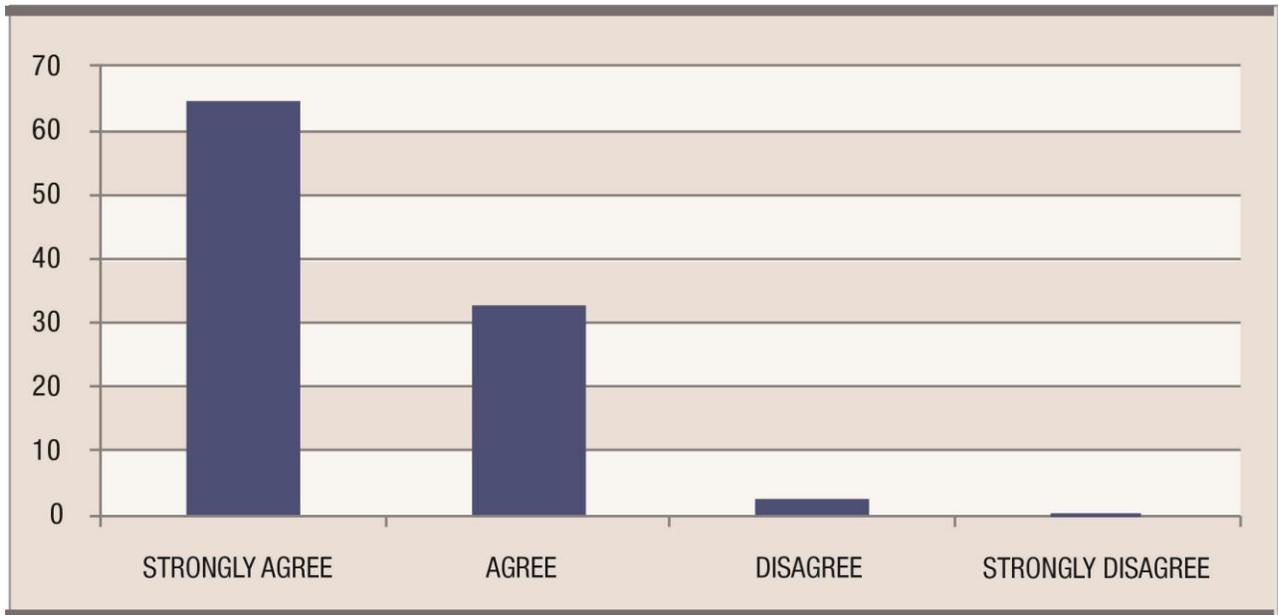


Figure 6. “ I understand how the results from this conversation will be used to inform next steps.”

