

WOOLMAN HILL Quaker Retreat Center

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March 12, 2021

Richard Kleinschmidt, Clerk
Concord Friends Meeting
11 Oxbox Pond Road
Canterbury NH 03224

Dear Richard et al,

This is a request for Concord Monthly Meeting to consider a special one-time contribution of \$5,000 to Woolman Hill's *Welcoming Future Campaign*.

Concord Friends have had a strong connection to Woolman Hill over the years. Several of you have served (or are serving!) on the board, including Heidi Babb, Kathryn Cranford, Pat Wallace and Gini Barker. We have fond associations of Mark Barker, JJ and Sara Smith attending NEYM Ministry & Counsel retreats here on the hill. Friends from your meeting have facilitated, eldered, cooked for and participated in all kinds of programs, including Couples Enrichment, Circle of Trust, Mindful Mortality, Physician Heal Thyself, Say the Wrong Thing, Deepening Worship, SAGE, Inward Activism, knitting and singing retreats, just to name a few. You've brought your children to JYM and JHYM retreats on the hill, and have weeded and planted and raked at volunteer workdays. You've helped Woolman Hill deepen and grow, and you've held Woolman Hill in your hearts. Thank you!!!

Experienced by Friends as a spiritual sanctuary, Woolman Hill is often described as a grounding place—an island of calm in the midst of turbulent seas. From this seedbed many New England Friends have discovered and nurtured their calls to ministry. Paying close attention to the threads of emerging spiritual needs in the region, Woolman Hill frequently co-sponsors programs with New England Yearly Meeting, such as recent offerings on mentoring, Quaker parenting, SAGE (Support Across Generations for Elders), eldering, racial justice, and the nine-month Nurturing Faithfulness course. NEYM youth groups (JYM, JHYM, YF) and Young Adult Friends hold retreats at Woolman Hill, as do monthly meetings, Connecticut Valley Quarterly Meeting, and groups such as the Challenging White Supremacy working group, QUIP, the FUM Board, Quaker Spring, and the Climate Disobedience Center.

Woolman Hill is entering the final phase of our *Welcoming Future Campaign*. We are pleased to report that to date we have raised \$990,000 toward our \$1.2 million goal. Most of this support has come from individual Friends. In addition, we've received grants from the NEYM Legacy Fund and the Obadiah Brown Benevolent Fund. We have also received several generous gifts from monthly meetings in the amounts of \$15,000, \$5,000, and an extraordinary gift of \$100,000. We are now beginning the process to approach other meetings.

Growing out of an in-depth strategic planning process, Woolman Hill had been planning to move into a major multi-year feasibility study and fundraising campaign at the beginning of March 2020. Our original campaign vision included a new building, renovations to existing

buildings, a Welcome Fund, and the establishment of an endowment. We were blessed with several large gifts inspiring us to go forward with the campaign, and had therefore retained the services of Michael Wajda, a long-time Quaker fundraiser, to serve as our consultant.

The pandemic put an abrupt halt to these original plans, but a silver lining emerged. All along in our planning for the capital campaign projects, we had been aware that construction work in the main building would be difficult to navigate while actively hosting groups in that space. Then, faced with the extremely unusual situation where programs and rental bookings were likely to be severely limited for at least a year due to COVID-19, we saw a unique opportunity to do those renovations with far less impact on visiting groups. So, in the midst of the despair and challenges of the pandemic, the Woolman Hill board made the momentous decision to move ahead with the conference center renovations as quickly as possible and to put the other campaign goals on hold.

While the 1800s farmhouse that serves as our main conference center is central to Woolman Hill's charm, it also precludes or seriously restricts the use of Woolman Hill by many individual Quakers and groups. The building has many characteristics that make navigating it with limited mobility next to impossible. At a recent Young Adult Friends gathering on the hill, a YAF in a wheelchair wrestled with narrow doorways and inadequate ramps. During another program, an elderly participant using a walker had to weave her way through the kitchen to her bedroom and in and out of entryways with multiple steps and uneven thresholds. Groups also struggle with too few bathrooms, limited privacy and insufficient break-out spaces.

The addition will add six bedrooms to the main building, including three ground floor rooms and two accessible bathrooms. The main entrance and foyer have been redesigned (while maintaining the familiar charm) to be fully accessible, and there will be two sitting nooks in the new wing that may be used for small break-out groups. Preliminary construction has begun, with the expectation that framing will begin very soon. We hope to have the project substantially completed by late summer.

As we have been visiting with Friends and meetings to ask for their support, we have received much positive feedback about the details of our plans. Many Friends feel that these upgrades to our facilities are long overdue. All have also affirmed how these improvements will enable our services and ministries to reach more Friends and others through retreats and programs to nurture the Religious Society of Friends. Events at Woolman Hill provide critical opportunities for Friends to explore their individual and collective relationship to Quaker practice and faith.

We are profoundly grateful for all the ways Concord Friends support and love Woolman Hill. We hope that your meeting will be favorably inclined toward this important request, in light of how these improvements to our physical facility will make Woolman Hill experiences more accessible and welcoming to Friends throughout New England and beyond. Please let us know if there's any further information that would be helpful to you in your discernment.

With hope and gratitude,



Margaret Cooley
Executive Director