



# John Brown Farm State Historic Site Unit Management Plan

Summary of Public Comments Collected During Virtual Public  
Information Meetings on February 8 and 9, 2023 and Written  
Comments Received by March 13, 2023

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## INTRODUCTION

The New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation (OPRHP) and the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) are jointly preparing a Unit Management Plan (UMP) for John Brown Farm State Historic Site. The creation of a UMP will allow for the highest level of protection of the Historic Site's cultural, historic, and natural resources and better facilitate public use, education, and enjoyment of the area for generations to come.

To initiate meaningful public engagement and seek input on the future management of these public lands, OPRHP, DEC, and the Adirondack Park Agency (APA), conducted two online public information meetings. The first meeting was held on the evening of Wednesday, February 8, and the second meeting the morning of Thursday, February 9, 2023. The purpose of these meetings was to invite active public participation and involvement in the UMP planning process from an early stage. The public was invited to speak and make comments at each meeting. Written comments were also accepted after the meetings by e-mail and by postal mail through Monday, March 13, 2023.

This document is a summary of the comments received at the public meetings as well as written comments received before the end of the public comment period on March 13, 2023. Comments were welcomed after this cut-off date with no guarantee that they would be included in this summary document. These "late" comments will, however, receive equal consideration during the planning process as will the comments in this summary. More than 60 individuals and organizations submitted remarks, ideas, and questions as part of the request for comment.

Comments are classified by subject area. Similar comments were consolidated, and all comments were edited to include the substantive portions. The subject areas are presented in alphabetical order with no indication of any prioritization.

## ACCESSIBILITY AND INCLUSIVITY

- Develop an integrated plan for equitable public access and experiences designed for persons with disability(ies).
- There are barriers, other than physical location and accessibility, that prevent people of color from visiting public spaces in this area. They do not always feel welcome on these sites.
- I think a big priority is accessibility for students and being able to move large groups through the site, which would raise questions for students with accessibility needs.

## CULTURAL LANDSCAPE

### *Art*

- The John Brown statue is history, please do not take it down.
- I personally like the bronze Joseph Pollia sculpture in the traffic circle but am wondering if there is any consideration to create new sculptures on the site.
- Does the statue of John Brown and the young boy suggest a social or racial hierarchy?
- The statue itself can be interpreted in many and different ways ... it is, after all, art.

### *General*

- I thoroughly enjoy the quiet pastoral atmosphere of the Farm.
- Please do not reforest acreage that has been open since the era in which John Brown's family owned this property.

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- The site is a gravesite and should be kept as such with utmost respect and regard to the surrounding nature trails and natural beauty of the area.
  - The Farm is not just an intellectual place to go and think about the history, but it's an emotional experience, too. The Farm is a sacred site, it's really hallowed ground. Let's make sure we have a sacred contemplative space.
  - The site should expand to include lands originally purchased by John Brown, circa 1850.

### ***Visual Pollution***

- We surely hope that the natural beauty remains a cornerstone and a hallmark of this tribute to John Brown by limiting visual pollution.
- When equipment that is used to run seasonal or one-off events is left on the grounds after the event is over it compromises the area's natural beauty and the serene setting.

## **FACILITIES**

### ***Existing Structures***

- I would ask you to carefully consider the Caretaker's Cottage and its outbuildings as they are the least significant from a historical perspective.

### ***Facility Name***

- I prefer the name that appeared on older signs directing visitors to the historic site, which was "John Brown's Grave."
- The site should be called the "John and Mary Brown Farm."

### ***Grounds***

- The groundskeeper does nothing short of a meticulous job on the lawns, fields, and flowers.

### ***Interpretive/Visitor Center***

- This is an important opportunity to develop a visitor center and education space that both celebrates and shares the histories and stories of African American communities in the Adirondacks.
- Build a contemporary, state-of-the-art visitor center open year-round for exhibits, conferences, workshops, and special events, with office space, restrooms, and gift shops all of which adhere to the Adirondack Park State Land Master Plan guidelines.
- An interpretative center, as I thought the Barn already is, can address past and current issues related to the site/history.
- The site is woefully lacking in its interpretive facilities and has little to attract most people to make the drive.
- Create more facilities where artists can show their work and interact with the public.
- There is no need for a conference center building on the site because other meeting spaces in Lake Placid are not utilized to their capacity and are more than sufficient to accommodate any planned event at the site that needs shelter or cover.
- A new seasonally staffed building would be a more proper shelter for permanent and rotating interpretive exhibits.
- The Barn has plenty of space to house a small gift shop area. Reconfigure what you have.
- An interpretation center is needed near the property entrance to provide the historical context of John's Brown's life, slavery at the time, Timbuctoo and the role of Blacks prior to and during the Civil War, and the Underground Railroad in Champlain Valley.

