

Colchester Agriculture Commission  
Minutes of Meeting  
Monday, December 16, 2013 – 7:00 P.M.  
Town Hall, Room 1

RECEIVED  
COLCHESTER, CT  
2013 DEC 18 AM 10:01

NANCY A BRAY  
TOWN CLERK

*Nancy A. Bray*

Attending: C.Bourque, A.Savitsky, D.Wasniewski, L.Curtis (Alternate)

Absent: O.Duksa, A.Zimmerman

Others attending: S.Soby (Board of Selectmen), R.Goldstein (Chairman of the Board of Education), B. Bernier (Board of Education), L.Przekopski, D.Cugno, M.Gastkiewicz, and the following students from Bacon Academy: M.Hallee, C.Vitale, S.Jacobs, K.Johnson, J.Clarke, N.Chasse, C.Ignazio, M.Beckstein, B.Morgan, A.O'Brien, E.Schissel, E.McNally, V.Furman, C.Tsamis, S.Morgan, S.Angelo, K.Gagnon, J.Shah, and N.Sullivan

**1. Call to Order:**

Meeting was called to order by Chairman C.Bourque at 7:09 P.M.

**2. Additions to Agenda:**

**MOTION:** L.Curtis moved that **Agenda Item 10 be moved up to become Item 5 and the remaining agenda items be renumbered accordingly.** D.Wasniewski seconded. Motion **approved unanimously.**

**3. Approve Minutes of the Agricultural Commission on September 16, 2013 and November 18, 2013 – Special Meeting:**

**MOTION:** D.Wasniewski moved that **the minutes of the September 16, 2013 meeting be approved as submitted.** A.Savitsky seconded. Motion was **approved unanimously.**

**MOTION:** D.Wasniewski moved that **the minutes of the November 18, 2013 Special meeting be approved as submitted.** A.Savitsky seconded. Motion was **approved** with A.Savitsky abstaining because he had not been present at that meeting.

**4. Citizen's Comments:** None.

**5. Presentation of a proposal for the creation of Non GMO lunch options for Bacon Academy by students Mitchell Hallee and Courtney Vitale:**

M.Hallee and C.Vitale are student representatives on the Colchester Board of Education. Earlier in the year the BOE received a petition from the parent of students in the school system that the Town consider serving GMO-free lunch alternatives in the schools. The BOE asked the student representatives to spearhead the project on behalf of the Board.

A copy of the Plan of Response which was presented this evening to the Agriculture Commission by M.Hallee and C.Vitale is attached to and a part of these minutes. (This presentation was originally given to the Colchester BOE in October.)

Following the presentation there was a general discussion of the issues raised by this proposal. D.Wasniewski said that he had originally heard this presentation at a BOE and felt it was important to involve the Agriculture Commission in the effort to raise awareness of the study. A.Savitsky asked whether there has been any consideration of having the schools grow some of their own food (perhaps in a greenhouse environment) to support of this effort and as a general learning experience for the students. D.Cugno, a local vegetable farmer, said that he applauds this effort to educate and inform the next generation of consumers about the issues with genetically modified food.

C.Bourque said that he was extremely pleased that this topic is being considered by the students at Bacon Academy and asked whether there is going to be a plan to educate the whole student body about the many issues associated with the topic of genetically modified foods. Mr. Bourque further stated that there is an ongoing effort by the CT State Department of Agriculture to teach farmers how to go about selling their locally produced food to school systems and also to train school cafeteria personnel how to buy products from local farmers. The idea is to get synergy on these issues by combining the resources of the BOE and the State agencies which are studying various aspects of these issues. R.Goldstein said that the BOE would welcome a joint meeting with appropriate personnel from state agencies who are involved in implementing these strategies.

C.Bourque said that this is a difficult topic to move forward and that it needs the whole community to be aware and involved to make the necessary changes to the entrenched system of food production and distribution. He is aware that various systems at the state level are being addressed with input from the CT department of Agriculture to try to get more local and healthful products into the cafeteria lunch menu offerings in our schools.

