

**Woolman Hill**  
**Final Report to Friends Foundation for the Aging**  
**June 2022**

**What problem were you addressing?**

Woolman Hill's physical facilities—the buildings, land, and their accessibility—are the indispensable component that makes cross-generation magic possible here. The 1800s farmhouse that serves as our main conference center had many characteristics that made navigating it with limited mobility next to impossible. Inter-generational groups also struggled with too few bathrooms, limited privacy, and insufficient break-out spaces.

**What change did you expect to create? How?**

In the midst of the pandemic, Woolman Hill (WH) saw an opportunity to move ahead with a major renovations project to dramatically improve the accessibility of our main building and thereby to increase its use by a significant segment of the Quaker community that has been disinclined to come here. We are thrilled to report that after nineteen months of planning, fundraising, and construction Woolman Hill has a beautifully renovated and expanded conference center. Full ground floor accessibility, including main entry, spacious foyer, ADA compliant bathrooms and bedrooms, as well as informal gathering and break-out spaces, now serve the multi-generational community of Quakers and others who use our facilities for spiritual growth and renewal. Our Facebook page shares photos and progress reports about our new facilities, including from our Open House Celebration held on October 16, 2021: [www.facebook.com/WoolmanHill](http://www.facebook.com/WoolmanHill).

**How did you measure success--both quantitative and qualitative?**

Our first measure of success is the high-quality construction that was completed in October 2021. We now have a totally improved and expanded facility. While these physical aspects are a key measure of success, our biggest measure will be an increased use by all ages and those who were reluctant to come earlier because of the facilities. The pandemic is still having an impact on the center's use, so good data on use improvement will need to come later, but we are encouraged that some groups have begun to enjoy our new space. In September, one monthly meeting held its first intergenerational retreat here in several decades, primarily due to the previous lack of space and accommodations suitable for elderly Friends. Many of the Friends had never been to programs at WH before, despite their meeting being only an hour away. Another monthly meeting with aging members, which has never held a retreat at WH, is now discussing holding an event here next spring. A number of non-Quaker nonprofit groups have enjoyed the improvements to the facility as well, including a Buddhist sangha whose aging members have struggled with mobility challenges at WH in the past.

Our October 16, 2021 Open House and Celebration glowed with enthusiasm and positive feedback about our new spaces. The new facilities are receiving rave reviews, including the wonderful comment that the major addition blends beautifully with the old farmhouse. This excitement bodes well for increased participation and use of Woolman Hill.

**Please note any collaborations that supported your work and/or ways that you leveraged resources. How did this project engage and empower staff from all levels of your organization?**

This was a MAJOR undertaking for Woolman Hill, significantly larger than any previous project requiring MANY hands to come to fruition. Three board members served as an ad hoc Accommodations Working Group to shepherd the initial stages of the project, one of whom then served as the Board's liaison to the project, working closely with the Executive Director to oversee construction. During the design process, WH solicited survey responses from recurring Quaker and non-Quaker groups, New England Yearly Meeting staff, program facilitators, and current and former

WH Board members and staff. A team of architect, general contractor, WH executive director and board liaison met (via Zoom and on-site) twice a week for the bulk of the project. The architect is a woman, and her assistant was transitioning to female during our project; one of the two general contractor project managers, the assistant project manager, the WH director and board liaison were also all women – this is very unusual in the construction industry. Input from the rest of WH’s staff (Maintenance Manager, Caretaker and Administrative Assistant) was sought on building techniques and on decisions re fixtures, furniture, etc. Our fundraising consultant, Michael Wajda, provided invaluable assistance. We could not have accomplished our goals without him. And, of course, we were lifted by the generosity of our donors who demonstrated solid commitment and joy for the future of Woolman Hill. In addition to FFA, we received grant support from NEYM’s Legacy Fund and the Obadiah Brown Benevolent Fund – demonstrating strong region-wide recognition of WH’s value.

One unexpected joy was engaging the subcontractors (excavators, painters, plumbers, electricians, drywallers, well drillers, HVAC, fire alarm crew, carpenters, etc.) in conversations about their lives, as well as meaningful exchanges about Quakerism and respect for the land. Many of them are part of multi-generational family businesses, and we were able to listen to the experiences they face with a challenging economy and incredibly demanding workloads. Several were reaching retirement age and uncertain whether the next generation would step up to continue the business. One of them remarked: “You’re not like our other customers. You don’t treat us as inferior, but as equals.” Another one, who stayed in a WH cabin overnight during a required 24-hour pump test for the new well, spent over an hour on the Meetinghouse porch looking out at the fields by starlight and later commented that he’d never taken the time just to appreciate watching fireflies.