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### ***New Construction Impacts***

- If building new structures, avoid impacts to wetlands, minimize impacts to topographical formations and features, limit vegetative clearing and preserve the natural qualities of the Historic area. In addition, if properly sited, clustering new structures can both reduce ecological impacts and increase visitor accessibility.
- Unless there is sufficient data that shows a large expansion is necessary, we simply don't agree that anything more should be built on this site.
- Noise and light pollution, road maintenance, traffic and community impacts, should all be seriously considered if there are more events and/or buildings on the site because people come to the site to be in nature and peace and any large structure or increased parking would dilute the beauty of the site.
- Impact avoidance should be a paramount goal in the management plan.

### ***Pavilion***

- I would like to see an accessible and permanent pavilion that has internet, electricity, comfort stations, energy efficient design, and facilities for catering and that is available for three season use.
- A permanent covered area like a pavilion and more bathrooms would allow more opportunities for students to engage with the site.

### ***Public Restrooms***

- An area in reasonably close proximity to the interpretive center might be a more suitable place for an upgraded bathroom facility. The outhouse in front of the John Brown house has always seemed 'not exactly the right place'.

## **GENERAL REMARKS**

- I very much agree with improving, preserving, and advertising the farm.
- The site should continue to be a place where people congregate to celebrate the life and works of The Great Abolitionist.
- The site should bring people together safely to experience the site, commemorate and celebrate the legacy, vision, and spirit of John Brown.
- The history of the farm is vitally important to those who live nearby.
- We are very interested in preserving the site for its historic value.
- It would be very regrettable if the existence and continuity of John Brown's Farm were to disappear or be threatened.
- One thing we got to remember is that we have the rural, underserved community in the Adirondacks, and I often say, I think every Adirondack kid should know about and be proud of the legacy of Black settlers and John Brown.

## **HISTORIC PRESERVATION**

- I think it would be worth considering whether or not we might have a National Historic District on John Brown Road and Bear Club Road that takes in the parcels that were part of Timbuctoo.

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## INTERPRETATION, EDUCATION, AND PROGRAMMING

### *Community Agriculture & Farming*

- Establish a recurring farmers' market focusing on community supported agriculture, and artisanal food industries, especially those owned and/or friendly to people of color.
- "Victory gardens" at the site would provide a venue for social interaction between people at different socioeconomic levels and help to build a harmonious community.
- I would love to see John Brown Farm growing food, herbs, flowers and/or fruit for the greater community.
- I think the Farm should have a technical school that offers degrees in farming, animal husbandry and breeding. The school could also offer several revenue-generating functions, e.g. bed and breakfast, natural food-producing operation, livery stable with saddle horses, etc.
- I would like to see the site restored to a farm as it was for over a century. The farm should also use 19th holistic farming methods and technology.

### *Cultural/Educational Residencies*

- Build simple cabins that could be offered on a sliding fee scale to artists, historians, and social justice organizations as a retreat center.
- An artist residency with a specific aim of supporting Black, Indigenous, and/or other artists and activists of color, is something that could be immensely productive at the site.
- Consider making your artists in residence program a major part of the growth of the legacy of the John Brown Farm to afford artists time to create works that represent the African diaspora.
- Permanent residence and studios for rotating visiting artists and scholars would create opportunities for artists to immerse themselves in creative endeavors related to the site, to make and show their work, and to interact with the public.
- It would be great to see more facilities where visiting artists, scholars, etc., can do/show their work and interact with the public (ie. artist residencies!).

