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# Hillside Farm, Boylston

## Project Positioning Statement

June 2021



Prepared for Hillside Restoration Project, Inc.

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## Executive Summary

Hillside Farm is a historic site located in and owned by the Town of Boylston. The property, which consists of a nineteenth-century mansion, horse barn, and carriage house, was the home of internationally renowned temperance activist John B. Gough. The 12.56-acre parcel is held under preservation easement and is situated within the larger Hillside Park, a 293.6-acre, municipally-owned property also once part of the Gough estate. This larger property contains two modern structures that serve as the Boylston Police Department and town administrative offices; electrical power lines owned by New England Power Company; municipal soccer fields; parking lots; and a forested area. The Gough House is partially renovated, while the horse barn and carriage house are in an advanced state of deterioration. Architectural Heritage Foundation (AHF) has prepared this Project Positioning Statement to consolidate all available information about the restoration effort and to offer guidance regarding appropriate next steps.

Since November 2020, AHF has been in close communication with Hillside Restoration Project, Inc. (HRP), a non-profit organization dedicated to preserving and redeveloping Hillside Farm. We conducted a site visit on February 8, 2021, in which we examined Gough House and the surrounding property, and met with HRP and the Town Planner. Additionally, we have reviewed an extensive list of documents relating to the building, including:

- National Register documents (1969-1975)
- “Report on the Architectural and Historical Significance of the Exterior and Interior of Hillside” (1988)
- Deed of Taking (1997)
- “Report to the Committee” preservation and reuse strategy by John Salem and Timothy Murphy, Architects (2000)
- Hillside Farm Preservation Restriction
- Massachusetts Historical Commission Inventory documentation
- Massachusetts Preservation Projects Fund documentation
- HRP lease agreement (plus extension) with the Town of Boylston
- Maps and site plans of the property
- Hillside Stencil Project Report (2007)
- Hillside Land Use Background Information presentation (2011)
- Newsletters and fundraising material (2002-2015)
- Gough House Facilities Plan and Proforma (2015)
- HRP Vision and Strategy for Gough House (2016)
- Hillside Farm Development Proposal (2021)
- Historical documents relating to Hillside Farm
- HRP bylaws

HRP's proposed program draws on a wide range of potential uses for Hillside Farm. Combined with the multiple existing owners and users at Hillside Park (for example the Police Department), the plans for this very dramatic site and prominent building lack a cohesive, strong, and ultimately financially supportable vision. Without significant philanthropy, our research and analysis, which took into account cost, architectural features, location, and market conditions indicates that the proposed plan would be financially unsustainable. For this project to be successful, it will be necessary to both integrate Hillside Park into the forthcoming Town Master Plan and to develop a separate master plan for the property. These plans will need to be strong, visionary, and broadly supported by all stakeholders. Until these steps are accomplished, AHF recommends that HRP pause piecemeal or task-specific fundraising efforts; create a clearly labeled map of the property as well as a mini-offering sheet with relevant information for potential partners, developers and/or investors; digitize all project-related documents; and organize all documents within a single, easily-accessible online filing system.

This Project Positioning Statement provides a thorough assessment of the challenges and opportunities at Hillside Farm, the site's current condition, and HRP's proposed program. The document is intended to help build consensus around the site and buildings and to offer recommendations for future action to advance a redevelopment project.

A chart outlining next steps and a list of facilities offering office/co-working spaces, conference rooms, and event space within a ten-mile radius of Hillside can be found in the Appendices of this report.

## Introduction

Renovation of Hillside Farm is an opportunity to expand economic, educational, and cultural opportunities in Boylston, MA. The property is municipally-owned and consists of the John B. Gough House, a horse barn, carriage house, and 12.56 acres of landscape features that have been placed under a preservation restriction with the historic structures. Hillside Farm sits within the larger Hillside Park, which contains 293.6 additional acres and is also owned by the town. Hillside Restoration Project, Inc. (HRP), a 501(c)3 nonprofit, is overseeing the preservation and redevelopment of the Hillside Farm property. Significant restoration has already been accomplished in the ground-level front rooms of the mansion; the remainder of the building, as well as the barn and carriage house, are stable, but in poor condition. If a program succeeds, HRP will lease the buildings from the town, and both will enter into a public-private partnership to maintain the property. HRP envisions Hillside Farm as an educational resource, as well as a source of economic opportunity for Boylston, with the Gough House serving as an office and events facility, the barn as a performance venue, and the carriage house as additional municipal space. The purpose of this report is to identify information gaps; to summarize the critical challenges to a program advancing; and to suggest possible paths forward.

## Project Need

Hillside Farm is a critical component of Boylston's identity, Massachusetts' history, and national heritage. John Gough exemplified the reformist spirit of his era, and Hillside is emblematic of nineteenth-century country estates. Preserving the buildings could facilitate economic development in Boylston, increase cultural and recreational opportunities in town, and provide a teaching resource for local schools and the broader public about the history of reform movements in America. If no action is taken, the buildings will deteriorate past repair, and the twenty years of work and \$1.8 million already invested in the Gough House will have been wasted.

## History of Hillside Farm

Hillside Farm was the estate of charismatic temperance crusader John Gough, who lectured internationally during the nineteenth century against alcohol consumption and inspired 150,000 people to pledge themselves to the cause. In 1848, he purchased 26 acres of land in Boylston and built the Italianate-style house where he and his wife, Mary, raised seven children. Within twenty years, they had amassed another 200 acres, expanded the house to accommodate their growing family, and added several farm buildings, a gymnasium, and a bowling alley to the property. Upon Mary's death in 1891, Worcester resident William J. Hogg bought the property to use as a summer home and a place to breed cattle and horses. The site then passed under a series of owners, including William O. Bloom, the New England Power Company, George F. Fuller, and the Shepherd Knapp School, which constructed two modern school buildings alongside the

