



TOWN OF PETERSHAM

**NICHEWAUG INN AND ACADEMY COMMITTEE**

PETERSHAM TOWN OFFICES  
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October 25, 2021

Dear Members of the Petersham Selectboard,

The NIAC has finalized its recommendations for the uses and select demolition of the Nichewaug Inn and Maria Assumpta Academy property. This site is a 6.6 acre lot of land on Common St. The property consists of the Nichewaug Inn and the Maria Assumpta Academy, a 100,000 sqft cluster of connected buildings and additions. There is currently one outbuilding on the site, the Garage.

The NIAC was tasked with working with the larger community on future uses of the site. The committee received 2 DLTA grants in 2020 and 2021 respectively, from Montachusett Regional Planning Commission (MRPC) to assist with this work. Through these grants, the committee performed a survey for Town residents to share their ideas and recommendations. This survey was mailed to all households in Petersham in Fall 2020. The survey was also available in online form through our town website. The results of the survey were shared with the public by Karen Chapman, MRPC, in a virtual Public Information Meeting in February 2021. The results of the survey are available on the Town of Petersham website.

After the Survey and Public Information Meeting, the NIAC met with several Town Boards and Committees for input and recommendations. These meetings occurred from Spring 2021 through that Summer.

The NIAC held an update on next steps with the BoS and the MRPC in late Summer 2021.

The enclosed Recommendations are a result of the collection of Survey Results, research by the NIAC and volunteers, NIAC meetings with and without invited guests, meetings with other Town boards and committees, advice from the MRPC, and working closely with the Petersham Selectboard from January 2019 through Fall 2021. We are pleased to be able to present the Recommendations to you and to the residents of Petersham.

Sincerely,

Ann Lewis, Chair

Jane Lynch Gilbert, Committee Member



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# **Nichewaug Inn and Academy Committee**

## **NIAC Final Recommendations of the Report to the Selectboard**

**25 October 2021**

### **General**

The NIAC recommendations are based primarily on the desires of the majority of town residents who responded to each question in the NIAC Nichewaug Inn and Maria Assumpta Academy Public Opinion Survey of Fall 2020. Needs outlined in Petersham's most recent Master Plan of 2004, the Open Space and Recreation Plan of 2014, and the importance of a central location for the services provided were also considered. The committee also takes into consideration the need to keep the total activity, lighting, and noise levels within bounds that most neighbors could find acceptable and that wouldn't inordinately impinge on activities on the Common, and vice versa.

**The NIAC has three overall recommendations:**

- 1. that a total site plan be developed, including support services such as drinking water needs, sewage disposal, and off-street parking, before any permanent facilities are developed or any land transfers are planned**
- 2. that a structural engineering study be conducted on any buildings or parts of buildings that are recommended for retention**
- 3. that the town do what is necessary to situate itself in a position to qualify for public and private grants to help support the development of projects on the Nichewaug Inn and Maria Assumpta Academy property**

### **Demolition Recommendations**

**The NIAC recommends that the town in keeping with the responses to the Survey (see Appendix A for labelled parts of the buildings:**

- 1. demolish the Academy Building, the entire brick clad structure to include:**
  - the Auditorium Wing [60% of the survey respondents to this question were against repurposing this part of the structure]**
  - the New Academy Building [54% against repurposing this]**
  - the short connector that attaches the brick clad structure to the shingle building**
- 2. demolish parts of the Shingle-Style building to include:**
  - the Kitchen Wing or Nuns' Quarters [55% of the survey respondents to this question were against repurposing this]**

- the Inn Addition or Mother Superior Addition of the Shingle-Style building [54% were against repurposing this]
- a portion of the Dining Room Wing

### **Retention Recommendations**

The NIAC recommends that the town:

1. retains the Historic Stonework [62% of the respondents to this question favored repurposing this part of the structure]
2. retains the Historic Inn [61% favored repurposing this] and secure all new openings
3. retains the Chapel/Music Room [59% favored repurposing this]
4. retains the old Drinking-water Well that produced 10,000gal of water per day for the Maria Assumpta Academy
5. retains the Garage currently used by the Fire Department for the storage of vehicle and other material and equipment

New technology allows for a public water supply and septic disposal on the site for residential units or low water use activities on this site. That technology would provide capacity to add the Petersham Memorial Library on shared systems. We recommend that water and septic options be explored for all structures recommended for reuse and before any land division or permanent development is begun on the site. The NIAC recommends keeping the Garage, that currently houses Fire Department vehicles, and the old Drinking-water Well that is sited next to the Garage until determinations of land use and the use of the old well are settled.

