

# **Bequest Proposal for the Urban Farming Institute**

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**From: Reparations/Reparative Justice Group of FMC** (Polly Attwood, Susan Davies, Minga Claggett-Borne, Nancy Frost, Cynthia Knowles, Diana Lopez, Wendy Sanford, and Sandy Sweetnam)

## **I. Introduction**

### **Core Request**

We are proposing that Friends Meeting at Cambridge (FMC) make an unrestricted contribution to the Urban Farming Institute (UFI), a 501(c)(3) organization, founded and run by African Americans, who are turning vacant land in Dorchester, Roxbury and Mattapan, owned by the Boston Farms Community Land Trust (BFCLT), into urban farms supporting neighborhood farmers and providing healthy food to the community. Here is a link to the UFI website: <https://urbanfarminginstitute.org/> and to the BFCLT website: <https://www.bostonfarms.org/>

### **Overview**

Wealth and privilege for white people in the USA have been created by hundreds of years of systematic oppression – particularly of Indigenous and African American people – based on white supremacy culture. White dominance has prospered through theft of people’s lives, work, freedom and dignity; theft of land and property; theft of children; theft of power and opportunity. Systems of white dominance are the scaffold for the relative advantage of all white Americans, and the solid wealth of many, both historically and currently.

Some of the tools of this systematic theft and continuing oppression include demeaning stereotypes of those robbed of livelihood and opportunity by these thefts; sexual violence against women as a form of domination; denial of educational opportunity; and multiple other measures calculated to separate a people from their cultural roots and practices. Federal and state laws have conferred legality on much of this oppression.

We in the Reparations/Reparative Justice group feel spiritually led to encourage the meeting to engage in reparations in order to address the history of genocide and exploitation by releasing resources that we benefit from due to that history. Making reparations is the process of identifying those harmed by our ancestors/government/religious groups and taking responsibility for using our resources to address

the harms. Making reparations is an immense project on a regional or governmental level. We are suggesting a first step for FMC.

In creating two concurrent proposals for uses of the recent generous bequest to FMC, we have looked for small, already-established groups led by communities of color. We have sought groups that members of our meeting are or might be involved with in friendship, learning and support, although in no way would FMC's contributions be dependent on such involvement. All decisions about use of FMC contributions would be made by the recipients.

It is important to us that any "reparations" donation we make be understood – by the meeting, by the recipient – as being about accountability and justice rather than charity.

We are asking for a percentage rather than a set amount of the bequest. We believe that it would eventually be appropriate for the Meeting to consider an annual percentage "right sharing" of our abundance towards reparations/reparative justice.

The Quaker values and testimonies that guide our proposal include the testimonies of equality, right sharing, and right relationship with groups whose wellbeing has been negatively impacted by measures that benefit us and our meeting.

### **Specific Rationale for this Proposal**

African-Americans were kidnapped from their homes and kept in chattel slavery, their language and culture erased. The women were raped and their children were taken from them. They were considered subhuman. Their unpaid labor built this country. After the Civil War and the Emancipation Proclamation, patterns of enslavement evolved into Jim Crow, segregation, and lynching. In the mid-twentieth century, decades of mortgage policies known as "redlining," and exclusion from benefits such as the G.I. Bill have kept Black people from acquiring property and thus building equity. Economic security and wealth continued, and continues, to rest in the hands of white people. When Black communities manage to build some wealth, white violence becomes a tool for punishing and robbing them. The 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre, for example, wiped out a flourishing black business district and neighborhood. In building the interstate freeway system, the federal government robbed Black communities by consistently choosing to build freeways through Black business districts and established neighborhoods: New Orleans, Nashville, Birmingham, Miami, Atlanta, Boston and many others.

Wealth, i.e. net worth, is perhaps a better measure of well-being and economic security than income, and the generations of exploitation of African-American labor has resulted in a dramatic inequity between their net worth and that of White people. New data from the 2019 Survey of Consumer Finances (SCF) show that "the typical White family has eight times the wealth of the typical Black family and five times the wealth of the

typical Hispanic family... In the 2019 survey...Black families' median and mean wealth is less than 15 percent that of White families, at \$24,100 and \$142,500, respectively.” (Disparities in Wealth by Race and Ethnicity in the 2019 Survey of Consumer Finances - Neil Bhutta, Andrew C. Change, Lisa J. Dettling, and Joanne W. Hsu with assistance from Julia Hewitt.)