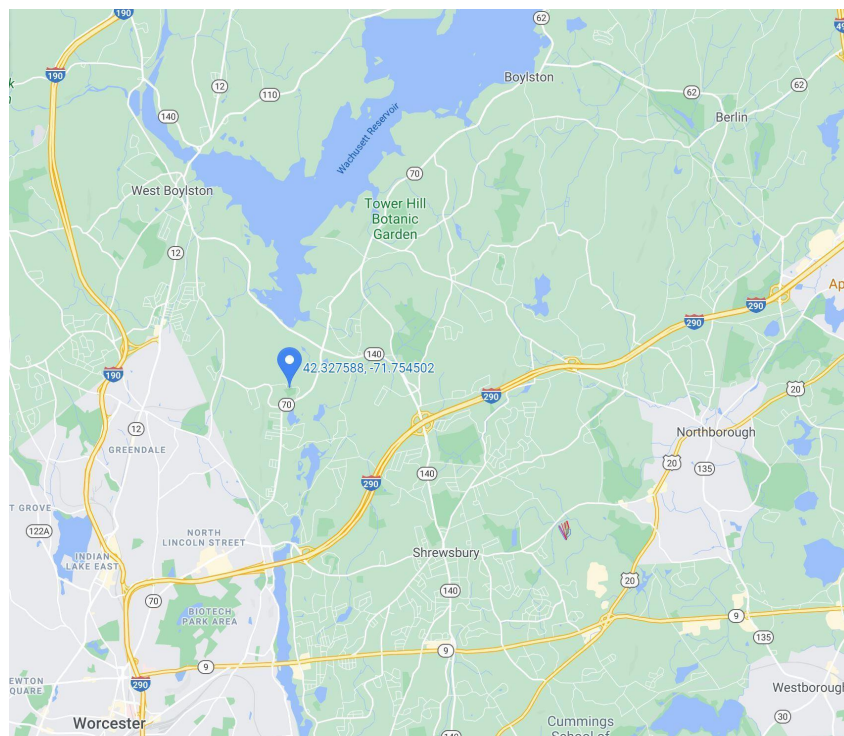


historic structures. Digital Equipment Corporation purchased the property in 1979 to use as a training facility. Following a plunge in the company's fortunes, in 1997 the Town of Boylston acquired the buildings and 293.6 acres through eminent domain. Today, only the Gough House, horse barn, carriage house, a cupola from a demolished barn, and some mature trees and orchards remain of Hillside Farm's historic features. The former school buildings still stand on either side of Gough House and are occupied by municipal offices and the Boylston Police Academy.

The Gough House is listed as a National Historic Treasure in the National Register of Historic Places. It is nationally significant for its example of early Italianate/Square-style residential architecture and as the home of one of the most well-known reformists of the nineteenth century. Twelve acres of Hillside Farm, including the Gough House, horse barn, and carriage house, have been placed under a preservation easement by the Town of Boylston and the Massachusetts Historical Commission.

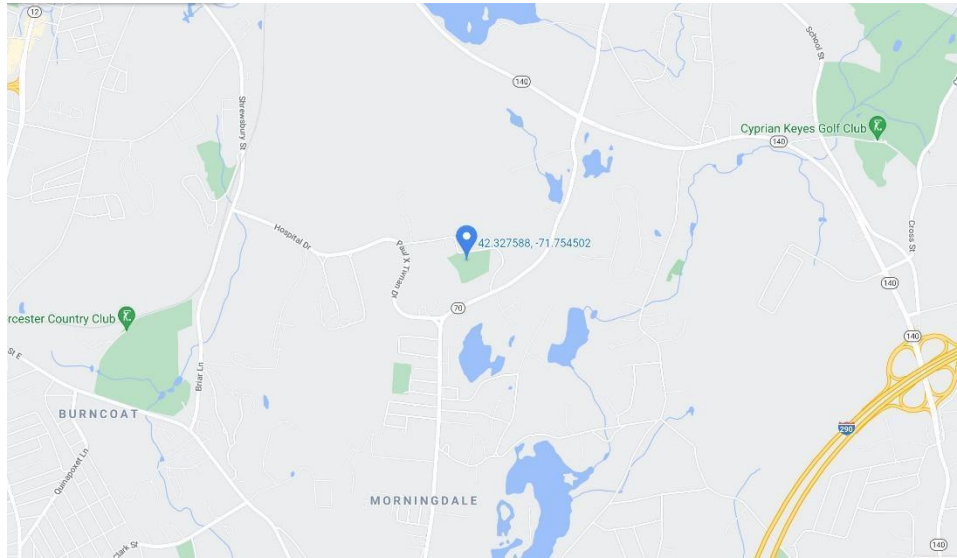
## Location

Hillside Farm is located near the southwestern corner of Boylston and comprises most of the area within MA-140, MA-70, Paul X Tivnan Drive, and the West Boylston border. The South Bay of the Wachusett Reservoir lies to the north of the property, while Boylston's commercial corridor is two miles up Main Street from the subject property.

