

Colchester Agriculture Commission
Minutes of Meeting
Monday, April 15, 2013 – 6:30 P.M.
Town Hall, Room 3

NANCY A. BRAY
TOWN CLERK

Nancy A. Bray

RECEIVED
COLCHESTER, CT
2013 APR 16 PM 1:10

Attending: L.Curtis, E.Gillman, D.Wasniewski, J.Becker (arrived at 6:49).

Others attending: S.Soby (Board of Selectmen), A. Turner (Town Planner—arrived at 6:43), C.Bourque (New London County Farm Bureau), A.Zimmerman, J.Palmer, C.Vullo, D.Wray, and one other person who did not identify himself during the meeting.

1. Call to Order:

Meeting was called to order by Chairman E.Gillman at 6:35 P.M.

2. Additions to Agenda: None.

3. Approve Minutes of the Agricultural Commission on March 18, 2013:

In the absence of Secretary L.Curtis, the minutes of this meeting had been taken by J.Savitsky who submitted them to the office of the Town Clerk on April 11. For unknown reasons these minutes had not been posted on the Town website prior to tonight's Agriculture Commission meeting. Therefore no copies were available to be read and approved at this month's meeting. These minutes need to be posted on the website so that they can be made available to be read beforehand and approved at the next meeting of this commission on May 20, 2013.

4. Citizen's Comments:

A. Zimmerman, a new Colchester resident, had previously spoken to Selectman Soby and attended this meeting of the Agriculture Commission as an interested new citizen. L.Curtis asked him to the commission a brief bio. Mr. Zimmerman said that he had grown up on a dairy farm in Ohio. He had been a Professor at Ohio State University in the field of Agricultural Engineering. He and his wife have recently retired and have relocated to Colchester. He said he is interested in helping the Agriculture Commission in any way that would be helpful.

C.Bourque reported that he has recently had calls from other farmers in town about problems with their property tax valuations over time. He reported that there has been much confusion and inconsistency which seems to be particularly in the area of assigning the correct tax codes to some of the agricultural structures on farm properties. He has done some research using the town data and has uncovered several examples of these apparent inconsistencies from farm to farm. He expressed the opinion that this is a serious enough problem that the Agriculture Commission should take the lead to try to put this issue higher up on its priority list so that the causes for this can be understood and the situation resolved so that all agricultural buildings in town are coded appropriately and consistently.

C. Vullo was present at the meeting to give her specific example of the type of problems that Mr. Bourque spoke of more generally in his remarks. Through her research in the Assessor's Office of the tax record history relating to her farm and her investigation of the meanings of the various tax codes applied to different types of barns, she realized that there had been a clerical error in assignment of the correct code to one of her farm structures. She said that she has been through the process of going to the Assessors office to try to get the correct tax code assigned to this particular structure on her tax card. Having gotten no satisfaction in that encounter with the Assessor, she had subsequently brought this case to the Board of Assessment Appeals. She reported that this formal process resulted in an outright refusal by the BoAA to make any changes to the incorrectly coded tax card information without a complete on site inspection of all the the buildings on her property, which she has declined to allow since the town-wide revaluation had been just so recently completed. This unsatisfactory outcome has resulted in letting stand the higher tax valuation on her pole barn-- a difference of \$6.00 per square foot more than how the actual structure should be valued had it been coded correctly on the tax card in the Assessor's office. She reported that she has just mailed the relevant documentation of this injustice in a letter to the First Selectman, the Assessor, and all the members of Board of Assessment Appeals.

There was further discussion and speculation about the possible reasons for these sorts of inconsistent coding assignments from property to property (and even from year to year on the same property) and it was decided that it is important for the Agriculture Commission to hear directly from the Assessor on issues such as those which were brought forward this evening. Therefore Selectman Soby volunteered to contact the Assessor on Tuesday morning, April 16, to request that he (the Assessor) come to the next Agriculture Commission meeting on Monday, May 20 to address these topics. C. Bourque said that it is also important for the Agriculture Commission to understand exactly what the process at Town Hall is currently supposed to be in order to insure that all structures are coded correctly in the Assessor's tax records.

MOTION: L. Curtis moved that “**The Agriculture Commission authorize a subcommittee to formulate general and specific questions to give to the Assessor a week before the next meeting so that the Assessor can be prepared to address these issues at the May meeting of the commission.**” E. Gillman seconded the motion.

During the discussion, C. Bourque volunteered to be part of the subcommittee to formulate the specific questions and issues which will be given to the Assessor. C. Vullo said that Mr. Bourque could include the issues she has raised at this meeting and also in her letter to the First Selectman et al.

Motion was unanimously approved.

5. Chairman's Report: None.

6) **Old Business:**

a) Discussion and possible action on the Colchester Farmers Working Group's recommended changes to the Agricultural Section of the current zoning regulations.

Copies of the document "Amendments to Agricultural Uses section of the proposed Town of Colchester Land Use Regulations Recommended by the Colchester Farmers Working Group on February 25, 2013: 8.11 AGRICULTURAL USES" had previously been distributed electronically to all members of the Agriculture Commission for their review prior to this meeting.