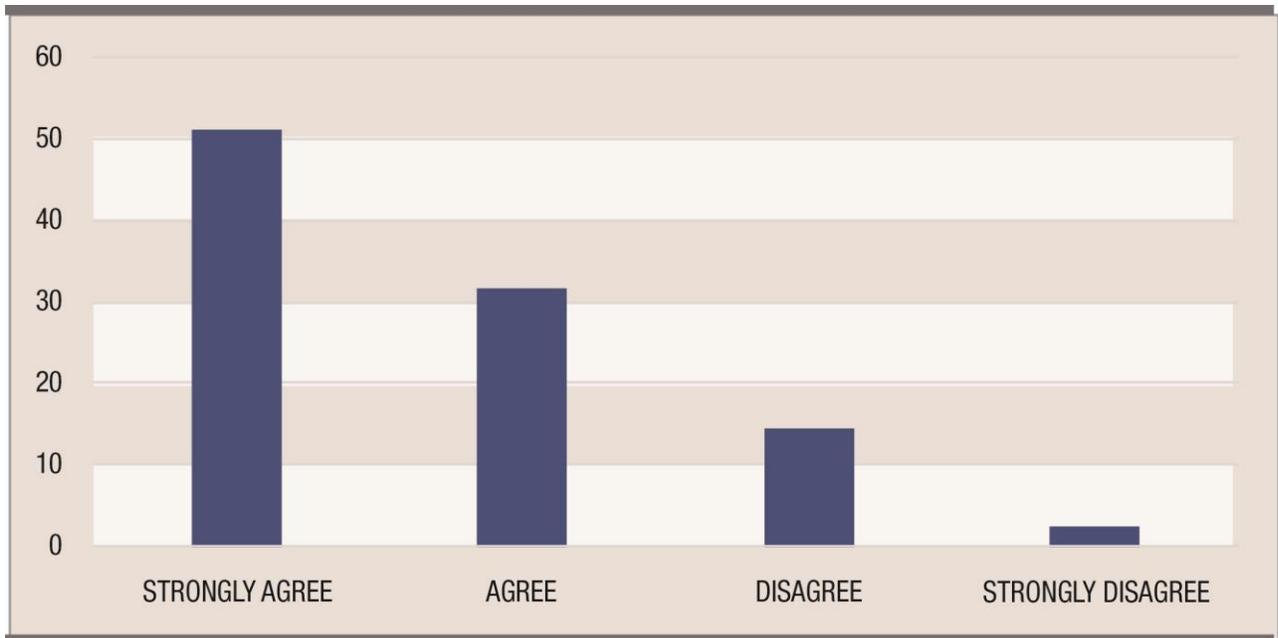
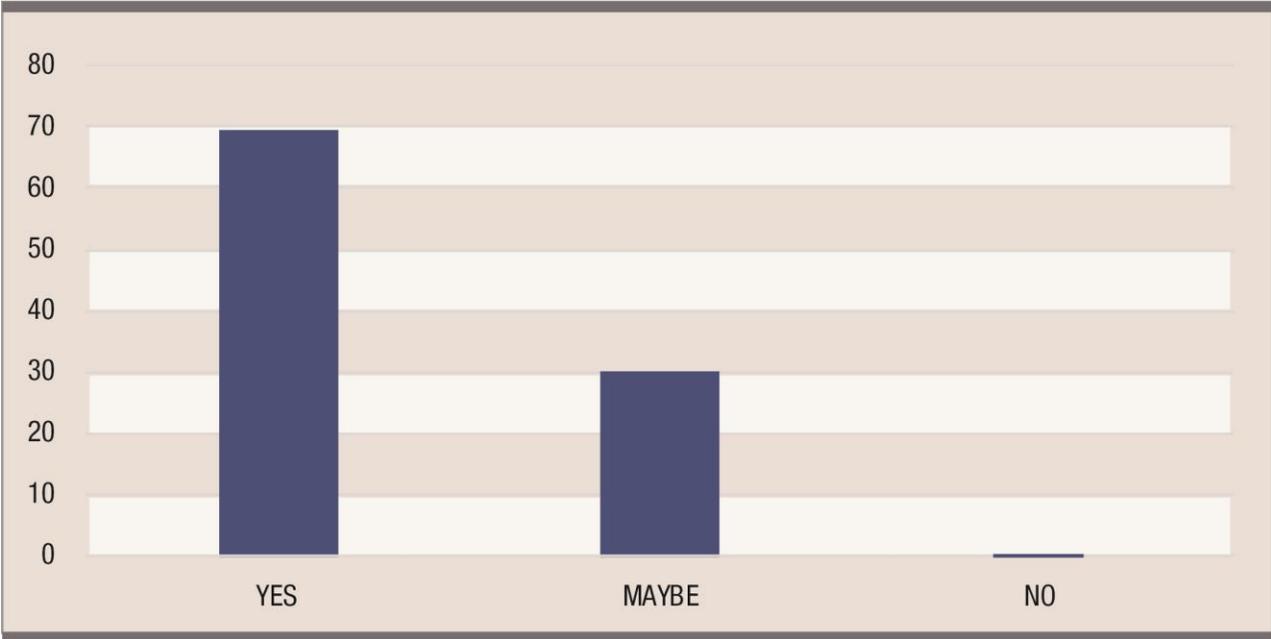


Figure 7. "I would attend another community conversation on this or a different topic."