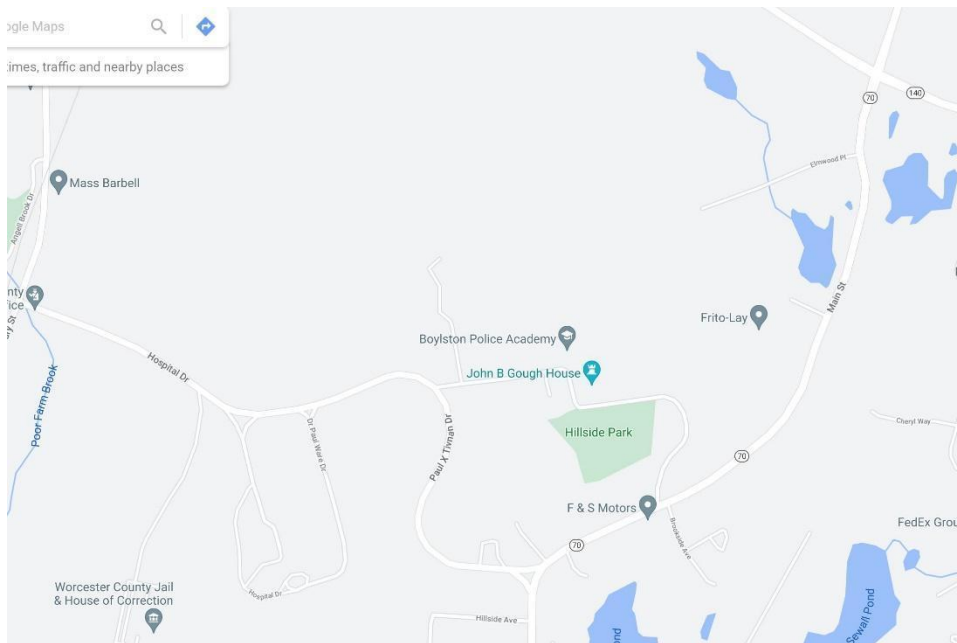


Regional Map

Boylston is a rural suburb of Worcester with a population of approximately 4,600. Much of the Wachusett Reservoir is located within town boundaries, as are the popular Tower Hill Botanical Garden and the newly established Summer Star Wildlife Sanctuary. The town is a 10-minute drive from Worcester, 30 minutes from Framingham, 50 minutes from Boston, and an hour from Providence. A Town-funded van service is available to seniors, but otherwise, the town is inaccessible by public transportation.

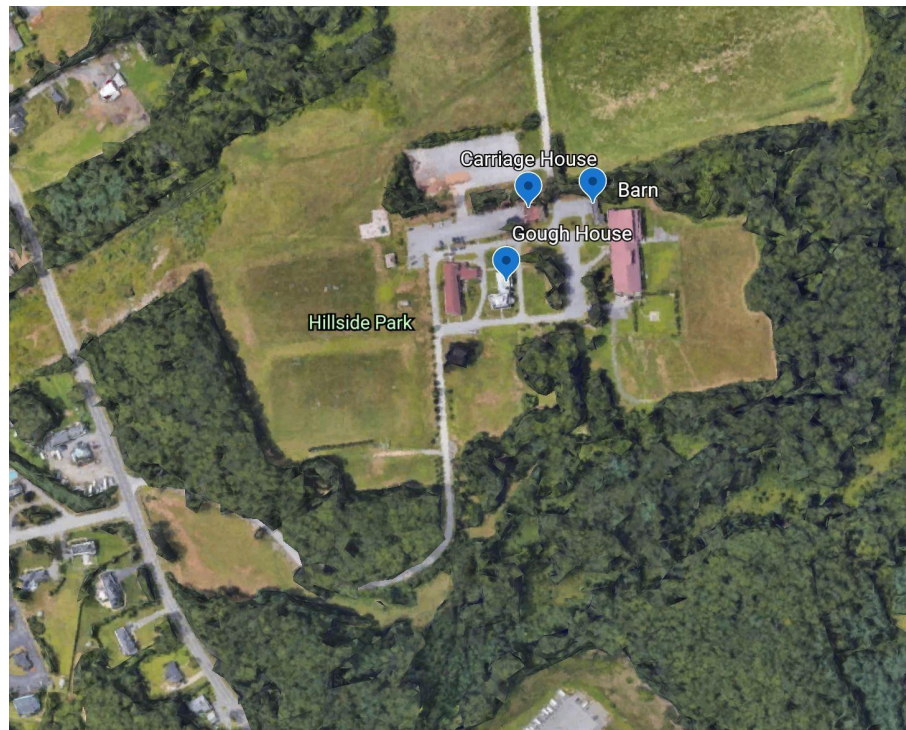


Subject Neighborhood Map



Subject and Hillside Park Map Close Up

The subject property, known for clarification in this report exclusively as Hillside Farm, is a 12.56 acre parcel that includes the John Gough House, a carriage house and a barn, as outlined on the site overview in the following exhibit. This preservation-restricted area encompasses a narrow strip of land angling southeast from the historic buildings past the curve of the entrance road to Main Street.



Hillside Park Property Overview with Hillside Farm Features Defined

The three historic structures that fall within HRP's purview are displayed in the exhibit below.



Hillside Farm and Adjacent Buildings Close Up



The subject property sits within the context of the broader Hillside Park, which is a 293.6-acre property primarily consisting of open and recreational space. As shown in the prior exhibits, there are other buildings, parking facilities, and playing fields that surround Hillside Farm’s historic structures. These are part of the broader Hillside Park property.

## Development and Use Restrictions

A number of development and use restrictions apply to the 293.6-acre Hillside property, with additional limitations placed upon the 12.56-acre parcel under preservation easement. These restrictions include:

1. Zoning
  - a. Industrial park zoning with wellhead protection overlay applies to a portion of the property. By-right uses include office, medical office, wholesale/warehouse, commercial recreation, R&D, corporate HQ, light manufacturing, renewable energy, and public uses. Special permit uses include corporate conference center, hotel/motel, and utilities.
2. Environmental
  - a. Development restrictions apply along perennial rivers.
  - b. Wetland protections apply to a portion of the property.
  - c. Development restrictions apply to state-identified “core habitats,” or areas of critical species concern.
  - d. 1,000-ft. hunting buffers around recreational fields and buildings.
3. Historical
  - a. The structural and landscape features of the 12.56 acres under preservation easement must be preserved for educational purposes and public use. Certain private uses may be permitted with Town approval if they contribute to the site’s maintenance and financial sustainability.
4. Eminent Domain Acquisition
  - a. Hillside may be subject to development limitations due to its appropriation through eminent domain. The Town acquired the property with the intention of augmenting municipal open space and increasing opportunities for public use. According to the Boylston Town Planner, any new structures built on the property would require the Town to preserve as open space an equal amount of land elsewhere and would require legislative approval.

## Proposed Vision and Objectives

Vision: To preserve and restore Hillside Farm in a financially sustainable way as a unique, highly desirable destination for cultural, educational, recreational and social programming and activities.

