

*Text of Remarks Made to the Grail Council During Meeting of January 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2023  
By Magda Durante  
for the Sustainable Communities Affinity Group*

I'd like to start with affirming the Grail core purposes.

The five Grail Core Purposes are to:

- 1) Conduct and maintain educational institutions
- 2) Promote social activities and international exchange, and foster the religious, artistic and cultural development of women and girls
- 3) Operate an environmental training and retreat center or centers
- 4) Promote the application of spiritual principles to everyday life and
- 5) Encourage educational and charitable activities connected with the foregoing.

These tenets, together with our active anti-racism, are our purpose and mission as Grail members. We've all taken the time to be here because we believe that the Grail has a unique role to play in the world today. We're all deeply aware that our role as women manifesting God's love in the world for transformation is more important and more needed than ever.

The Sustainable Communities Group has met weekly for over five years--with input from over 40 Grail members--to develop a plan to put the Cornwall Grail Center on a more sustainable financial footing while fulfilling the Grail core purposes. We've crafted a proposal that achieves these goals:

- It preserves one of our greatest assets, the Cornwall Center land and buildings, an asset that will only appreciate in financial and environmental value
- Puts the U.S. Grail on a firmer, more sustainable financial footing
- Helps us better steward the land we're privileged to steward and protect
- Allows us to fulfill the Grail core purposes that we've committed to as Grail members
- And it embodies the broader empowerment and agency of Grail members, as has been so eloquently expressed by the Revisioning Team

The time we've been allotted is limited tonight, so we look forward to reviewing the details of the plan at a future date.

Tonight we focus on a very urgent task. A decision must be consciously made by the Council so that it doesn't end up being made by default-- the vote for representatives of the Council and the Executive Director to meet with representatives from Sustainable Communities to work out a new lease and to give the current renters timely notice according to the terms of the lease.

The terms of the lease require us to give the renter notice 120 days, or four months, before the lease ends to advise the renter of a change in terms; that is, April 8<sup>th</sup>, 2023. With that date just slightly more than two months away, it is imperative that we take action to revise the lease terms to be more advantageous to the Grail.

The Grail ReVisioning Team has demonstrated that there's broad support within the US Grail to decentralize decision-making and give the membership more agency on important decisions. This support for more inclusion and for decentralization of power was also called for at the GA. In line with this, Sustainable Communities also believes that decisions relating to our local center should have the input and representation of the local Grail community.

Three years ago, US Grail members failed to achieve a quorum in an election on the question to sell the Cornwall Center. Since the vote to sell was defeated, and the decision thus made to keep the Cornwall center, the question we're faced with now is how to best protect and nurture our asset to fulfill our core purposes. It's vital that the local Grail community take an active part in decision-making in the management of this asset.

We have an active and committed community of over 40 women (a significant percentage of active Grail members) who've contributed and support our exciting, paradigm-shifting plan for the Center that repairs some of the very disadvantageous terms agreed to with the current renters.

Because the local community didn't have a seat at the table, the entire Cornwall property was rented out for far less than the market rate, resulting in the loss of nearly \$400,000 of rental income over the three-year term of the lease. Thirty-five acres and five buildings, including twelve- bedroom house, were rented out for little more than I pay for my small three-bedroom house a few miles away. Being local to the NY metropolitan area, and knowing the market here, the input of local Sustainable Communities Group representatives will help the Grail make better-informed decisions to preclude significant losses like this in the future.

The Sustainable Communities Group is made up of accomplished women of all ages and ethnicities, with extensive local networks, and with extensive professional, management and community organizing experience. We've met tirelessly every week for three years and put in the effort to survey, research, plan and organize. We've put in the work, and are ready and able to carry out our commitment to the core purposes of the Grail.

Regardless of whether or not the plan is adopted, our representation in matters concerning the Cornwall Center is important. We ask that you take this vote tonight to pass this resolution to give the local Sustainable Communities representatives a seat at that table in matters pertaining to the Cornwall Center, and most urgently to begin the immediate task of drawing up a new lease well before the current lease expires.

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We ask the Council to schedule a follow-up meeting in two weeks to discuss how to formally include our representatives, ensure timely notice to the renters, and to revise the lease terms to be more advantageous to the Grail.

## *RESOLUTION*

- a. Whereas, the vote to sell the Grail Cornwall property was defeated in an election three years ago, and
- b. Whereas, the Sustainable Communities Affinity Group has met virtually on a weekly basis for more than three years to determine a long term, financially sustainable plan to maintain Cornwall which will also fulfill Grail mission goals, and
- c. Whereas, there are Grail members who are eager to make a several year commitment to make the Cornwall Grail their primary residence and others who are committed to staffing Grail programs, and

d. Whereas, the Sustainable Communities Affinity Group has presented to the Council and to the membership proposals which we believe help to fulfill Grail mission, and

e. Whereas, it is imperative that the Grail resume its mission on Grail property as soon as possible in order to give life to its not for profit status and to attract new, younger, multiracial members to ensure the survival of the Grail into the future, and....

f. Whereas, it is necessary for a democratic process that the base community most impacted give free, prior, and informed consent to decisions;

Therefore, be it resolved:

That the Council recognize the legitimacy of the Sustainable Communities Affinity Group agency in relation to decisions about the future of the Cornwall Grail property, and that we begin joint talks with Council members immediately, related to the resumption of the use of Cornwall Grail property for the fulfillment of Grail mission by Grail members, recognizing an April deadline, in accordance with the lease granted to Rural & Migrant Ministries (RMM), in informing RMM of any changes which we wish to make in relation to the renewal of their lease, and

Be it further resolved: that representatives of Sustainable Communities Affinity Group, along with representatives of the Council:

- a. Participate in framing a new lease of designated parts of the Cornwall Grail property, together with Council members, to be presented to RMM, and
- b. Participate with Council members in face to face negotiations with RMM, and
- c. Be present and agree to the terms of any lease for any potential renter of any part of Cornwall Grail property, whether it be RMM or another renter.

At this time we formally request a vote on this resolution.

Thank you for your time and all your efforts on behalf of the Grail.