Conclusion

Ninety-three people from the Nottingham community participated in conversations centered on how to use the Marston Farm Property in ways that benefit a range of individuals in the community. A range of ages, genders, and political perspectives were represented at the event. Attendees' final recommendations and key areas of concern centered on a few distinct areas, although there were different views about how to approach these issues depending on the range of perspectives present in the group. The priority topics for final recommendations included:

- **The Marston Property as a Space with Multiple Uses**
- **A Financial Plan for the Short and Long Term**
- **Clear Goals with Distinct, Achievable Steps**
- **The Marston Property as a Space for Everyone**
- **Parking and Other Developments**
- **Keeping Marston Safe for Everyone**

The primary purpose of the public engagement conversations described in this report is to guide the Marston Property Exploratory Committee's next steps in forming a set of recommendations to the Nottingham Board of Selectmen.

Appendix A: Marston Property Exploratory Committee Membership

Donna Danis, Chair
Janet Horvath
Chet Batchelder
Peter Landry
Lauren Chaurette
Skip Seaverns
Tina Cooke
Cheryl Smith
Gary Cowan
Tom Sweeney
Miska Hadik
Wynn Varney

Appendix B: Summary of Participant Evaluations

Participant Demographics

- The average age was 54 years old.
- Participants identified as 47.6 percent male, 52.4 percent female.
- 24.3 percent of participants were retired.
- 3.2 percent of participants were students.
- 11.6 percent of participants identified as liberal, 14.5 percent as somewhat liberal, 40.5 percent as moderate, 14.5 percent as somewhat conservative, and 18.8 percent as conservative.

Participants reported highest educational attainment of the following levels:

- 1.4 percent elementary or middle school graduate
- 13.7 percent high school graduates
- 5.5 percent some college education
- 45.2 percent college graduates
- 28.8 percent had a graduate or professional degree

Feedback on NH Listens Processes from Participants

Participants were asked questions about the experience of participating in a NH Listens conversation. Of those who responded, participants expressed the following views:

- 98.7 percent of participants agreed or strongly agreed that the facilitator was prepared.
- 98.7 percent of participants agreed or strongly agreed that the facilitator(s) made sure everyone took part in the conversation.
- 97.4 percent of participants agreed or strongly agreed that their group talked about the most important issues related to the topic.
- 91.8 percent of participants agreed or strongly agreed that because of the conversation, they have a better understanding of people who they disagree with and their opinions.
- 98.7 percent of participants agreed or agreed strongly that their perspective was respected in the conversation.
- 82.9 percent of participants agreed or agreed strongly that they understood how the results from the conversation will be used to inform next steps.
- 94.8 percent of participants agreed or strongly agreed that the information in the discussion guide was useful to them.
- 89.3 percent of participants felt that the time allotted for the sessions was the right amount of time (and 1.3 percent too much and 9.3 percent too little).
- 98.7 percent of participants agreed or agreed strongly that they were glad they participated in the community conversations.
- 100 percent of participants indicated yes (69.7) or maybe (30.3) that they would attend another community conversation on this or a different topic.

Appendix C: How NH Listens Collects and Reports Findings

NH Listens bases this kind of community development work on small-group facilitated dialogue (typically eight to twelve participants per group) that produces specific findings. Depending on the topic, the findings might be at a more general level, articulating broad sets of values or criteria for decision making, or quite specific recommendations, such as concrete steps for action.

Whether a dialogue is constructed as a one-time event that stretches over several hours or multiple events occurring over several weeks, participants typically move through a four-stage process supported by the facilitator. These stages include:

1. Introductions and personal stories about how participants relate to the focus topic of the dialogue (including their prior experiences with and opinions about the topic)
2. Review of the available data on the topic to ensure common, comparable levels of knowledge among participants
3. Analysis of the topic and its multiple dimensions, leading to selection by the group of a small number of key issues (three to four) that serve as the basis for subsequent discussion from which the group generates concrete actions and recommendations
4. In-depth discussion of the selected key issues and articulation of a final set of views, values, or recommended actions directed at relevant decision makers

Throughout the dialogue, facilitators and participants document the conversation on large flipcharts and identify recurring statements or themes. That is, the information that is gleaned from each small group is inductively analyzed, moving from specific comments made by group members to general statements that represent the shared ideas and perspectives of the group. Both agreements and disagreements are recorded, to ensure that all points of view are heard and documented.

Notes:



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