HRP proposes several key objectives to guide Hillside Farm’s renovation:

- Partner with arts and cultural organizations, educational institutions and local and regional groups to realize the property’s full potential.
- Develop a flexible program of productive uses that can successfully occupy and utilize the buildings, including office, events, and educational space in the Gough House, a performance venue and environmental research laboratory in the barn, and additional municipal space in the carriage house.
- Steward the property through a public-private partnership between HRP and the Town of Boylston, with HRP leasing the buildings and the Town maintaining the grounds.
- Support municipal efforts to expand opportunities for passive recreation and research in the natural areas of the property to attract additional visitation.
- Access existing economic and cultural development funding sources available to the Town, and build relationships with the organizations and agencies offering those funding sources.
- Rehabilitate and preserve the exterior building facades and interior rooms, while also providing needed building upgrades and improvements, including life safety systems and universal accessibility.

## Background and Process

In 1998, shortly after the Town of Boylston acquired Hillside Park through eminent domain, the Boylston Historical Society partnered with municipal leaders to plan for the historic property’s restoration. By 2003, the effort had gained momentum: a preservation strategy and architectural drawings were produced by John Salem and Timothy Murphy; the Town approved a historic preservation agreement for 12 acres of the site; and the non-profit organization Hillside Restoration Project, Inc. was established.

Over the past two decades, HRP has worked tirelessly to stabilize and begin to restore the Hillside Farm historic buildings, identify possible new uses for the site, engage the local community, and fundraise. The preservation team secured a lease agreement from the Town, created a facilities plan and business strategy for the property, and generated capital and operational budgets. To date, HRP has invested \$1.8 million in building stabilization and restoring the ground-story front rooms of the Gough House.

In November 2020, the Boylston Board of Selectmen formally agreed to allow HRP to seek a comprehensive feasibility study for Hillside Farm, leading the Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission to connect HRP with AHF. After preliminary site research and early conversations with the preservation team, AHF concluded that a Hillside Farm feasibility study would not be helpful

at this stage of the project. Instead, AHF proposed a pro-bono Project Positioning Statement that would identify information gaps, expose key challenges to a project advancing, and suggest possible paths forward. AHF visited the site on November 4, 2020, studied numerous documents provided by HRP, and conducted limited market research on office and event facilities.

## Current Building Conditions

The Gough House is structurally stable and watertight, while a greater degree of deterioration is evident in the horse barn and carriage house. The exterior of the Gough House has been restored to its original appearance, the structural components of the first floor stabilized and repaired, and the ground-level front rooms fully restored. However, deterioration of the ell, porch, and upper floors has not yet been addressed. In the horse barn, a rafter end is splitting, the first floor and its framing require permanent reinforcement, and water infiltration has eroded mortar joints on the foundation wall. The carriage house is in the worst condition: portions of the exterior walls show signs of rot, the chimney joints have eroded, a leak in the roof has rotted a hole through the attic floor, and the attic wall plate exhibits an outward bow. The barn is vacant, while the carriage house is in Town use. The Town of Boylston currently maintains the grounds.

Life safety and accessibility are critical issues that any future preservation work must address. The Gough House currently has a temporary heating system, and although the carriage house has a gas-fired furnace, it is unknown whether gas service is active to the building. The Gough House also receives electricity through 240/480 single volt phased electrical service that runs through several fused switches in the basement and feeds the horse barn and carriage house. None of the buildings have a lightning protection system. Likewise, none have active plumbing systems, and none are handicapped-accessible. Hillside Farm requires modern plumbing, electrical, HVAC, fire suppression systems, WiFi, and accessibility upgrades including an elevator/lift. If the property were to become an events or performance venue, restroom capacity would need to be increased dramatically. Future preservation efforts must address not only the buildings' deterioration, but also modernize their infrastructure.

## Architectural Zones and Proposed Program

Hillside Farm's three extant buildings comprise several architectural zones and sub-zones that ideally would accommodate complementary uses. The architectural zones and HRP's proposed uses are as follows:

1. **Gough House:** This area measures 6,940 SF and is divided into several sub-zones: the restored entrance hall, parlor, parlor alcove, conservatory, and sitting room; the unrenovated ell, by far the largest space in the building; the unrenovated former bedrooms, offices, and restrooms on the second story; and a cupola that may or may not offer opportunities for reuse. The

interior stencil decorations in the entrance hall and along the grand staircase await restoration.

- **Proposed Program:** The ground-floor front rooms will become a Nonprofit Learning and Retreat Center, as well as offer rentable conference, meeting, and training space for nonprofits, businesses, and private individuals. The fully restored sitting room also will serve an educational purpose for local school groups and the visiting public. The ground-floor portion of the ell will provide space for larger meetings and personal events, supported by a new kitchen facility. The second story will contain rentable office and co-working space.
  
- 2. **Horse Barn:** This area measures 3,900 SF and has five points of entry at the northern, southern, and eastern elevations. Two wing extensions off the southern elevation are connected by a single-story, roofed, shed-like section. The space has not been renovated and is currently vacant.
  - **Proposed Program:** The horse barn will be a performance venue with space for environmental education and research.
  
- 3. **Carriage House:** This space measures 2,002 SF and consists of enclosed central and eastern portions of the building, and an open bay at the western end. The eastern section is set back slightly from the rest of the structure. The carriage house has not been renovated.
  - **Proposed Program:** There is no proposed program for this building, as it is currently being used for storage by the Town. However, HRP hopes to restore it as part of the twelve-acre preservation agreement and to find a suitable new use for the space, if possible.

**Table 1. Gross and Net Floor Area by Architectural Zone**

Building Element	Square Feet
Gough House	6,940
<i>Ground level</i>	3,763
<i>Upper level</i>	3,177
Horse Barn	3,900
<i>Ground level</i>	2,200
<i>Upper level</i>	1,700
Carriage House	2,002
<i>Enclosed section</i>	1,662
<i>Open bay</i>	340
<b>Total</b>	<b>12,842</b>



## Proposed Management

In 2015, HRP developed a facilities management plan for Hillside Farm. The facilities management plan outlines a maintenance schedule for Hillside's historic structures and certain landscape features, including original trees near the Gough House, recently planted trees lining the driveway, and the lawns around the buildings. It calls for a small professional staff to oversee the property, funded in part by a volunteer Friends group, and largely by rentals of the proposed office/co-working space, conference rooms, and event facilities. The plan also recommends strengthening the public-private partnership between HRP and the Town through a longer-term lease of the twelve acres under preservation easement, and expanding joint programming with local cultural organizations, such as the American Antiquarian Society and Preservation Worcester.