### *Exhibits and Signage*

- Temporary interpretive signage planted around the site might best be given a rightful place in the interpretive center versus on the grounds where the signs are subject to seasonal weather elements, damaged, or blown in far off fields.
- I was surprised by the lack of information and interpretive material provided to visitors on a visit ten years ago. Much of the information and signage was outdated and/or reflected misinformation that was propagated in the 20th century.
- We think there should be educational kiosks on other historically relevant and significant persons.
- Exhibits should have a more central role in people's interaction with the site.
- I especially love the "Dreaming of Timbuctoo" exhibit and would love to see it become a permanent exhibit.
- It would be great to have a more robust digital offering at the site so that you could engage with the site and exhibits even when the doors are closed. For example, you may be able to watch digital content inside, but you might also consider opportunities like augmented reality where people can use their devices to engage with the site in a more modern way.
- I don't think the "Dreaming of Timbuctoo" exhibit is in the greatest place cause it's kind of hard to get to and it's kind of hard to know it's there.

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## **General**

- This historic site—indeed, the constellation of programming associated with it—is indispensable to public history in the region.
- Consider how to make use of this land to continue John Brown’s legacy through education and arts.
- The Farm tells a vital story that is at the heart of the American story, and it does so brilliantly.
- Expand the programming that will reach the broadest and most specific audiences!
- The farm is a decisive place of memory in the history of the United States; it has contemporary relevance to the defense of rights, the fight against modern slavery, and the actualization of ideals defended by John Brown.

## **Interpretive/Educational Themes**

- The site should put the story of Timbuctoo in the context of the national anti-slavery movement and the struggle for civil rights into the present day.
- Acknowledge the presence of Indigenous people to the area historically and in contemporary terms.
- Install historiography and educational kiosks on Jesse Max Barber, the John Brown Memorial Association, and early African American pilgrimages and monuments.
- Expand and tailor the interpretive program on the Black voter suffrage movement for visitors of all ages.
- Ensure that diverse voices and scholars are helping to define the interpretive story here; consider reaching out to the National Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington D.C. or the National Underground Railroad Freedom Center in Cincinnati, Ohio to do so.
- Mary Brown’s story needs to be highlighted as well, she was very much Brown's partner in all things and deserves great recognition on the site.
- Impart more education on the role of Black persons in the entirety of the Adirondacks, not just North Elba.
- Expand the focus by telling the story of not only John Brown but Gerrit Smith and what he was doing in the area.
- Bring people together safely to experience the site, learn, commemorate and celebrate the legacy and vision and spirit of civil rights leader and preservationist John Brown, and make contextual historical linkages to the national Underground Rail Road.
- The site has a conventional historiography that really downplays the significance of people of color to Timbuctoo and John Brown, because Brown came to Timbuctoo, not the other way around.
- Include historic themed trails with kiosks to educate recreators about the history and context of the Gerrit Smith tracts.
- I think it's really important for any visitor to the Farm to first get a sense of just truly how pro-slavery the country was, how pro-slavery the country was becoming, and the historical context to which John Brown was reacting.
- I would like to see expanded interpretation of the residents farming at Timbuctoo, and further talk about the barriers these new farmers were facing which may still have some relation to the barriers farmers today face.

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## ***Programming***

- Host artistic events, such as “plein-air” workshops and alfresco exhibitions, to explore and celebrate the terrain in ways that promote environmental awareness and foster community engagement.
- A horse show (for draft horses) could be hosted at the farm right in time for the I Love NY Horse Show held in Lake Placid.
- I would like the John Brown Farm to offer activities that help us address and overcome our prejudices toward one another—programs and presentations that engage people of diverse backgrounds, experiences and opinions in life changing dialogue.
- The farm has so much history and is an ideal place for school field trips.
- One thing that would be wonderful to see would be an annual event, such as the May 9th pilgrimages commemorating John Brown's birthday.
- Provide flexible spaces for art exhibits and theatrical and musical performances.
- I would like to see more inclusive programming that makes people of color feel welcome.
- Develop a three-season on-site educational program for students and teachers.
- I love your educators and the interpretive opportunities and would love to see more of that going forward, especially programming for school audiences.
- Programs that incorporate educators of the Wild Center would be wonderful. There have been some, and it would be great to see them continue with John Brown Lives!

## ***Research and Collections***

- Expand the on-site library and make it accessible to researchers and scholars.

## **PARTNERSHIPS**

### ***General***

- For educational institutions, collaborative work with John Brown Farm is particularly appealing.
- Through partnerships, many important interpretations of the site could come to fruition, becoming a live teaching area that will be a real asset for people everywhere.
- Integrate with educators and school systems in the area to provide more wonderful opportunities.