#### **6. Chairman's Report:**

C.Bourque pointed out that there was a feature article in the Colchester section on Page 19 of the December 6 "News Bulletin" about Molly Stanavage, a Colchester teen who attends Lyman Memorial High School where she is enrolled in the vocational-agriculture program. She has become very involved in beekeeping and this article goes into depth about her endeavors in this regard.

#### **7. Adopt Calendar for 2014 Agriculture Commission Meetings:**

C.Bourque presented a list of dates for the third Monday of the month in 2014 which is the usual meeting date for the Agriculture Commission. As often happens, the third Mondays of the months of January and February happen to be holidays and Town Hall is closed. Therefore it is necessary to reschedule the Agriculture Commission to another date in those two months. Mr. Bourque suggested that the Agriculture Commission meet on the fourth Monday of those two months and schedule all other meetings for the third Monday for the rest of the year.

**MOTION: D.Wasniewski moved that the calendar for 2014 be approved as recommended by Chairman Bourque. L.Curtis seconded. Motion approved unanimously.**

The dates for the Agriculture Commission meetings in 2014 , therefore, will be as follows: 1/27, 2/24, 3/17, 4/21, 5/19, 6/16, 7/21, 8/18, 9/15, 10/20, 11/17, and 12/15. L. Curtis will send an email of these dates to the Town Clerk so they can be properly recorded and on file at Town Hall.

## **8. Election of Secretary:**

Action on this was postponed for a future meeting because two of the Agriculture Commission members were absent from this meeting.

## **9. Committee Reports:**

### **a) Education:**

C.Bourque reported that Bacon Academy has a project to create some 4 X 8 foot raised garden beds to provide herbs for the culinary class. He brought this topic to the Colchester Grange who voted unanimously to donate the necessary the lumber and soil for this project.

M.Hallee noted that there is a composting project being initiated at Bacon Academy, but did not provide any other details about this.

### **b) Farm Building Tax Exemption:**

A.Savitsky presented his study of the farm building tax exemption. A copy of his report is attached to and is part of these minutes. (NOTE: The suggestion that the Town should consider implementation of this farm building tax exemption project was first officially raised in the 2007 Agriculture Viability Grant study and report. In 2008, a focus group of Colchester farmers endorsed the concept and gave it a high priority in a list of ways that the Town could provide meaningful support to its farming community.)

Discussion followed Mr.Savitsky's presentation. C.Bourque noted that according to the state statutes, towns **may** elect to exempt up to \$100,000 **per farm building** (NOT per farm entity) from its local property tax assessments. Each town has discretion over the actual dollar amount (up to the \$100,000 maximum) that it will exempt but the amount decided must by law be applied to each farm building on a qualified farm property. A farm must provide the form M-28 Statement of Profit or Loss to the assessor's office showing a profit of at least \$15,000 (or a qualifying loss) from farming endeavors. This form is currently available in the Assessor's records for qualifying farms in Colchester. Mr. Bourque will email a copy of this statute to S.Soby as background for future deliberations by the Board of Selectmen.

S. Soby said that in order to move the recommendations forward to the Board of Selectmen for consideration, more information will be needed. Specifically, the BOS will need to know the number of buildings in Colchester that would qualify for such an exemption and what the total financial impact would be in dollar value of reduction of property taxes from these exempted structures. Also he suggested that it would be helpful to know how other towns in our general area are handling this issue. He suggested that C.Bourque ask the First Selectman to request the Assessor to provide the Agriculture Commission with the necessary data. Once the potential financial impact is known, the Agriculture Commission can decide how to proceed with a request that the BOS implement this recommendation.

**10. Discussion and possible action regarding land use issues of interest to this commission:**

**a) Plan of Conservation and Development (POCD):**

C.Bourque reported that the POCD process is not being followed as it was described to the Agriculture Commission at its Agusut meeting by A.Turner, the Town Planner. (See Minutes of the Agriculture Commission Meeting on August 19, 2013, item 6(b) for the specifics.) Mr. Bourque has attended several of the P&Z Meetings on the third Wednesday of the month when he was anticipating dicussssion of issues related to revising the POCD, but the subject has not been deliberated there as anticipated. He said that he has been told that there will be no P&Z meetings on this topic until after the first of the year.