HRP's business strategy from 2016 based revenue projections on existing rental rates for offices and event venues in Central Massachusetts. HRP estimated that offices at Hillside would rent for \$18/SF; that over five years the event space venue fee would increase from \$3,000 to \$4,800 per wedding and from \$500 to \$732 per smaller event; that the corporate meeting fees would increase from \$1,500 to \$1,823 over five years; and that philanthropic dollars would close the remaining operating gap by contributing \$40,000 to \$48,000 per year. These projections anticipated that Hillside would operate at a loss during its first year, but thereafter would be profitable. The business strategy did not account for development costs.

## Key Challenges

### *High Cost*

Redeveloping the three historic structures at Hillside Farm is estimated to cost \$11.5 million. Gough House alone is expected to cost \$3.5 million above and beyond the \$1.8 million already spent restoring the ground-floor front rooms. Funding a capital project, not to mention subsequent operating costs, will require significant philanthropic giving, as well as financial support at the municipal and state level.

### *Intrusive Structures*

Hillside Farm sits within the context of the larger Hillside Park property, complicating the management of and visioning for the future of the site. Several structures intrude on Hillside Farm's historic fabric in ways that make preservation efforts more difficult. The Gough House, horse barn, and carriage house are sandwiched between the former Shepherd Knapp school buildings, whose modern, unattractive architecture undermines the site's nineteenth-century charm. The New England Power Company's transmission lines slice through the southwestern portion of the property, narrowly avoiding the historic buildings. A network of paved roads and parking lots carves the hilltop. Police cruisers come and go regularly from the adjacent police station. Town soccer fields lie in close proximity to the historic buildings, further

impairing the tranquility of the site. These features and the small and choppy interior of Gough House decrease Hillside Farm’s ability to command higher rental fees for events.

### ***Poor Location***

The lack of amenities in Boylston, particularly in Hillside’s immediate vicinity, also poses a significant challenge to redeveloping the property in a financially sustainable way. Rental rates for office and co-working space are generally higher in areas with lively streets that offer dining and retail options. Performance venues tend to be more successful in these areas, too. Hillside is on a section of Main Street that is residential and not pedestrian-friendly. Unless the property offers unique services on site, it is unlikely to generate substantial revenue as office/co-working space, or to be able to compete with better-situated performance venues in Worcester. Integrating the entire Hillside Park site into the forthcoming Town Master Plan is crucial if Hillside Farm is to draw users reliably.

### ***Post-Pandemic Uncertainty***

COVID has upended the business world and perhaps permanently altered work habits. Demand for office space has slumped by as much as 20%, and it is unclear how much it will rebound. The future of conference facilities is even more uncertain, as Zoom has proven an effective meeting platform. Demand for co-working space outside the central business districts of big cities already surpasses supply and is expected to grow; however, before the pandemic, locally the co-working sector struggled to develop a sustainable business model. For Gough House to succeed as office space, it would need to offer a work environment unattainable elsewhere and may need to rely on a flexible co-working membership system.

### ***Incohesive Program***

Hillside Farm requires a strong story to attract sufficient philanthropic funding. Though ambitious, the envisioned program is not cohesive and does not necessarily reflect market conditions. It is unclear how the various proposed uses, which range from non-profit training space to an environmental science research center, will complement each other to generate adequate critical mass and operational revenue, let alone finance a capital project. HRP should work with the Town to develop a vision for Hillside Farm within the context of the broader Hillside Park and that is tied to Boylston’s forthcoming Master Plan. Ideally, the Hillside Farm development program will create a cohesive story at the location with the individual buildings’ programs synchronized to support each other.

### ***Architectural Challenges***

Hillside Farm’s infrastructure must be updated to support the proposed uses. The buildings require ADA-compliant renovations, modern life safety systems, and WiFi, as well as greater restroom capacity and a catering kitchen for large events. These latter requirements will pose an architectural and programmatic

challenge unless all three buildings are integrated into a comprehensive program or the Town grants access to the adjacent municipal buildings.

## Market Analysis

AHF conducted limited market research into current rental rates for office/co-working space, conference rooms, and event venues within a ten-mile radius of Boylston (municipalities included Hudson, Marlborough, Sterling, Westborough, and Worcester). AHF concluded that these proposed uses would likely bring in less revenue than HRP projected.

### **Office/Co-Working Space**

Almost all office/co-working spaces that AHF investigated were rentable on a subscription basis. Rates varied according to the spaces' locations and amenities. For example, Davinci Meeting Rooms at 225 Cedar Hill Street in Marlborough charges \$14 to \$25/hour for a private room in an office park just off Route 495; by contrast, Hudson Mills Executive Center charges \$70/hour for an office in a renovated mill building near nature trails and an active downtown with numerous dining options, shops, and wellness centers. Similarly, Venture X in Marlborough - also in an office park/strip mall - has different membership levels ranging from \$25/month for a virtual office to \$595/month for a private office; Work Central, located in an office park in Westborough, offers membership levels ranging from \$49 to \$189/month; and WorcLab in downtown Worcester, however, has membership levels ranging from \$55/month for a business address and \$600 to \$1000/month for a private office. The one office building AHF found that collects rent based on a traditional dollars/SF model is located near WPI in Worcester and charges tenants \$11.40 to \$13.44/SF for 580 square feet of office space, and \$19.80/SF for 4,000-7,300 square feet.

Because of Hillside's limited amenities and the Gough House's small square footage, AHF assumes the property would command lower office/co-working rental rates. Leasing offices at \$13/SF - the lower end of office rental rates in Worcester - would generate 28% less income than HRP predicted. If HRP were to adopt a monthly subscription model, all twelve offices in the Gough House would have to be rented year-round at \$350/month for Hillside to meet HRP's income projections. It is difficult to predict revenue generated under a monthly subscription model due to uncertainty regarding how much square footage in the Gough House could reasonably become private offices versus co-working space.