MOTION: J.Becker moved that "The Agriculture Commission endorse the language in the document "Amendments to Agricultural Uses section of the proposed Town of Colchester Land Use Regulations Recommended by the Colchester Farmers Working Group on February 25, 2013: 8.11 AGRICULTURAL USES" and submit this document to the Planning and Zoning Commission at its next meeting on Wednesday, April 17, 2013". L.Curtis seconded the motion.

Motion was **unanimously approved.**

In further discussion Town Planner Turner said that he would be responsible for getting copies of this document to the P & Z Commission on Thursday 4/17/13 so that they could review these recommendations. Mr. Turner will also put the Agriculture Commission on the agenda for the P & Z meeting on Wednesday May 1 so that we can make our official presentation about the recommendations in this document to the full P & Z Commission.

b) Discussion and possible action on April 29, 2013 regional workshop concerning the fiscal value of land use. This workshop will be led by Paula Stahl.

E.Gillman expressed a desire to get as much publicity about this upcoming workshop to insure maximum audience for these important concepts. A.Turner volunteered to post the flyer for this workshop prominently on the Town website along with a link to the complete report prepared by P.Stahl. C.Bourque recommended that we get R.Blessing of the Norwich Bulletin to consider writing an article about this. A.Turner volunteered to have P.Stahl speak directly to Mr.Blessing about this idea. C.Vullo suggested that J.Meader of the Brooklyn Office of the Uconn Extension Service might be able to provide some publicity to a wider regional audience. E.Gillman said she would speak to J.Meader about this. She will also speak to J.Hage and C.Juhl at the Bacon Academy to spread the word. L.Curtis said she would try to get more publicity through the Colchester Land Trust contact list. C.Bourque suggested that the Colchester Business Association might have an interest in this subject. L.Curtis will contact J.Faski in this regard. Also she will have her contacts at the East Haddam Lions Club try to get this information to spread the word in their town. C.Bourque will forward the flyer about the upcoming workshop to his contacts at the New London County Farm Bureau and the Colchester Grange..

c) Discussion and possible action on ways to improve the Agriculture Commission's effectiveness to serve the town's agricultural community.

D.Wray reminded the commission that an Education Subcommittee had been previously approved by the Commission at its December 2012 meeting and that D.Wasniewski and J.Becker had agreed at that time to serve as the commission members on this committee along with other volunteers to be recruited to this effort. J.Becker said that she finds now that she cannot serve on this subcommittee. C.Bourque volunteered to contact some of the 30 part-time farmers in Colchester that the New London County Farm Bureau is aware of to try to recruit some new members for this Subcommittee of the Agriculture Commission and will provide E.Gillman with a list of willing volunteers. Further action will be on the agenda for the May meeting of the commission.

d) Discussion and possible action on nomination and election of candidates for Agriculture Commission officers.

The Agriculture Commission no longer has a full roster of members and alternates due to the following:

A.Lyons, Alternate, resigned his post due to changes in the demands of his job.

J. Savitsky, Alternate, is ineligible for the position because he is not a resident of the Town of Colchester (his farm is just over the border from Colchester, but actually the land is in the Town of East Haddam). In order to serve on a commission in Colchester, there is a requirement to be both a resident and a registered voter in this town.

A.Savitsky, Commissioner, is currently ineligible for this position because he was not a registered voter (though he is a Colchester resident). Mr. Savitsky has subsequently registered to vote in Town and the Board of Selectmen will take action at its meeting on April 18, 2013 to reinstate him to his position as one of the five Agriculture Commission members.

E.Gillman, Chairman, announced that her official term of chairman was up in January, 2013 and that she no longer wishes to serve the Commission in this leadership role. She stated her intention to change her status on the commission to become an Alternate instead of being a regular commission member due to the demands on her time of her dairy farming operation.

D.Wasniewski, Vice Chairman, said that he did not have the time available to succeed to the Chairmanship of this Commission right now due to pressing demands of his business and farming activities.

S.Soby said that in order for some of these changes to be effected, the people in question need to make their wishes known to the First Selectman's office so that appropriate actions can be taken by the Board of Selectmen to fill all the vacant positions on the Agriculture Commission. It is known that O.Duska has submitted her application to be on this commission to the Selectmen's office. Other interested citizens are encouraged to submit their applications so that a pool of willing and able volunteers for positions on this commission can be vetted and considered by the full Board of Selectmen in accordance with town protocol for filling these vacancies.

C.Bourque recommended that no official vote be taken on filling the Chairman's position

until new members and alternates are selected and a full new Agriculture Commission can meet to do so with all five members present. L.Curtis noted that she would be willing to continue to serve as Secretary of this commission, at least until her term of office is up in November 2013.

e) **Any other old business deemed necessary:** None.

7. New Business:

a) **Any other new business deemed necessary:** None.

8. Adjournment:

MOTION: J.Becker moved to **adjourn the meeting at 8:30 P.M.** D.Wasniewski seconded. Unanimously approved.

Respectfully submitted,

Leslie Curtis
Secretary