The Boston Globe on 9/18/23 covered a report from The Boston Foundation that found racial homeownership gaps at all income levels in the region. “A series of homeownership assistance programs in Massachusetts have made significant strides in helping families buy their first home, but the state has a ways to go to fully address persistent racial gaps in homeownership... The report found that while many of the state’s assistance programs have provided needed help when used properly, including to many households of color, eligible residents often have inadequate access to the information... The report’s findings show that Massachusetts has one of the largest racial gaps in homeownership in the country.”

A 2023 Supreme Court ruling that affirmative action in colleges and universities is in violation of the U.S. Constitution’s Equal Protection Clause continues the long pattern of denying full education to Black people, thus perpetuating barriers to the levels of income and livelihood that support ownership of land and home.

Black communities in Boston have resiliently resisted the barriers put in the way of their flourishing. The Urban Farming Institute (UFI) was established in the Mattapan neighborhood of Boston in 2011, its mission being to acquire land and to build farms. Access to healthy food has been an ongoing problem in the inner city neighborhoods of Boston, for decades known as a “food desert” without supermarkets or other access to fresh produce. As white people left for the suburbs, supermarkets deserted the inner city and followed them. Any available food became more expensive for low-income residents, with small corner stores offering fewer and unhealthy alternatives. Believing that access to healthy food is a universal right and working with the City of Boston and with neighborhood residents and developers, UFI acquired land and turned it into farms. To preserve the farms for the future, it formed the Boston Farms Community Land Trust (BFCLT) in 2017, the first community land trust for urban farms. UFI now manages 7 farms owned by BFCLT in Roxbury, Dorchester, and Mattapan. As described on its website, it “teaches people how to grow and distribute food locally to foster healthier residents, neighborhoods and economies.”

## **II. Use of Funds**

- Does this proposal advise keeping some or all of the Bequest for FMC's capital or budget use? N/A

We are requesting 10% of the Bequest, \$40,000, understanding that there are other proposals, some of which may be intended for the capital or budget needs of FMC.

- Is this the only funding for this project or is it part of a larger effort?

The Urban Farming Institute has a budget of \$1.78 million for 12/31/2023. The \$40,000 donation would be 2.25% of UFI's total operating budget. One use for an amount of this size could be to build additional raised beds and provide farming training for people who have small garden areas available for planting vegetables.

We are proposing an unrestricted gift, and therefore cannot respond with any more specificity to this question. UFI may use the contribution for expenditures affecting some or all of the farms. The Glenway Farm in Dorchester and the Garrison Trotter Farm in Roxbury have both been operating since 2013; the Tommy's Rock Farm in Roxbury includes a greenhouse and in 2021 became the first site made available directly to neighborhood farmers for commercial growing; the Astoria Farm in Mattapan has been operating since 2019; and the Westville Farm in Dorchester is the newest site to be developed into a neighborhood farm.

- Is it ongoing after these funds are depleted?

The UFI is an on-going organization with a track record of sustaining a large budget and multiple farms. It will be the organization's decision how and at what pace to use these funds.

- Is this funding for a start-up, a program already up and running, or is this for an expansion?

This funding is for programs already up and running – see description above. Nonprofit organizations often have difficulty obtaining operating donations which will allow them to continue doing the work. Donors often look for “new programs” and fail to support existing ones. We are excited about supporting the work being done as well as future efforts.

- If being given to an existing program, what portion of that budget will this represent?

See description above.

- If an existing project, are members and/or attenders at FMC already engaged with this project, and if so, how? Are community members welcome to become involved and how?

At this time we know of no members of our community who are active with UFI. Our hope is that because it is a local organization with a range of work needed, our community may become involved. However, the contribution is not dependent upon such involvement.

There is an interesting connection. Pat Spence, the President/ CEO of UFI, grew up and lives on the same street as Brookview House, a transitional house for women and children in Boston, developed in the late 1980's by members of FMC and to which FMC made an interest-free loan of \$100,000 to assist in its development. Pat Spence's mother was active on the Brookview board at the time, and active also in the development of FMC's Homeless Women's Housing Initiative.

### **III. Budget** – up to 3 years is recommended

This is a one-time contribution to UFI, to be used as the organization determines. Whether or not the funds will be used over multiple years is not our decision to make.