It is worth noting again that demand for office/co-working space in a post-COVID world is uncertain. While demand outside large cities may grow due to new residential patterns, it will likely slump overall, as people are expected to work from home at least part of the week. According to *Real Business*, the changes wrought by the pandemic are "accelerating the evolution of the office from a place to a service."<sup>1</sup> In light of this trend and Hillside's distance from an active

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<sup>1</sup> Ben Hutchin, "The Future is Flex: The Office Space Post-COVID," *Real Business*, March 5, 2021, <https://realbusiness.co.uk/the-future-is-flex/>.

downtown, the Gough House would have to offer tenants a value proposition in terms of cost or a working experience not found anywhere else in order to be competitive as office/co-working space.

### ***Conference Rooms***

As with offices, location and amenities accounted for the variability in meeting space rental rates. Davinci Meeting Rooms, a corporation that offers conference rooms in cities throughout the country, is an example. Its conference rooms rent for \$30 to \$66/hour (depending on group size) at the aforementioned 225 Cedar Hill Street in Marlborough, an office park isolated from dining and retail opportunities; \$40 to \$70/hour at Apex Drive Office Center in Marlborough, which is near numerous restaurants and a supermarket, albeit in an unattractive office park/strip mall; and \$70 to \$90/hour at the Hudson Mills Executive Center, three blocks from a vibrant Main Street. Other conference rooms are rentable on a daily basis. WorcLab in downtown Worcester provides meeting space for \$150/day, while Work Central in Westborough offers conference rooms of various sizes for \$180 to \$270/day.

If Gough House meeting space rented at a daily rate comparable to that of nearby facilities - for example, \$180/day in Year 1, increasing incrementally to \$219/day by Year 5 - and 12 to 29 meetings were held per year in line with HRP's estimates, then conference room rentals would generate just 12% of HRP's income projections. If users were charged a high hourly rate of \$90 for conference rooms, then 25 eight-hour meetings would have to be held at the Gough House in its first year of operation, 49 in its second year, 56 in its third year, 58 in its fourth year, and 60 in its fifth year to meet HRP's income projections.

### ***Event Space***

The desirability of event spaces depends largely on location, as well as the number of guests that can be accommodated at the property. Facilities in particularly beautiful or historic settings with larger capacities enjoy greater demand and higher rental fees than those in more ordinary locales with smaller rooms or choppy layouts. Boylston's Tower Hill Botanical Garden, for instance, charges \$1,000 for a one-hour wedding ceremony and \$6,500 to \$9,500 for a five-hour reception during its on-season; \$500 for a one-hour wedding ceremony and \$3,000 to \$4,500 for a five-hour reception during its off-season; and \$500 to \$1,200 for a one-hour intimate ceremony, depending on the number of guests. On the lower end of the pricing spectrum is The 228 in Sterling, a renovated barn in a bucolic setting charges a fee of \$600 to \$1,175, depending on the number of hours and guests. However, excluded from this base rate are many optional, yet desirable amenities such as all-day access to the property, use of an on-site catering kitchen, a wedding coordinator's services, and decorating time, to name a few. These services are often included other facilities' rental fees. The Manor Banquet Facility in West Boylston, which is neither historic nor scenic, charges \$100 to \$400 per event.



With its historic setting and spectacular view, Hillside Farm might be able to rival Tower Hill in popularity as a wedding venue. However, the former Shepherd Knapp school buildings, New England Power Company lines, municipal soccer fields, and the smaller interior rooms at Gough House reduce the site's appeal. This infrastructure would likely force HRP to charge lower rates in order to be competitive. AHF determined that HRP's proposed \$3,000 venue fee, with an annual 15% increase over five years, may be reasonable for the on-season, but should be reduced for the off-season. This adjustment may not substantially lower HRP's revenue estimates, however, because the projected 60 guests per wedding seems conservative. HRP's pricing estimates for special/personal events similarly might be reasonable, even though nearby spaces like the Manor Banquet Facility are much less expensive, since Hillside's location is more attractive despite the presence of intrusive infrastructure.

## Recommendations

Hillside Farm requires a cohesive vision closely tied to the larger Hillside Park property as well as municipal economic development initiatives in Boylston. Outside of this broader context, HRP will struggle to garner the substantial political and philanthropic support necessary for a project at Hillside Farm to proceed and be successful. Though creative, the proposed program consists of a hodgepodge of uses that neither take into account the realities of Hillside's location, nor are synchronized with ongoing Town planning efforts. In light of the significant challenges facing the restoration project, AHF recommends the following:

1. **Wait for the Town Master Plan to be completed and remain in close communication with planners regarding the Town's vision for Hillside as a whole - not just the 12 acres under preservation easement.**
  - a. A 2011 Hillside Land Use presentation by the Boylston Board of Selectmen outlined a number of possible development options for the 293.6-acre property, including an industrial park (office/R&D), a mixed-use complex, and senior housing. The goal of the proposed development was to promote development along the Route 140 corridor.
  - b. Upon completion of Boylston's Master Plan, work with the Town to develop a Master Plan for the 293.6-acre Hillside Park property that places the Hillside Farm historic structures within the context of broader economic development efforts for the site and the town as a whole.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> MassDevelopment's Carriage Grove development in Belchertown is an excellent example of this approach that could be suitable for Hillside:  
<https://www.massdevelopment.com/what-we-offer/real-estate-services/development-projects/carriage-grove-belchertown>.

2. **Consider how Hillside Farm’s three historic buildings can support each other programmatically, allowing for a more convincing story and financially stable project.**
  - a. Food incubators are becoming increasingly popular as a way to spark economic development, support local agriculture, and increase community programming.<sup>3</sup> For example, if HRP decides that the best use for Gough House is as an event/meeting facility, developing the horse barn and/or carriage house for related and supportive secondary uses, such as a catering kitchen run by local food entrepreneurs, would begin to develop the bigger picture story for the site. In this version of programming, Gough House events could feasibly have an exclusive relationship with the local catering services, adding further synchronicity to the site. An on-site garden could provide fresh ingredients for the tenants and learning opportunities for the community, while maintaining the historic farm use and feel of the property.
  - b. Artist live/work space is a statewide priority as artists are priced out of the Greater Boston area, while affordable and senior housing are municipal priorities in Boylston. If the Town were to encourage housing development on the Hillside property, either by repurposing the former Shepherd-Knapp school buildings or through new construction, HRP may wish to pivot to attract municipal and state financial support to renovate the historic structures as residences and studios for makers and artists.
  
