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TOWN OFFICE BUILDING
EAST HADDAM
CONNECTICUT
06423



February 4, 2015

The Honorable Benjamin Barnes, Secretary
Office of Policy and Management
450 Capitol Avenue
Hartford, CT 06106-1379

Subj: East Haddam Center for Community Agriculture
Proposed Revision to 2013 STEAP Funded Project

Dear Secretary Barnes:

The Town of East Haddam received a grant award of \$431,200.00 from the Small Town Economic Assistance Program (STEAP) during the 2013 funding round to support the development of a new Center for Community Agriculture at the Harris Property on Mt Parnassus Road in East Haddam. The Center, as originally proposed, included cultivated fields, greenhouses, high tunnel hoop houses and a barn with a commercial kitchen. The objective of the Center was to support agricultural business development as an incubator for food production and processing

Project Accomplishments to Date

1. Completed fencing of the 4-acre parcel for cultivated fields
2. Cleared an additional 4-acres of land
3. Completion of the draft site plan for the Center
4. Leased 12 plots to area residents for cultivation during the 2014 growing season
5. Cleared the rear 7-acres field; this field is available for lease, and the Town anticipates negotiating a lease with a local farmer for the use of this acreage in 2015.
6. Held two public information forums

The objective of the Center is unchanged, but will be modified to incorporate recent public dialogue on the project. The Town proposes to remove the commercial kitchen from the program due to public concerns on operating costs and liability. Instead the emphasis will be on the planned food production resources (cultivated fields, high tunnels and greenhouses). As such, the Town of East Haddam respectfully requests that the STEAP funding support the revised program outlined below.

Proposed Project Revisions

The objective for the Center will remain as an agricultural business incubator. Rather than focus on food processing, the project will shift its concentration on food production and education through the cultivated fields and high tunnels. The fields and high tunnels will allow new farmers to learn farming techniques at minimal costs. The town plans to work with the UCONN Agricultural Extension Service and CT Department of Agriculture to coordinate training programs and identify veteran farmers for mentoring younger farmers.

Equal Opportunity Employer



The Revamped Agriculture Center Program Includes:

1. A small open-air pavilion for training
2. Acquisition of Farm Equipment
3. A barn for farm equipment storage (off-site)
4. High tunnel hoop houses / Green House
5. Composting area
6. Additional preparing of fields for planting
7. Tool shed / Wash facility (Town Funded)
8. Installation of power and water (well) for supporting the Center (Town Funded)
9. Road restoration of Old Mt Parnassus Rd to improve site access (Town Funded)

East Haddam plans to finalize the site plan and apply to the Town Planning & Zoning Commission for site plan approval this winter. With site plan approval, the Town plans to install the water supply well and electrical service to the Center this spring.

The Pavilion

A small open air pavilion is planned in lieu of a formal enclosed structure as originally proposed. The pavilion will serve multiple uses for the Center such as a lecture area, demonstration area, produce cleaning and sorting, etc. When not in use by the Center, the pavilion could serve as a picnic area for visitors to the adjacent Town hiking trail and DEEP's Comer State Memorial Park

Equipment

The initial application for STEAP assistance did not account for farm equipment needs for operating the center – a lesson learned from the first phase for this project. This repurposing proposal includes acquisition of the needed farm equipment. Initially, the project anticipated borrowing town public works equipment for working the fields. Indeed, town equipment was used to prepare land during early activities, but it is not realistic to rely on this equipment on a continual basis as it is needed by public works for its traditional town responsibilities. Also, the town equipment is more suited for road maintenance and mowing and lacks many of the attachments needed for farming. The farm equipment acquired by the town for the project will be used for the Center for Community Agriculture.

The Barn

Also in lieu of a more formal Center Building, the Town proposes to erect a kit-type barn to store and protect the Center's farm equipment. For security and to prevent untrained/unauthorized use to this equipment, the town proposes to locate the barn down the street on Mount Parnassus Rd, at the nearby Town Public Works Garage. The farm equipment could easily be accessed from the Garage for use at the Center.

High Tunnel Hoop Houses

The placement of hoop houses or "high tunnels" remains part of the planned activities for the site. These structures will allow growers an extended season for production.

Tool / Wash Shed

The Town received a donation for the construction of a tool shed on site. The shed will allow farmers to store small tools on site and provide for a washing area.

Training Partnerships

The town will engage students enrolled in the Nathan Hale – Ray High School, Vocational Agriculture (VOAG) program to learn agricultural business and trade skills. The center's resources will be available to the VOAG curriculum to enhance its programs and encourage students to seek agricultural careers. The town will also coordinate with the UCONN Agricultural Extension Service and make available the center's resource to enhance and augment the Extension Services programs and training. The Town will also work with the CT Department of Agriculture to coordinate training programs and identify veteran farmers for mentoring younger farmers.

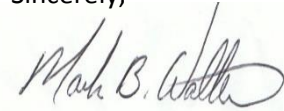
Project Benefits and Impacts

As with the original application for funding, the job creation estimate is based on the cultivated plots, and their ability to support entrepreneurs. The revised program doesn't affect the Town's overall goals and objectives of the project. The Center will: 1) support the growth of local employment by nurturing new farmers through their use of the Center's food production resources; 2) provide "start-up" or expansion space for farmers; 3) support the growth of local agricultural businesses; 4) provide a local food system; 5) bring fresh produce to the local Food Bank; 6) create recreational activities; and 7) establish a "hub" for community events. The Center will make available cultivation plots for farmers ranging in sizes from 10,000 square feet to 2,500 square feet. The acreage can support a number of farmers and farm businesses. Additionally, the greenhouse and high tunnel will support other farmers with extended growing seasons for crops cultivated in these spaces.

With OPM's approval of the revision to the STEAP grant, the town will be able to begin construction of the above improvements during the 2015 construction season.

Please don't hesitate to contact me at 860-873-5021 if you have any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,



Mark B. Walter
First Selectman
Town of East Haddam

Cc: David LeVasseur, OPM
Catherine Smith, Commissioner, DECD

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TOWN OF EAST HADDAM



OPEN SPACE HARRIS PARCEL 130 ACRES - MT PARNASSUS ROAD

PROPERTY COOPERATIVELY PRESERVED BY THE
TOWN OF EAST HADDAM AND THE
STATE OF CONNECTICUT

THIS LAND WAS PURCHASED FOR PRESERVING OPEN
SPACE, WATERSHED PROTECTION AND
PUBLIC ENJOYMENT



FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE WAS PROVIDED BY THE
STATE OF CONNECTICUT DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY
& ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION OPEN SPACE
AND WATERSHED LAND ACQUISITION PROGRAM

AREA IS OPEN 1/2 HOUR BEFORE SUNRISE TO 1/2 HOUR AFTER SUNSET

NO MOTORIZED VEHICLES, HUNTING BY PERMIT ONLY

PLEASE WEAR BRIGHT ORANGE CLOTHING DURING HUNTING SEASON

PARK IN DESIGNATED AREAS AND DO NOT BLOCK THE ROAD

QUESTIONS AND COMMENTS CAN BE DIRECTED TO THE LAND USE
OFFICE DURING REGULAR BUSINESS HOURS AT 860-873-5031



Joey
Girouard
First Selectman

Noah
Bonilla
First Selectman