### **Please share any unanticipated outcomes or barriers encountered.**

Our largest barrier to our ultimate goal of welcoming Friends who have been deterred from participation in programs and events at Woolman Hill remains the pandemic. The pandemic also affected supply chains, rising costs and contractor availability. Despite that, we were able to stay relatively on budget and achieve substantial completion within a few weeks of the initial target date. The minor delay impacted several group rentals, including an intimate three-generation family reunion centered around a couple’s 50<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary. Though the newest bedrooms were not yet ready for them, they were able to enjoy the improved foyer, bathrooms, and patio access – which served the youngest and oldest members of their family equally well. Obviously, the lifespan of this pandemic is out of our control, but we are very optimistic that Friends and others will use Woolman Hill more once the pandemic is behind us. Happily, the new addition allowed us to house Friends in single rooms for our first in-person program since March 2020, which greatly eased participants’ sense of COVID risk.

Due to anticipating a significant reduction in event income, at the beginning of the pandemic our staffing at Woolman Hill was reduced, and this major project added extra burdens to the Executive Director. It often required more than is reasonable from every member of our already very small staff. The WH board has now engaged a pair of consultants (both Quaker) to carry out a business planning process, with a goal of increasing the sustainability of our human and financial resources, as well as improving systems for tracking various metrics of our operations.

### **How do you plan to share and replicate your results?**

Our Open House and Celebration in October generated much enthusiasm for our new and improved facilities. We post regularly on Facebook, which spreads our news widely too. In August, we plan to have a display at New England Yearly Meeting Sessions. The fundraising itself for this project has offered us many opportunities for enhanced communication with Friends meetings, foundations, and individuals about the important ministries of Woolman Hill.

We know of several monthly meetings who are considering holding retreats at Woolman Hill in the near future, and we are beginning to envision renewed programming of our own with the pandemic diminishing. This September we will host the first residency of the next offering of the nine-month Nurturing Faithfulness course (a collaboration with NEYM and Beacon Hill Friends House), a multi-generational faith and leadership program designed to help Friends explore ways to meet God more deeply, hone methods of discernment, reach for fuller faithfulness, and ultimately bring these gifts and strengthened abilities home to their local meetings and beyond.

**Include a project financial statement (budget and actual) for the reporting period.**

**MAIN BUILDING GROUND FLOOR RENOVATIONS BUDGET**

<b>EXPENSES</b>		<b>ACTUAL</b>
<b>Ground floor portion of improvements</b>	<b>\$380,000</b>	<b>\$410,500</b>
<i>Building renovation costs - total</i>	<i>\$760,000</i>	<i>\$821,000</i>
<b>INCOME (portion for ground floor)</b>		
Individual donations	\$240,000	\$270,500
Monthly meeting donations	\$70,000	\$75,000
Grant funding	\$70,000	\$65,000
<b>Total budgeted income</b>	<b>\$380,000</b>	<b>\$410,500</b>

**Feedback on your interaction with FFA would be helpful. How have we helped? Made it harder? What else can we do to facilitate your work?**

Our experience with Susan Hoskins has been very helpful. She listened to us and encouraged us throughout the application process. She asked good questions, provided feedback, and told us of the foundation’s work with other Quaker organizations. We are very grateful for the support we have received from her and the board. The clear information on the FFA website was also very helpful.

We’re extremely grateful that the FFA Board saw the connection between the accessibility of our physical space and the welcome of the spiritual container for our intergenerational programming. Thank you for recognizing and supporting the integral role our facility plays in our programming.

As we look at future initiatives and collaborations, we welcome staying in connection with FFA about possibilities for strengthening our offerings that speak to aging and intergenerational communities. We’re excited to see FFA’s support in bringing the ARCH Program to NEYM and are eager to find ways to work together on in-person and/or hybrid workshops at Woolman Hill on relevant topics. A big question currently for the WH board and staff is whether and how to engage in hybrid (in-person and on-line) program opportunities. We recognize the ways that on-line participation in events increases accessibility, particularly for aging adults and for those at a farther distance. At the same time, we’re aware of how valuable it is for Friends to have experiences *away* from technology, immersed in a beautiful natural setting, and the richness of interacting in person. Being in a rural area, we also have significant challenges in obtaining reliable internet. So we have deep discernment ahead about WH’s approaches to hybrid programming.

**Additional comments:**

Many thanks again for helping Woolman Hill build a more welcoming future for older adult Friends!