3. **Consider ways to improve the attractiveness of the site and plan for the future program’s architectural needs.**
  - a. Use creative landscaping techniques to obscure the former Shepherd Knapp school buildings (if they cannot be removed), such as planting lines of arbor vitae between the buildings and historic structures.
  - b. If the Gough House is to become an event space, it will need greater restroom capacity. Unless the Town is willing to make the restrooms in the former Shepherd Knapp school buildings available to Gough House users, additional restrooms will have to be constructed in the house, in one of the other historic structures, or in an addition to one of the buildings.
  - c. The Gough House does not have a room big enough to host large events. The ground-level area of the ell measures just 28x24 ft., whereas it would need to be double that size in order to host events of 100 to 120 people. A permanent tent would be necessary to absorb the overflow and attract larger parties that capture larger event fees.

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<sup>3</sup> CommonWealth Kitchen in Boston and the Worcester Regional Food Hub are two examples.

4. **Improve the organizational aspects of the project.**
  - a. Clearly delineating which buildings and what acreage are part of the project, and what the related buildings and users are, is critical. Develop a property map that clearly labels all buildings to help future developers and potential investors quickly understand the property's layout, users, owners, potential, and challenges.
  - b. Along with a map, critical information that should be at HRP's fingertips for potential investors or developers are: the site acreage, building square footage, current uses, ownership, and zoning/use restrictions. A mini-offering sheet would help anyone interested in the property get themselves more quickly oriented to the site (see, for example, [Senior Housing Land Opportunity - Boston, MA Landing Page | Real Capital Markets \(cbredealflow.com\)](https://www.cbredealflow.com)).
  - c. Digitize all project-related documents, including those associated with past municipal planning efforts for the site, storing them all in a single file.

## Conclusion

Hillside Farm has the potential to be a transformative preservation project for Boylston if it can be integrated into the Town's larger efforts. If renovated, the Gough House, horse barn, and carriage house could serve a wide range of purposes, including: additional space for gatherings, meetings, and cultural events; an educational resource for community members; professional space for office workers, food entrepreneurs, makers, or artists; or affordable, senior, or artists housing. As an architectural gem so closely tied to Boylston's agricultural heritage and a national historical treasure of nineteenth-century reformist movements, determining Hillside Park and Hillside Farm's future is urgent as the historic structures will only continue to deteriorate as time passes.

AHF recommends that HRP pause any rehabilitation cost fundraising and predevelopment efforts until the Town Master Plan is complete. Preserving and operating Hillside Farm's historic structures will require significant philanthropy. Such funding will be more readily obtainable with a cohesive program in line with broader municipal goals. HRP should continue to work closely with the town planner to advocate for a Master Plan for the 293.6-acre Hillside Park property. This plan would provide critical context for the historic buildings' eventual redevelopment. While working towards these longer-term objectives, HRP can advance the following smaller, but no less important, tasks: create a clearly labeled map of the property to aid potential developers and investors in orienting themselves to the site; digitize and organize all project-related documents; brainstorm ways in which the buildings can support each other programmatically; continue to educate area residents about Hillside and its history; and envision the architectural needs of possible programs.

## Appendix 1 - Actionable Items Moving Forward

Actions	Primary Stakeholders
Create a clearly labeled map and mini-offering sheet of Hillside Park	HRP
Digitize all project-related documents and store them in a single location	HRP
Complete the Town Master Plan	Town of Boylston & CMRPC
Develop a Master Plan for Hillside Park	Town of Boylston & HRP



## Appendix 2 - Office/Co-Working Space, Conference Rooms, & Event Spaces in Central MA

Name	Operator	Town	Location	Rate	Room Capacity	Minimum Reservation	Amenities
225 Cedar Hill St.	Davinci Meeting Rooms	Marlborough	Office park just off 495, daycare and conservation land nearby	\$14-\$25/hr \$25/month for virtual office; \$40/month for community membership; \$199-\$425/month for desk; \$595/month for private office	1 person	n/a	Audio-visual conference equipment, in-person greeters, garage, catering High-tech meetingand podcast rooms, on-site notary, high-speed internet, 24/7 keypad access, café, lounge, catering, snacks, complimentary coffee & tea, insulated walls, filing cabinets
Venture X Marlborough	Venture X	Marlborough	Office park just off 495 Repurposed mill along the Assabet River, 3 blocks from a charming, active downtown with numerous dining options, gyms & yoga studios in the building	\$299/month?	1-8 people	day or month	WiFi, complimentary coffee, gym & shower, 24-hour keypad access, parking
Workstyle	Boxer Properties	Marlborough	Repurposed mill on the Assabet River, 3 blocks from a charming, active downtown with numerous dining options, gyms & yoga studios in the building	\$70/hr	2 people	n/a	Audio-visual conference equipment, in-person greeters, free on-site parking, catering
Hudson Mills Executive Center (The Landing)	Davinci Meeting Rooms	Hudson	Repurposed mill on the Assabet River Trail, 3 blocks from a charming, active downtown with numerous dining options, gyms & yoga studios in the building	\$25/day - \$200/month for a desk; 500-\$800/month for private office	1-8 people	n/a	On-site parking; membership includes discounts to local businesses
The Landing at Hudson Mills	Out of Office	Hudson	Downtown Worcester	\$55/month for a business address; \$150/month for virtual membership with floating desk; \$275/month for dedicated desk; \$300/month for lab space; \$600-\$1000/month for private office			High-speed internet, flexible event space, conference rooms, phone booths, shared kitchen/kitchenettes, managed mail & receiving area, shared loading dock & freight elevator, 24/7 access, incubator/maker space on site
Worklab	Worklab	Worcester	Downtown Worcester	\$90-\$225/month membership			Fiber WiFi, coffee & tea, photography workshop equipment, workshops/talks/networking events, 24-hour access
Be Studios	Be Studios	Worcester	Downtown Worcester Near WPI and Institute Park, some dining options nearby, just off Route 290	\$11.40-\$13.44/sqft/yr for 580 sqft; \$19.80/sqft/yr for 4000-7300 sqft		1 year	Reception services, business support services, 24/7 access, remote voicemail access, copier/scanner, incoming mail & package handling, kitchen, complimentary beverages, gym & showers, preferred room rates & rae shuttle from nearby hotel
100 Grove St.		Worcester	Renovated mill?	\$150-\$250/mo for co-working space depending on membership; \$575/mo for private office plus unlimited membership		1 month	WiFi...
Work Central	Work Central	Westborough	Office park just off 495, short drive to Route 9 and numerous dining options	\$49-\$189/month depending on plan type (virtual to business)			
Worcester Idea Lab	Worcester Business Development Program	Worcester					