Meanwhile, Mr.Bourque reported, about thirty individuals in town have been interviewed by Planometrics to get input for the POCD. He wondered who chose the specific people to be interviewed. Apparently Planometrics is involved directly with the office of the Town Planner in all these matters and as yet the POCD Committee has not been involved in the process as it was anticipated when plans were announced last summer. Mr. Bourque is concerned that the POCD should reflect the views of a very wide cross-section of Colchester citizens and he does not feel there is nearly as much public input into the process as would be desirable at this stage of the plan's development.

S.Soby suggested that C.Bourque have a conversation about these concerns with Town Planner A.Turner and Chairman of the Planning & Zoning Commission J.Mathieu. He acknowledged that the process is working out differently from previous expectations. He indicated that the 2001 process may not need to be exactly replicated in this instance because the assumption is that the original plan is being revised rather than being created anew in this iteration. He also said that the personnel and professional skill set levels in the Town Planner's office is completely different from what it was back in 2001.

**b) New Land Use Regulations:**

C.Bourque is concerned about the wording in the regulations that still limits farm stores to only farms on arterial and collector roads, not other categories of roads. L.Przekopski pointed out that all farms pay taxes which keep all the roads in town in repair, so the category of road on which a particular farm is located on should have no bearing on its being permitted to have a farm store on its land. S.Soby said the P&Z welcomes public input on the proposed regulations and that all concerned citizens should make their voices heard directly by the P&Z on issues such as this--those meetings are on the first and third Wednesdays at 7:00 P.M.

**11. Adjournment:**

**MOTION:** A.Savitsky moved to adjourn the meeting at 8:40 P.M. D.Wasniewski seconded. Unanimously approved.

Respectfully submitted,



Leslie Curtis  
Secretary

## GMO-Free Lunch Petition: Plan of Response

End Goal: To develop a plan to offer students GMO-free alternatives in the school cafeterias

### Intro

- I. What are GMO's?
  - A. Stands for "Genetically Modified Organism"
  - B. Plants or animals that have been genetically engineered with DNA from bacteria, viruses or other plants and animals
  - C. These experimental combinations of genes from different species cannot occur in nature or in traditional crossbreeding
  - D. Virtually all commercial GMO's are engineered to increase productivity by withstanding direct application of herbicide and/or by producing an insecticide
  - E. In more than 60 countries around the world, including Australia, Japan, and all of the countries in the European Union, there are significant restrictions or outright bans on the production and sale of GMO's
- II. Narrowing the scope of investigation
  - A. Our research will focus only on how to implement a GMO-free program in Colchester
  - B. We will not consider whether or not GMO's are safe
- III. Why are we here?
  - A. Petition created by Ana Burr during spring 2013 asking Colchester Schools to offer "GMO-free or Organic alternatives"
  - B. ~300 students, parents, faculty, and administrators signed the petition
  - C. Mission Statement: "Colchester Public Schools are committed to establishing and maintaining... a safe, engaging, and effective learning environment to meet the unique needs of individual students"
  - D. Strategic Plan Goal #3: "Students, staff, parents and community members will promote a positive school environment that fosters respect, safety and a sense of belonging."
    1. Providing students with safe food choices is an important part of establishing a safe, effective learning environment and meeting the needs of students
- IV. Investigate Current Cafeteria Operations in All Schools:
  - a. Interview cafeteria manager
    - I. Do any cafeterias offer GMO-free options (complete meals or single items) already?
    - II. Who is/are the current supplier(s)?
    - III. What are the current costs [for comparison purposes]?

- iv. Are there contracts in place that would prevent a change of suppliers?
- v. What regulations do we have to follow?
- b. Interview school cafeteria workers
  - i. How will changes affect day-to-day operations?
- c. Interview administration (Ken Jackson (facilities) & Sharon Floyd (cafeteria supervisor) as well as school principals)
  - i. How do they anticipate a GMO-free program would work?
  - ii. What are their potential concerns?
  - iii. Do they support the program?
  - iv. Where would their support end? (uncompromisable issues)
- d. Get students and parents opinions on the school meals now and on GMO's (likely through surveys)
  - i. Is the current lunch a good value?
  - ii. Do you currently buy lunch from the school cafeteria?
    1. If not, would you buy a GMO-free lunch?
    2. If so, would you prefer lunch be GMO-free?
  - iii. How much would you pay for a GMO-free lunch?

