

Could This Historic Property Be The New Home of Apple Tree Arts?

OLD GRAFTON TOWN HOUSE, LOCATED at ONE GRAFTON COMMON



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**February 6, 2008**

Thanks to our many friends in the community who continue to pledge their support toward making the second and third floors of One Grafton Common the new home of Apple Tree Arts. The excitement being generated by the prospect of theater, concerts and other events being held in this building's magnificent "Great Room" appears to be contagious based on the number of people who have come forward to help lend their expertise in making this dream a reality.

Our One Grafton Common (OGC) Building Committee has been working diligently to lay the groundwork needed to conduct a comprehensive capital campaign for completion of the renovations needed for this historic town landmark. We are currently working with the Board of Selectmen, Town Manager, and Town Counsel, as well as a historic preservation consultant and architectural firm to replace the roof of the building. It is our hope to have the funding in place for this piece of the overall project by this summer and to have the new roof completed by the end of this year.

One of our other main focuses is to establish a long-term lease agreement between Apple Tree Arts and the town of Grafton. This agreement is necessary for us to access potential sources of funding that would not otherwise be available to the town. We hope to have this agreement finalized in the near future, and will then be able to get the OGC capital campaign in full swing.

Much has already been accomplished and, while there is still much, much more to do, the support we are receiving from the community keeps us focused and confident that that this will come to pass. Stay tuned!

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November 2007

Thanks to everyone who completed our recent e-mail survey concerning our efforts to secure a new home for Apple Tree Arts at One Grafton Common! Over 30% of you filled out the survey -- well above the average for a survey like this. We were thrilled to learn from the consultants who

conducted this survey for us that there is tremendous fundraising potential out there to help make this dream come true.

We also had a very successful community meeting at the Harvest Barn on November 28, with a great show of support for this initiative. We are poised and ready to embrace this tremendous opportunity to aid the Town of Grafton in restoring One Grafton Common. The second floor space of this beautiful town-owned building is stunning, with an auditorium with seating for 250, high arched ceilings, and a stage area for concerts and theater arts productions.

We are currently researching our organization's ability to help the town amass the necessary funding. As a cultural non-profit organization, we have opportunities to raise money through both fundraising and grantwriting. We hope to strike an agreement with the town for a long-term lease of the second and third floors for community arts programs and events. We have organized a building committee and an advisory board. We're creating a business plan. And we're working with various town committees and staff to chart the path ahead.

We can do it, but we will need the help of the entire Apple Tree Arts community to make it happen. Stay tuned!

Please check out the following sites. These are local organizations that have recently accomplished what we are trying to do:

<http://www.amazingthings.org>

<http://www.natickartarts.org>

If you are not a Grafton resident, but would like to help, please call the Apple Tree Arts office, at 508-839-4286. Thank you!

October 17, 2007

A note from the Executive Director:

Thanks to all our staff, board, volunteers and friends in the community for your support of Apple Tree Arts at Town Meeting in Grafton, Monday, October 15!

In a "sense of the meeting" vote, the townspeople unanimously agreed to keep One Grafton Common under town ownership. This gives us time to assess our ability to work in partnership with community leaders and others in our efforts to move toward operating in this location. We had a fantastic affirmation from the town meeting of the work we have done in the community, as well as wonderful writeups in the local papers as well.

Now we can gradually and logically approach this new location. So grateful at this point for the opportunity! We'll see what the future holds!

Sincerely,
Donna

Oct 9, 2007: A Letter to the Grafton News Editor, from Donna Blanchard, Executive Director
To the Editor:

For the past 18 years, Apple Tree has served the Grafton community by broadening our non-profit organization's capacity to offer music lessons, concerts, theater arts programming and early childhood music classes to many Grafton residents. We have sponsored such concerts at as Livingston Taylor, Tom Chapin, and the Claflin Hill Symphony Summer Winds on Grafton Common this summer, produced youth musicals such as 101 Dalmatians and summer youth theater programs, showcased college groups in our A Cappella Nights, made Pizzazz a great family night of entertainment, produced an exciting holiday concert for 250-300 people for the past three years, and supported many youth and faculty musicians who have performed in local businesses and non-profits. Many young families have met other community members for the first time through attending our classes.

We have grown our program through the dedication of people in our town who have believed in our mission to bring arts experiences to our community and have served on our board, faculty and staff and as parent volunteers. We are deeply indebted to two organizations that have rented us space at low cost: the Evangelical Congregational Church and the Town of Grafton Municipal Center. We are extremely grateful to local generous individuals who have supported us. We could not have been successful without businesses such as Gaudette Insurance and the Grafton Suburban Credit Union. We appreciate the Grafton News for the opportunities they have given us to publicize and grow our musical events.

Apple Tree Arts has now grown to the point where we need a centralized home.