Name	Operator	Town	Location	Rate	Room Capacity	Minimum Reservation	Amenities
Apex Drive Office Center	DaVinci Meeting Rooms	Marlborough	Strip mall/office park along the Boston Post Road near numerous dining options, a trampolining park, hotel, and supermarket.	\$40-\$70/hr	4-12 people	2 hours	Audio-visual conference equipment, in-person greeters, garage, catering
225 Cedar Hill St.	DaVinci Meeting Rooms	Marlborough	Office park just off 495, daycare and conservation land nearby	\$30-\$66/hr	3-12 people	n/a	Audio-visual conference equipment, in-person greeters, garage, catering
Venture X Marlborough	Venture X	Marlborough	Strip mall/office park along the Boston Post Road near numerous dining options, a trampoline park, hotel, and supermarket.	\$35-\$65/hr for a conference room; \$95/hr for a podcast room	4-12 people	1 hour	High-tech meeting and podcast rooms, on-site notary, high-speed internet, 24/7 keypad access, café, lounge, catering, snacks, complimentary coffee & tea, insulated walls, filing cabinets
Hudson Mills Executive Center (The Landing)	DaVinci Meeting Rooms	Hudson	Renowned mill along the Assabet River, 3 blocks from a charming, active downtown with numerous dining options	\$70-\$90/hr	6-12 people	n/a	Audio-visual conference equipment, in-person greeters, free on-site parking, catering, onsite copy/print services
Worklab	Worklab	Worcester	Downtown Worcester	\$150/day	6-8 people	1 day	High-speed internet, WiFi, printing, A/V equipment, coffee, white boards & markers, conference bridge, flexible event space, conference rooms, phone booths, shared kitchen/aterettes, managed mail & receiving area, shared loading dock & freight elevator, 24/7 access, incubator/maker space on site
Work Central	Work Central	Westborough	Office park just off 495, short drive to Route 9 and numerous dining options	\$30-\$45/hr or \$180-\$270/day	2-30 people	1 hour	A/V equipment, high-speed internet & videoconferencing, complimentary beverages, catering, client services team

Name	Operator	Town	Location	Rate	Room Capacity	Minimum Reservation	Amenities
The Landing at Hudson Mills	Out of Office	Hudson	Repurposed mill on the Assabet River Trail, 3 blocks from a charming, active downtown with numerous dining options; gyms & yoga studios in the building				On-site parking, historic setting
Hudson-Concord Elks #959	Elks	Hudson	Surrounded by a parking lot and next to a large park on a residential street				High-tech event space and meeting rooms, catering, on-site parking, café, lounge, cleaning service, A/V equipment, high-speed internet
Venture X Marlborough	Venture X	Marlborough	Strip mall/office park along the Boston Post Road near numerous dining options, a trampoline park, hotel, and supermarket.		100 people		High-speed internet, flexible event space, conference rooms, phone booths, shared kitchen/kitchenettes, managed mail & receiving area, shared loading dock & freight elevator, 24/7 access, incubator/maker space on site
Worclab	Worclab	Worcester	Downtown Worcester	\$100/hour weekdays; \$150/hour weekends & nights	80+ people		Fiber, WiFi, coffee & tea, photography workshop equipment, workshops/walks/networking events, 24-hour access
Be Studios	Be Studios	Worcester	Downtown Worcester	On-season: \$1000 ceremony, \$6500-\$9500 reception, \$750 half-hour extension fee. Off-season: \$500 on-site ceremony, \$3000-\$4500 reception, \$750 half-hour extension fee. Intimate ceremony: \$500-\$1250 for 1-hr rental depending on number of guests, \$500 half-hour extension fee	120 people on-season, 50 people off-season	1 hour ceremony, 5 hour reception	1-hour ceremony rehearsal, wedding coordinator, photos on the grounds, Friend-level membership to the gardens, 1 wedding exclusivity, day-of-event assistants, tables & chairs, caterer. Intimate Ceremonies have reduced amenities and are available only for Friend-level or higher members
Tower Hill Botanic Garden	Tower Hill Botanic Garden	Boyston	Beautiful gardens & trails with a great view				WiFi, A/V equipment, videoconferencing, catering & bar provided by the Manor.
The Manor Banquet Facility	Fotiadis Family	West Boyston	Located on MA-12 across from a wine & liquor shop and cannabis dispensary, walking distance from town Common and other small businesses	\$100-\$400 per event depending on time and room	25-400 people	4-5 hours	Prep kitchen, tables & chairs, freight, patio, in-house speaker system, 2-hr set-up time before event, non-alcoholic drink station (You bring drinks/ice/cups), 1-hr wedding rehearsal, cleaning service, historic & scenic setting
			Bucolic setting with renovated barn, field, woods, gazebo off 190'. Rates in 2022 are \$625-\$725 for 0-50 guests (3-4 hours); \$775-\$975 (51-70 guests); \$925-\$1175 (71-92 guests); max # of guests currently is 120 (with outdoor tents) because of COVID; this is base rental rate, many extras plus catering additional cost				
The 228	Sharon Olson and April ??? - women-owned, family run	Sterling		\$600-\$1175 depending on # of hours and guests	92 people	3-4 hour events, 5+ hour weddings	