## 2. Identify and Investigate GMO-Free Programs in Other Schools

- a. Research "cookie-cutter" GMO-free programs (i.e. farms to schools) that are pre-planned and can easily be applied to our schools
  - i. What schools have this program in place?
  - ii. What is the cost of implementing this program?
  - iii. What are the requirements?
- b. Contact (and potentially visit) schools with GMO-Free/organic programs
  - i. What was the process for implementing this program in your school?
  - ii. What was the cost of and time frame for implementing the program?
  - iii. How did the students/public react?
  - iv. Note town demographics for context and comparison

## 3. Identify Options Available to Colchester Public Schools In Conjunction with District Administrators

- a. Develop possible plans to be presented to BOE
  - I. Completely GMO-free/Organic
    1. All food served
    2. We will develop a plan that leads Colchester Public Schools to this point
      - a. Obviously requires extreme change
      - b. It may not be immediately feasible
  - II. Partially GMO-free/Organic (many different possibilities to consider)
    1. A meal option (similar to "deli")
    2. Particular ingredients in meal (breads, meats, sauces)

- 3. Sides (milk, fruits, ice creams, cookies)
- III. No change
- 1. *How important is this to our students, staff, and parents?*

b. Assess viability of plans

- I. Legal
  - 1. *How does the plan comply with the contracts and regulations by which we are bound?*
- II. Financial
  - 1. *Factors to consider:*
    - a. *Meal pricing*
    - b. *Cafeteria budget*
    - c. *Effect on sales*
    - d. *Will more people buy because people feel the food is safer?*
    - e. *Could a higher price turn people away?*
- III. Logistical/Practical
  - 1. *Is it possible to prepare the food?*
    - a. *May involve more cooking from scratch*
    - b. *May involve cooking a greater variety of dishes*
  - 2. *How long will it take to implement the plan?*
  - 3. *How will the public react? Will there be enough participation?*

Conclusion

I. Summary

- A. 3 Steps:
  - 1. Investigate Current Cafeteria Operations
  - 2. Investigate Successful GMO-Free Programs in Other Schools
  - 3. Identify and Evaluate Options Available to Colchester Public Schools
- B. End Result: *To develop a plan to offer students GMO-free alternatives in Colchester's school cafeterias*

II. Community Involvement

- A. Bacon Academy Student Council
  - 1. This presentation made with assistance from
    - a) Meaghan Hickey, President
    - b) Erica Boucher, Vice President
    - c) Kevin Hackbarth, Treasurer
    - d) Thomas Frickman, Faculty Adviser
- B. Get other members involved
- C. Bacon Academy's community activism class
  - 1. Christopher Juhl & Karen Christanson
- D. Anyone else??? *Something to offer, knowledge, time, etc.*

III. Timeline

## Farm building tax exemption study

Topic has been touched on before, but I will simplify it.

Who qualifies;

- A. \$15,000 farm income needed
- B. Actively farming. Someone retired or someone just restoring a tractor in a garage would have a hard time qualifying.
- C. Farm sales tax exemption not enough.

What qualifies;

Building that is currently used for farm operation.

Two bay detached garage in holiday homes with a restored tractor in it probably will not qualify.

My own three bay garage [with a tractor and truck in it], with attached 20x30 farm workshop. Hay

On top. Lean two with 200 chickens and feed storage and crop supplies would probably qualify.

State recommends \$100,000 value per building,, not per farm.

Each individual town can tweak this amount if so desired. Some towns have changed the amount a bit.

With the qualifications above, it narrows it down to not too many farm buildings in Colchester.

What needs to be done is find out how many farmers and how many buildings qualify. then add up the total of tax revenue that would be lost. Take that amount and divide among the rest of the tax payers in town. It will not be very much at all.

My recommendation; ag commission send this study to the town. see if the town wants to proceed further. it may not be a lot of money saved by each farm, but it will help out and may keep a farm in Colchester going.

Prepared and presented  
by A. Savitsky 12/16/13