January 12th, 2022

Dear Commissioners,

I am writing in support of the DRI application for Island Grown Initiative’s proposed Education and Innovation Center.

As most of you know, I have had a long relationship with this land and the efforts to preserve it for future production agriculture. While I believe there has been a narrative submitted to your board about the farm’s history, I would like to add to and elaborate upon this. In addition, I would like to make a suggestion that would address nitrogen mitigation concerns around the construction of the new facility.

From 2005 thru 2013, the Whippoorwill Farm CSA provided over 500 island families with weekly vegetable shares. During that eight year stretch the farm’s advisory board members worked with local and regional nonprofits to find a permanent solution for keeping the farm in the public domain, and assuring production agriculture for its future. This was an exhaustive effort in which twice the farm narrowly escaped a sale to private ownership which may have jeopardized its future role in local food production. Had it not been for the thoughtful and generous support of Eric Grubman, and the commitment from a number of friends of the farm, these goals may not have been reached. Fortunately, in 2012 all of the hard work paid off and the farm made it into the hands of Island Grown Initiative.

As a nonprofit with an environmental focus, I believe that IGI now has an extraordinary opportunity to build a model farm that can help feed the island, while developing practical and scalable sustainable technologies that offer education for all. I am very pleased with the commitment that IGI has made to pursue a regenerative organic approach to rebuilding the soil and providing nutrient dense food to our island community. Modern agriculture is at the root of so many of our environmental challenges. Fortunately now, there is an awareness and openness to changing our ways and following a sustainable path - akin to what indigenous people have practiced for thousands of years. With historical knowledge and modern science, we can reverse the damage done to our environment, and restore the health and vitality of our food systems, soils and water.
As a former member of the MVC, I realize that nitrogen leachate will be an area of concern with this project. Can some portion of the current farm infrastructure, and the new EIC building, be upgraded to include composting waste systems? I use the word upgrade because a composting system would remove 100% of all the nitrogen generated from this expansion. Given the sensitivity of Duarte’s pond and headwaters of the Lagoon watershed, this would seem like the right direction to be moving in.

As a nonprofit educational organization, I believe IGI is in the unique position to implement such a system, and care for it in a way that would promote composting as both a viable solution to nitrogen mitigation, and an unique educational opportunity. If the organization is going to invest heavily in reducing its carbon footprint and reach for carbon neutrality with its buildings, why not try to do the same for the groundwater below? Call it nitrogen neutrality if you will.

While the proposed new technology being planned for the waste system is a great step and necessary for the project, I think IGI could really drive the nitrogen issues out of the park by including a composting component. I sincerely hope this will be considered. The West Tisbury Library has done it, South Mountain Co-Housing has done it, why not IGI?

In closing, I hope you will support IGI’s application, as well as their ongoing efforts to preserve this Island-wide resource as a center for regenerative agriculture, education and innovation.

Best,

Andrew Woodruff
PO Box 719
West Tisbury, MA