

Colchester Agriculture Commission
Minutes of Meeting
Monday, May 21, 2012 - 7:00 P.M.
Town Hall, Room 3

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2012 MAY 23 PM 3:21
Nancy A. Bray
NANCY A. BRAY
TOWN CLERK

Attending: J.Becker, L.Curtis, E.Gillman, A.Savitsky, D.Wasniewski
and also J.Savitsky (Alternate)

Liaisons attending: S.Soby (Board of Selectmen); C.Bourque (New London County Farm
Bureau); A.Turner (Town Planner)

Also attending were D. Wray; J.Marino; students from Bacon Academy—K.Maguire,
L.Beckstein, J.Gordon, E.Deluca, R.Deluca, S.Slotnick, and M.Sullivan.

1. Call to Order:

Meeting was called to order by Chairman E.Gillman at 7:05 P.M. (Note: J.Savitsky
arrived at 7:07.)

2. Additions to the Agenda and 4. Citizens Comments:

A.Turner introduced J.Marino of 132 River Road to the commission and explained that the
Planning and Zoning Commission had requested that Mr. Marino bring his petition to change
the town's zoning ordinance to permit the raising of pigs in Colchester before the Agriculture
Commission for its consideration and recommendations before P&Z proceeds to make any
changes in these town zoning regulations.

L.Curtis moved that we add this discussion to the agenda as "New Business" and then
move this discussion to the top of the agenda for discussion. A.Savitsky seconded the motion.
Motion was unanimously approved.

3. Approve Minutes of the Agricultural Commission on April 16, 2012:

MOTION: J.Becker moved that the minutes be approved as submitted. A.Savitsky
seconded. Motion carried.

5. Chairman's Report:

Chairman Gillman reported that it had been an eventful month due to the Colchester voters
failure to pass bonding referendum question regarding the Town's plan to purchase the
Slembeck Farm in order to preserve the land for agricultural purposes.

5a) New Business:

J. Marino presented his plan to raise pigs in an indoor facility on his 132 River Road farm
along with a draft of a proposed zoning regulation change which would be needed so that he
could proceed to implement this plan. These proposed regulation changes were drawn up
by Mr. Marino's attorney consistent with the conditions that were discussed at the recent
Planning and Zoning Commission meeting.

The history is that pig farming and facilities to raise fur-bearing animals are now two uses that are explicitly “non-permitted” by Colchester's planning and zoning regulations, and have been so for many years. However Mr. Marino has a plan to raise pigs in an indoor facility consistent with contemporary practices being used successfully in other parts of the country. According to A. Turner, the P&Z Commission is willing to consider changing the town's zoning regulations to permit Mr. Marino's plan, but wanted input from the Agriculture Commission's on this whole subject before proceeding.

This discussion was open for input by citizens and liaison members present at the meeting as well as the commission members. Many opinions were expressed about various aspects of this proposal. E. Gillman had concerns about the wording of the third item—waste (manure) disposal—and felt that the NRCS and/or CT Department of Agriculture should be consulted to be sure the wording we eventually adopt will be less vague than that presented in this proposed new regulation. J. Becker wondered whether keeping the pigs contained inside was a humane treatment of the animals. Mr. Marino said that the facility he hopes to build will be climate controlled and very comfortable for the animals. A. Savitsky stated that pigs are the cleanest of the farm livestock to raise. C. Bourque said that new regulations are coming from the state Department of Agriculture about this subject and warned that it would be unwise for Colchester to make a zoning regulation change that is too restrictive and is made explicitly to support this particular model for raising pigs. E. Gillman opined that while this proposal is a fine model, there are also other sustainable models for raising pigs in a free range manner. D. Wasniewski reminded us that there is a huge and growing demand for locally produced meat and that this proposal could help satisfy this market.

MOTION: J. Becker moved that the Agriculture Commission meet in a special session to discuss all these issues and make specific recommendations for any changes to the wording of the proposed zoning regulation. D. Wasniewski seconded the motion. Motion unanimously approved.

6a. Discussion and Possible Action on draft of Colchester Farmland Preservation Ranking Criteria:

J. Savitsky and E. Gillman worked as a subcommittee to codify a model for a Farmland Preservation Ranking Criteria for Colchester. The document they presented was based largely on the model used by the Connecticut Farmland Trust but, of course, tweaked for the specifics of our town. A variety of questions regarding the wording of this document were discussed. The guidance E. Gillman has received from E. Moore of the Connecticut Farmland Trust is that this document can definitely be a “work in progress” but that the Town absolutely needs to have a ranking criteria document to present to the State in order to be eligible for many of the new state agricultural grants. We can amend this document at any time as we work with it and gain more experience with its relevance to ranking the farmland in our town. The Town Planner said that this was a useful model and that perhaps up to 90% of the ranking could be done in the office using the information available on the town's G.I.S. mapping layers.

MOTION: D. Wasniewski moved to adopt the Colchester Farmland Preservation Ranking Criteria as presented. J. Becker seconded the motion. Motion was unanimously approved.

A. Turner will correct the typos in this draft document and send a copy of the final document to E. Gillman for the Agriculture Commission's records. He will also include this document in his submission to the State by May 28, 2012 for the town to be considered for eligibility to participate in future grants for local farmland preservation.

6b. Discussion and possible action on the Slembeck Farm:

A post-mortem discussion about the failure of the voters in Colchester to approve the bonding referendum on the purchase of the Slembeck farm raised many points of view of why this initiative probably failed. The consensus was that the important thing is to work to ends that this land can be preserved as farmland in the future by other means. Therefore, if and when the land is sold to an outside buyer, the town should be in contact the new owner to educate them about preservation options which will become possible if the town's application to the state for agricultural preservation grants is approved. Also there are federally sponsored (USDA) program for young farmers and ranchers to enable them to procure low interest mortgages to buy and protect farmland such as this parcel.

C. Bourque pointed out that the failure of the voters to approve this bonding referendum points up the importance of the town's put a priority on funding significant dollars in a line item in the budget every year specifically for land acquisitions so that when future opportunities like this one arise, there will be money already available for this purpose and that will qualify the town for outside grants as well.

6c. (1) Bylaws draft completed by D. Wasniewski:

Members of the Commission each have a copy of the proposed By-Laws draft prepared by D. Wasniewski using model from other towns' Agricultural Commission by-laws. Everybody is expected to read this document and be prepared at the June meeting to discuss and possibly to act on adopting a version of them.

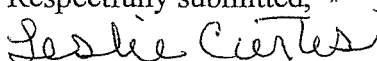
(2) E.Gillman reported that she has not yet contacted other towns such as Guilford, Thompson, and Sterling about their procedures for handling farmers' or citizens' concerns and complaints. She indicated that she would try to do this before the next meeting.

(3) Change in 490A acreage requirements:

S. Soby said that a change to a town ordinance would be necessary in order to lower the acreage requirement for farms to be eligible for the more favorable tax treatment under the 490A (Agriculture) legislation. Back in 2007 in a public forum where the recommendations of the Agricultural Viability Study of Colchester were discussed and evaluated, the Colchester farming community identified this subject as a top priority for action. The next step is for the Agriculture Commission to study this topic and make a recommendation for new (lower) acreage limits for 490A and then make their recommendations to the Board of Selectmen. The B.O.S. would then do a financial impact study of this recommendation, hold a public hearing on the matter, and finally bring the matter to a vote of the citizens at a town meeting.

7. Adjournment:

MOTION: J.Becker moved to adjourn the meeting at 8:45 P.M. A.Savitsky seconded. Unanimously approved.

Respectfully submitted,


Leslie Curtis
Secretary