

NENA Report Addendum

September 21, 2019

Interviewees and the NENA Block 75 Subcommittee were provided with a semi-final version of the report on the block on Friday, August 30. Respondents were asked to review the report and provide any feedback or recommendations for changes by Friday, September 6. Five respondents provided feedback; only three provided substantive feedback. Below is a description of how this feedback was handled.

Line by line changes: Some respondents requested changes to the text itself; these changes were presented in draft form as “NENA Report with Suggested Changes.” It included these recommendations in inserted comments or as tracked changes so that readers could clearly identify the proposed feedback. The NENA Block 75 subcommittee approved these changes and they were integrated into the final version of the report.

Below are more general comments reflecting feedback on the report. These responses have been paraphrased from the original communication, both for concision and to anonymize responses as much as possible. I provide no additional commentary on how these comments should be addressed, but they should be considered part of the report and may need to be discussed by decision-makers moving forward.

Garden characterization: One respondent is concerned that the presence of weeds may over time have given a superficial impression of insufficient maintenance, and even of the garden becoming an eyesore. They feel that the garden may be in better condition now than it has been in previous years, and that considerable effort has been expended on both weed control and wise land use practice, which might not be immediately visible. Furthermore, they point out that just a few people are doing a good job of maintaining the space, with very limited resources and without the demonstration of support of even a short term commitment by the church. With more resources, the basic challenges of weed control and other objectives could be more meaningfully addressed. In fact, they would like to see the church invest in the teaching farm even as it considers long-term plans. In particular, they would like some clarity about their future, over the next 1-3 years: because successful farming requires long-term planning and effort, operating under a cloud of uncertainty is detrimental. This is also true for the planning of educational programs. This respondent wonders if some intermediate action as pertains to the garden might be undertaken sooner, rather than waiting for the findings of a working group. They fear that delay in planning for the next year could limit the potential programs and activities than can be planned for the short term.

False equivalencies: One respondent is concerned that the report creates a false equivalency between church actions and neighbor responses. They point out church missteps at nearly every stage of the proposal process (both in 2003 and in 2018), and argue that neighbors have had a wide range of reactions, many of which have been rational and appropriate given the circumstances. Lawsuits may have been threatened at a far extreme, but neighbors have also worked to educate themselves on key issues, to stay open to communication with church

members and leadership, and to try to promote good process and dialogue. Not all neighbors think the same, nor have they acted the same. When they have expressed hostility, that hostility was in response to problematic actions on the part of the church. This respondent wanted to underscore the point that the neighbors have not done anything that makes them “not worthy of trust,” while the church has. And at the end of the day, the church holds many of the cards, so to speak. There is a power differential in place.

The respondent goes on to argue that it is not productive to frame public engagement around stakeholders as “for” or “against” particular projects. The issues surrounding the block are incredibly complex, and it could be beneficial not to oversimplify. When the church held public meetings in summer 2018, they were perhaps operating under a transactional model, wherein they sought public approval on a project on a short timeline: the public engagement felt not deep enough, and was not about building meaningful relationships or processes for information sharing. It may be more productive and even generative to think about the block not as a wound, but as a site in the public sphere, and an opportunity for dialogue and interaction.

Housing on Block 75: Another respondent was concerned that the report implied that some type of housing project on the block is inevitable. They would like to see the entire process “reset” such that there are no foregone conclusions about how the space will be used moving forward.