Our compelling vision of 1 Grafton Common centers around the 200-plus seat assembly hall on the second floor. We see the future of 1 Grafton Common, especially the large assembly hall, much like it used to be historically, as a gathering place for the community. A working stage would make all the difference in the world to an organization like ours.

We believe the adaptive use of space at 1 Grafton Common would enhance our vital common area, as townspeople from Grafton and surrounding towns would attend live musical and theatrical performances and in turn frequent local businesses. Our after school program for youth musicians and dramatists could flourish if we could renovate the stage and if our faculty could collaborate in the same location. We could produce adult community theater and community chorus concerts. We could increase our variety of music instruction for all ages with sound proof studios. We could welcome local artists to display their works.

We have grown our non-profit through support from greater Grafton area businesses, individuals and foundations. Our funding connections and knowledge of grant writing increase each year. Our board strengthens each year. We are seeking time at this juncture to allow us to work at securing the necessary funding to restore this building for the valuable cultural and historic preservation purposes it embodies. We are committed to the hard work it will take to generate funding.

That is why at the straw poll during the Town Meeting on October 15, it is our hope that people will help us encourage the town to keep this historic building.

Sincerely,

Donna Blanchard, Executive Director
Apple Tree Arts

Oct 9, 2007: A Letter to the Grafton News Editor, from Paul Scarlett, Board President

To the Editor:

I am writing on behalf of the Board of Directors of Apple Tree Arts to clarify our organization's position relative to the town-owned property at One Grafton Common.

Our intent in attending the October 2nd Board of Selectmen's meeting was to make official, prior to the October 15th town meeting, our interest in partnering with the town to raise the necessary funds for renovation of this property. It is our belief that this historic building, which is directly adjacent to Grafton's beautiful Common, should remain a town-owned asset.

Our motivation in this is straight-forward, Apple Tree Arts currently has no centralized base of operations, but must instead rent space in several different locations throughout Grafton. If the organization is to continue to flourish and grow, we need a place to call home.

One Grafton Common's central location is ideal. It has abundant office and classroom space on the second and third floors, which we understand to currently be largely unused. The lack of parking that would pose an issue for most other businesses is not an issue for us since our performances and on site lessons would occur during off hours.

One significant additional item that factors into our interest in leasing space at this site is the 200-plus seat assembly hall on the second floor. With some work, this space could be brought back to its original state and allow us to once again bring music and theater performances to this wonderful building.

Apple Tree Arts' mission is to enrich the community through the arts, and our presence on the Common would serve to enhance cultural tourism of the area. There are recent examples of very similar endeavors being accomplished in nearby communities. We believe that our organization's drive and resources, along with support from this community, can make these renovations a reality while retaining town ownership of this historic property.

Sincerely,

Paul A. Scarlett
President, Board of Directors
Apple Tree Arts

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**Letter Written to Board of Selectmen Sept 14, 2007:**

Ms. Natalie T. Lashmit  
Grafton Town Administrator  
30 Providence Road  
Grafton MA 01519

September 14, 2007

Dear Ms. Lashmit:

I am writing on behalf of the Board of Directors of Apple Tree Arts. As you are aware, there has been much discussion over the last several months relative to the future of the old Town Hall property at One Grafton Common. Recently, in fact, the Grafton News has printed articles that included speculation as to whether this building could be purchased by Apple Tree Arts and turned into a performance arts center. We felt it appropriate at this time to make our intentions relative to this property officially known.

An area of focus in the five-year strategic plan for Apple Tree Arts is, in fact, the purchase or lease of a building to serve as our center of operations. The Board has been working diligently with the Executive Director, Donna Blanchard, to put together a plan for making this a reality.

We are well aware of the property at One Grafton Common and do feel it has intriguing possibilities as a future home for Apple Tree Arts, particularly in light of its beautiful assembly hall and central location. We feel such use would also be of benefit to the town in that it would serve to enhance the quality of life in the community, as well as complement the existing businesses in the area.

We would be very much interested in pursuing with the town this potential opportunity. While at this juncture, a leasing arrangement rather than an outright purchase would be what is tenable for our organization, we would nonetheless welcome an opportunity to discuss the feasibility and timing of a future purchase should the town decide to sell the property.

We appreciate your time and consideration in this matter and kindly request that you provide a copy of this letter to the Board of Selectmen for their upcoming meeting on September 18th. We look forward to discussing this matter further and will plan on being in attendance at that meeting.

Sincerely,

Paul A. Scarlett  
President, Board of Directors  
Apple Tree Arts

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**SEPTEMBER 07**

**WE NEED YOU!!**

As townspeople, we all have a decision to make: should we sell the former town hall at One Grafton Common leaving its future to an unknown fate, or should we instead vote to retain town ownership and explore the opportunity of converting the 2nd and 3rd floors to an Arts Center?

Such endeavors have recently been successfully completed in Natick and Framingham. Why not here? Apple Tree Arts has the drive and wherewithal to make this a reality if the town votes to work with us. With your support, we can further enhance the quality of life in Grafton.