### **Use Recommendations**

In keeping with the responses on the Fall 2020 Public Opinion Survey, the NIAC recommends the three most favored uses:

1. **Outdoor Recreation [79% of respondents who answered this question favored this use]**

At their meeting on October 12, 2021, the Open Space and Recreation Committee (OSRC) voted to support recreational use of the Nichewaug property.

The NIAC recommends incorporating proposals from the OSRC in future development on the Nichewaug property. The NIAC also recommends the Town apply for a PARC grant to further the recreational goals of the property put forth by the OSRC.

The NIAC recommends moving forward on plans to create an inexpensive ice rink to be used for the Town's recreational use. This should be worked on for use during the winter of 2021/2022 to better realize the importance of centrally located, easily accessed recreation.

The NIAC recommends that the successful Community Garden on the Nichewaug property continue. The garden allows many groups, families and individuals use of a centrally located, easily accessed space to grow food, flowers, and to socialize.

**2. Community/Senior Center [71% voted for a Senior/Community Center on the site]**

**The NIAC recommends development of a Community Center that can be reserved at times for Seniors.** That scenario is a good way to share a single facility that is more easily temperature-controlled than the Upper Town Hall in the summers and winters. Our committee suggests that the Chapel/Music Room is an appropriately sized space that could be refurbished by the town as space for a Community Center, Senior Activities, and Performing Arts and Gallery. It is important to note that siting Senior and Community facilities near a town's largest population center and close to other town and community services encourages more people to walk to the facilities and can reduce the need for individual cars or for providing transportation services, especially if the facilities are within an easy walk from Senior Housing.

**3. Senior Housing [64% were in favor of Senior Housing on the site; 57% favored 1 to 6 units; 41% favored 7 to 12 units, 51% were opposed to 7 to 12 units; and increasingly large numbers of units had increasing opposition]**

**The NIAC recommends 6 to 12 units of Senior Housing on the Nichewaug Inn property because a few extra units may make the costs associated with development of the project more manageable and allow units to be priced for middle income Seniors.** Although 64% of respondents were against dividing the Nichewaug property into individual house lots, there are many scenarios that permit the development of Senior Housing without dividing the property into house lots.

- **The NIAC recommends the development of residences that make people's housing easier to maintain and encourages social interactions as they age.** Centrally located Senior Housing has many benefits, including that units are smaller, it facilitates carpooling, and is within walking distance of many of the town's services and cultural and social activities. With centrally located Senior Housing, the NIAC anticipates that more of our elders will be able to remain living in town as they age. Petersham Partners is a non-profit, volunteer organization that provides many services for Seniors to help the Seniors age in place. Provision of these services could be more easily provided to those Seniors who are centrally located. In 2018, the Census Bureau estimated that 39% of Petersham's population was aged 55 and over, in comparison with approximately 28% for the entire state in 2016.
- **The NIAC recommends that the Town of Petersham appoint a Senior Housing Committee to research many aspects of developing Senior Housing on the Nichewaug Inn site and to make recommendations for**

**implementation to the Selectboard.** Guidelines for development and funding of Senior Housing are complex and the possibilities are many. Finding the right combination to fit our Petersham community is essential. See the material on Senior Housing in the Appendices for some statistics on and photographs of Senior Housing.

The fourth and fifth most favored uses on the Fall 2020 Survey are Mixed Uses [59% of the respondents who answered this question favored this option for the site] and Performing Arts [56% favored this use for the site].

