

Colchester Agriculture Commission
Minutes of Meeting
Monday, October 15, 2012 - 7:00 P.M.
Town Hall, Room 1

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COLCHESTER, CT
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NANCY A. BRAY
TOWN CLERK
Nancy A. Bray

Attending: J.Becker, L.Curtis, A.Savitsky, J.Savitsky, D.Wasniewski

Absent: E.Gillman

Liaisons attending: S.Soby (Board of Selectmen),
A. Turner (Town Planner--arrived at 7:36 due to scheduling conflict),
C.Bourque (New London County Farm Bureau)

Also attending: Bacon Academy Seniors L.Higgins, M.Ciccone, and M.Hughes;
D.Cugno; and R.Blessing from the Norwich Bulletin newspaper.

1. Call to Order:

Meeting was called to order by Vice Chairman D.Wasniewski (acting as Chairman for this meeting in the absence of E.Gillman) at 7:04 P.M. (Note: A.Savitsky arrived at 7:06.)

2. Additions to Agenda:

None.

3. Approve Minutes of the Agricultural Commission on September 17, 2012:

MOTION: J.Becker moved that the minutes be approved as submitted. J.Savitsky seconded. There was no discussion and the motion was approved with two commission members (L.Curtis and J.Savitsky) abstaining because they had not been present at the September meeting.

4. Citizen's Comments.

None.

5. Chairman's Report:

None.

6) Old Business:

a) Updates from Town Planner concerning the Slembeck Farm.

A.Turner reported that he has now spoken with a total of four farmers who are interested in working with the Town and other state and federal agencies and other conservation groups to purchase this farm from the Slembeck family and then preserve it for agricultural uses only (not residential development) using a variety of preservation techniques and sources of funding. Mr. Turner has introduced them all to the property owners and walked the property with them. He continues to do what he can to facilitate the private purchase of this farm so that it can remain in agricultural usage. D.Cugno, a farmer who is interested in this

opportunity, was present at this meeting of the Agriculture Commission and asked about the status of a potential grant from the National Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). A. Turner informed him that the town had met the qualifications to apply for a NRCS grant, but that since the bond issue to finance the property had failed at referendum, the paperwork was never submitted.

b) Update on Town's adoption of regulations suggested in "Guidance & Recommendations for CT Municipal Zoning Regs and Ordinances for Livestock".

Selectman S. Soby reported that the draft of the revised zoning regulations is ready to be presented to all the Town's boards and commissions, but that the Planning and Zoning Commission (P&Z) has not yet acted on the Agriculture Commission's recommendations about the Town's adopting the principles in this document in its own regulations and ordinances. He said that there has been some consideration and discussion of this recommendation by P&Z members, but it has not come yet to a vote there. It is not known when it would come up on the P&Z agenda for official action. Mr. Soby added that any ordinances which might need to be changed as a result of this guidance (if approved conceptually by the P&Z) would have to be considered for action first by the Board of Selectmen and then brought to a vote at a subsequent town meeting.

c) Discussion and possible action on the formation of a local CERT training for response for livestock emergencies.

C. Bourque reported that after the September meeting of the Agriculture Commission, a sub-committee including A. Savitsky, C. Bourque, J. Nichols, J. Williams (Head of Region 4 of the State Emergency Management office) and others met to discuss how to proceed to implement new protocols for these types of situations. A week after that, there was a meeting of the Emergency Management Region 4 Steering Committee which was attended by W. Budney and J. Nichols of the Farm Bureau and others to continue these discussions. So there is much work being done at the state and regional levels to address better protocols for response to agricultural incidents involving large animals. As a side note, Bourque said that in a regional emergency all the fairgrounds in the state will be available to the state Department of Emergency Management to house livestock in the event that evacuation and relocation of livestock becomes necessary.

C. Bourque also told us that the general intent is for each town with an Agriculture Commission to develop a contact list of responders that includes each person's areas of special expertise in responding to emergencies involving livestock. (So far the New London County Farm Bureau has identified twelve such individuals in its area of jurisdiction.) These lists will then go up the chain of command to be consolidated at the regional level of emergency management in the state to produce an official call list to be used as necessary.

The Colchester Agriculture Commission could help the effort to identify more such volunteers by publishing articles in the local newspapers requesting people with needed skills to provide their information to be added to our local responder lists. The goal for our community is that first responders will have a readily available list of whom they can call for help in various situations involving livestock in our community.

It was also reported that Town Fire Marshal R. Gustafson has said that it is not required for our first responder teams to all be CERT certified in order to form appropriate first responder teams in incidents involving large farm animals.

d) Discussion and possible action on finalizing the Agriculture Commission By-Laws:

D. Wasniewski suggested tabling the discussion of this topic until November meeting.

e) Discussion and possible action on future expansion of the Colchester Farmers Market:

J.Savitsky reported that the farmers market was held at the Zagray Farm for the first time on Sunday, October 14, and that in addition to the regular market format, C.Bourque provided hayrides around the property which were a great addition to the experience for those who participated. The next Sunday market will be on the Town Green. And the last market of the season will be at the Savitsky Farm on Cato Corner Road. After the end of the season, J.Savitsky will get input from all the vendors and other town constituencies as to ideas of where the market should be located next year and how it might be enhanced. J.Becker suggested that the list of constituencies should include the Colchester Fish and Game club. L.Curtis suggested that a questionnaire might be able to be put up on the Town of Colchester website for all in town to make their opinions and input known. S.Soby said that the contact person at town Hall to facilitate this would be D.Kennedy in the office of the First Selectman.

f) Discussion and possible action on providing community education towards fostering agricultural/farm awareness:

D.Wasniewski asked the three Bacon Academy seniors present (M.Cicccone, M.Hughes, and L.Higgins) for their input on this topic. The students said that there were no agriculture-related classes currently available at the high school that they were aware of. None of these three students had ever been made aware that an option for students in Colchester who might be interested in farming would, by state law, be to attend a school in a nearby town such as Lebanon which has for many years had a Vocational Agriculture program as part of its curriculum. The students suggested that a VoAg program at Bacon Academy would probably be a more attractive option for local students interested in farming rather than having to be bussed to such a program offered in another town even though they might be eligible to do so.

The thought was expressed that options such as these need to be introduced at the middle school guidance level so that students and families can plan far ahead to take advantage of programs which are offered regionally but not yet locally.

The students said that an after-school club might be a way to start awareness of this field of study at the high school . They thought there would be sufficient interest in the subject to make this a popular choice if it were offered. They specifically mentioned J.Hage of the faculty at Bacon Academy as a potential good fit to help lead such a group.

g) Any other old business deemed necessary:

None.

7. New Business:

There was a discussion about the importance of the Agriculture Commission moving forward on some of the initiatives identified by the farmers in town regarding taxation issues under the state's 490 program as they are applied here in Colchester. The Cost of Community Services study being done by P. Stahl will provide statistics and other hard data to facilitate these discussions. It was the consensus of the commission members present that this should be an agenda item for the November meeting and that a sub-committee needs to be appointed to start to consider recommendations that the Agriculture Commission should make on this issue which has previously been identified in a public forum as of the highest priority to our local farming community.

8. Adjournment:

MOTION: L.Curtis moved to adjourn the meeting at 8:10 P.M. A.Savitsky seconded. Unanimously approved.

Respectfully submitted,



Leslie Curtis
Secretary