### ***John Brown Lives!***

- The site's relationship with JBL! firmly establishes it as an educational place, combining partners, teachers and students in Adirondack, state and national history and in goals of restorative justice.
- The social justice advocacy group John Brown Lives! has broadened the site's mission with its public events, historical-marker programs, and art installations.
- John Brown Lives! is an important NGO partner who has really anchored the interpretation of the site. Please keep their voice prioritized in future plans, alongside the voices of marginalized communities whose history is explored at the farm.

### ***Local***

- Future partners in conferencing about social history and restorative justice, equity, and inclusion goals might include the nearby Heaven Hill Farm conference center. The site might wish to establish a more formal, collaborative partnership.
- Collaboration with the Uihlein Foundation opens a real future for the historical site.

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- I would encourage you to reach out to either the Six Nations Iroquois Cultural Center or the Akwesasne Cultural Center to make sure that their voices are part of this planning process.
  - Can we consider ways of developing the site in relationship to, or in connection with, other historic sites in the state? For example, the Gerrit Smith estate, the National Abolition Hall of Fame and Museum, and The Women's Rights National Historic Park?

### ***National Park Service***

- This planning process might benefit from inviting the National Park Service's technical assistance program to participate in visioning, goal setting and design phases, as well as with national marketing.
- Consider affiliation with the National Park Service to expand opportunities in technical assistance, have access to additional funding sources, and to help tell the story of Harper's Ferry.

## **RECREATION**

### ***Bicycling***

- Install bike-friendly infrastructure, such as racks, work-frames, etc.

### ***General***

- We are very interested in preserving the site for its recreational value.
- I feel like there are two very separate experiences at the Farm, where some people visit for outdoor recreation and others visit for the history. I would love for there to be interpretive materials that even as you head out on the trail, or if you're looking to go for a ski, you can still encounter signage and other things that connects these two different experiences.

### ***Trails***

- Contemplate more trail connections and provide interpretation of them, like a trail south of the Farmhouse, connecting to Indian Pass and past the Lyman Epps homestead.
- Trails are awash with markers which are sometimes confusing.
- Enhance the accessibility of the trail system for wheelchair users, persons with limited mobility, as well as those using strollers.
- Establish rest stations (chem toilets) at trail heads.
- Create sign-in/sign-out stations with trail maps at each trailhead.
- Install resting-benches along trails at regular intervals, to expand hiker demographics to facilitate use by people with physical challenges.
- Expand and improve the trail system, to create lateral pathways connecting the existing loop and out-and-back trails.
- I am hoping that we can see more connections between the Historic Site and the Uilhlein property to the south of it for recreational and historical purposes.
- The trail system is wonderful, and if it can be expanded given all of the regulations of the region, by all means it should be.

### ***Water Access***

- The popularity of the Ausable River to fisherman could also be a boon to John Brown Farm with a simple trail to the river.
- It might be nice to take a trail down to the Ausable River so people can see it.

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## STAFFING

- I believe that having a full-time caretaker is very much needed. People should feel safe with someone on the property at all times.
- Can the Farm help to foster conditions that would attract and retain a stronger workforce of persons and families of color in the region?
- Do we still need a staff member living on the site fulltime? Carefully consider whether or not there needs to be an onsite presence, as opposed to nearby presence of staff.

## STEWARDSHIP AND NATURAL RESOURCES

### *Best Practices*

- Implement conservation design features and principles such as maximizing open space, limiting impermeable surfaces, utilizing wildlife-friendly fencing, installing downward-facing lighting, and other ecologically-sensitive planning and infrastructure.
- Perform an ecological site analysis to best site trail and structure development in areas with the least amount of impact to natural resources, wildlife habitat (including nesting and breeding grounds), and wildlife passage (including aquatic species).
- Climate resiliency is critical. Per this goal, the site should be carbon neutral at least, and carbon negative at best.

### *Flora and Fauna*

- More native plants and pollinators should be incorporated into the landscape.

### *Interpretation and Education*

- Place environmentally sound interpretive signage at key places along the trails, with information about local flora, fauna, climate, and geology.
- Maintain (smaller-sized) botanical/arboreal signage to identify indigenous and invasive species.
- Climate change concerns can be a great teaching opportunity.

### *Wildlife*

- During periods of migration, breeding, or foraging and feeding (particularly spring and fall), the public should be prevented from interfering or disturbing wildlife by way of education signage and roping off critical areas determined in the ecological analysis.
- Support avian species, e.g. birdwatching tours, bird-banding operations, participate in the annual Audubon Society bird-count.