**The NIAC recommends**

1. **the incorporation of Performing Arts and Gallery space with at least one of the top three uses, Recreation, Community/Senior Center, and Senior Housing, and that Senior Housing include space for Senior Services**
2. **that Senior Housing also include Public Use Office Space**
3. **that the Chapel be retained for use as a Community Center with times allocated exclusively for Seniors and that the Community Center include a stage for live performances and exhibition space for art**

**The NIAC recommends that in the event that the Town votes for total demolition, the above uses be considered in planning.** The Town of Petersham Master Plan of 2004 and the Open Space Plan of 2014 identify these uses as needs for the Town.

**Recommendations re Petersham Memorial Library's Request for a Gift of Land**

**The NIAC recommends that**

1. **no land be transferred to the Petersham Memorial Library until a unified site plan is developed for the Nichewaug Inn and Maria Assumpta Academy property that takes into account the needs of both the town and the Library**
2. **the town consider the development of shared facilities for the Library and developments on the Nichewaug property. The sharing of facilities would be a much more efficient use of space**
3. **if any land is transferred to the Library, the town agree on a price for the sale of land that will help defray some of the Nichewaug Inn and Maria Assumpta Academy demolition costs for which the town would be responsible**

The Library, a private, non-profit library that serves as the Town Library for the Town of Petersham. Every year the town gives to the Library approximately 10% of the Library's operating budget. The town elects three of the Library's twelve Board of Trustees members. The Nichewaug Inn property abuts the Library on two sides. Common Street forms the front (East) boundary, and the fourth side includes an easement for access to a third party's back lot. The Library sits on a lot of 0.61ac (Massachusetts Interactive Property Map, <https://massgis.maps.arcgis.com/apps/OnePane/basicviewer/index.html?appid=47689963e7b4007961676ad9fc56ae9>).

Potential needs of the Library were not addressed in the Fall 2020 Survey, but many people highlighted the Library's concerns in their comments. The Petersham Memorial Library sent a memo to the Selectboard and copied the NIAC regarding, "Request for Land/Land Use for the Petersham Memorial Library". Informal verbal requests to the Nichewaug Inn Task Force and now to the NIAC and the Selectboard for a transfer of some land from Nichewaug Inn to the Library, no formal, written request and justification was made by the Library over approximately the last 12 years until July 2021, at the request of the Selectboard and the NIAC at a meeting with the Library's Board on 7 April 2021. In that memo the Board of Trustees of the Library asks for a gift of 1 to 1.5ac of land. They plan to use it for the construction of a drinking water well and a septic system, to build a meeting room/classroom, to add off-street parking, to expand the Reading Garden, and add a toddler playground.

### **General Recommendations for State Grants**

**The NIAC recommends that the town follow the recommendations of the MRPC planners:**

- 1. apply for a District Local Technical Assistance (DLTA) in January of 2022 that would give an MRPC planner's time to the Town to develop a Housing Plan.**
- 2. update the Town Master Plan of 2004 and the Open Space and Recreation Plan of 2014.**
- 3. the MRPC also recommends that the Town participate in the "Community One Stop for Growth" portal**

As Karen Chapman explained, a DLTA grant allows an MRPC Planner to help develop a Housing Plan. The Housing Plan makes the Town much more competitive in an application for a Planning Grant through the Community Development Block Grant program for a planner to help the Town develop the Housing Chapter for an updated Town of Petersham Master Plan. Once the Town has an updated and accepted Master Plan, the Town would be eligible to apply for most state grants to develop Senior Housing and meet the other needs prioritized in the Fall 2020 Nichewaug Inn Public Opinion Survey.

The Community One Stop Portal helps communities determine which steps are needed to position the Town for success in writing state grant applications, which grant applications should be submitted, and how the State will guide the Town through the entire process of preparing and submitting grant applications. Participating in the One Stop Portal will allow Petersham to be competitive for both planning and development grants. Almost all state community development grants applications must be submitted through the One Stop Portal.

**The NIAC recommends that the Town follow the guidance of the MRPC and update the Master Plan and the Open Space and Recreation Plan.** Doing so will ultimately increase the Town's ability to succeed in garnering both planning and development grants.

