

Colchester Agriculture Commission
Minutes of Meeting
Monday, September 16, 2013 – 7:00 P.M.
Town Hall, Room 3

Members Attending: C.Bourque, L.Curtis, A.Savitsky, D.Wasniewski, A.Zimmerman

Others Attending: S.Soby (Board of Selectmen, arrived at 7:06), D.Cugno

NANCY A. BRAY
TOWN CLERK



2013 SEP 17 PM 3:37

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COLCHESTER, CT

1. Call to Order:

Meeting was called to order by Chairman C.Bourque at 7:02 P.M.

2. Additions to Agenda:

At the request of A.Zimmerman, a procedural issue will be discussed under the section 7b Any other new business.

3. Approve Minutes of the Agriculture Commission on August 19, 2013:

MOTION: A.Zimmerman moved that the minutes of the July 15, 2013 Agriculture Commission be approved. D.Wasniewski seconded.

Motion was **unanimously approved.**

4. Citizen's Comments:

None. However Chairman C.Bourque reiterated the concept that citizens' comments are encouraged at any time during the conduct of the Agriculture Commission meetings. Members of the public need only raise their hands to be recognized by the chair to add their comments to the proceedings. D.Wasniewski questioned this by referring to the protocol of other Town Meetings where public comment is generally solicited only at specific times during the proceedings. L.Curtis noted that the By-Laws of the Agriculture Commission specifically encourage public participation in all our meetings except for those times when it may become necessary (by state law) to go into Executive Session.

5. Chairman's Report:

C.Bourque reported that the CT Department of Agriculture has approved five million dollars for disbursement to farmers who suffered agricultural losses due to the spring rain storms and winter snow storms which damaged crops or infrastructure. The CT Farm Bureau is now responsible for disbursing these funds and it has the necessary application forms for qualifying farmers. The application period has been extended beyond August 1, 2013 for an indefinite length of time.

Mr. Bourque also stated that it is his goal for this commission to use some of our regularly scheduled meeting times as a forum for public education about a variety of agricultural topics. He feels it is important for this commission to do such outreach and education to further our mission of public awareness of the importance of agriculture as an economic engine for sustainable and tax efficient growth in our community.

6. Discussion and possible action regarding Land Use Issues of Interest to this Commission:

a) Update and discussion of revisions to Colchester's Plan of Conservation and Development (POCD) and Agriculture Commission members' possible participation at a special Town Meeting

on this subject scheduled for Monday, September 30.

It was noted that this meeting will be held at Bacon Academy and that the public is invited to attend. The intent of this meeting is as an open informational session where community input can be taken, the Planometrics firm introduced, and the broad outline of how this process will proceed will be discussed. This is intended to be just the first of many such opportunities for public input into this process. D. Wasniewski noted that the wording on the town's website announcing this event may not make it clear that this meeting is about the POCD. S.Soby volunteered to work with D.Kennedy in the First Selectman's office to get the wording on the website clarified.

C.Bourque also brought up a discussion of the procedure by which the Agriculture Commission will participate in the monthly meetings of the Planning and Zoning Commission (P&Z) regarding the development of the new POCD. It is planned that these sessions will be on the third Wednesday of the month. As the Agriculture Commission Chair, he plans to attend these meetings. He asked for a volunteer and an alternate from this commission to commit to attending these regular meetings with him. Both A.Zimmerman and D.Wasniewski volunteered to do so. D.Wasniewski will check his calendar to be sure that he is available to attend on those meeting nights. A.Zimmerman said he would be happy to serve as the Alternate from this commission at these meetings where public policy regarding conservation and development in our town will be shaped.

b) Status and discussion about the Revisions to Colchester's Zoning Regulations and Ordinances, particularly with regard to the agriculture uses issues.

C Bourque has obtained a copy of the revisions to the section 8.11 Agricultural Uses from Town Planner A.Turner. He reported that the revised document contains about 95% of the language that the Agriculture Commission has submitted previously based on the working farmers' group input. In his opinion most of the changes are of a minor nature, though there are still issues with the definition of farms and their relation to arterial and collector roads that may require further refinement in the upcoming discussions with the P&Z Commission. S.Soby said there is still more work to do on these revisions including having them reviewed for consistency with state and regional plans before these can be approved by the P&Z to go to a public comment period. C.Bourque will email a copy of the current revision to Section 8.11 to all other commission members so they can also review this and have the opportunity to provide further input.

c) Update and status of recent developments regarding the Slembeck Farm on Prospect Hill Road.

The Slembacks have recently re-listed the whole 75 acre parcel including the farmhouse for sale on the real estate market. However S.Soby clarified that the current negotiations are still ongoing with the plan that was presented to the Agriculture Commission by Mr. Berger at the August meeting. He reiterated that the Town of Colchester has a real interest in seeing this farmland put into preservation by means of an agricultural easement with the CT Farmland Trust as trustee. He also said there is interest in obtaining funding from outside sources to help the town with the financing of this farmland preservation.

C.Bourque brought up the idea that it is critical that our voters understand why it is in their best long-term interests to preserve this farmland. He cited the work of P.Stahl in preparing a fiscal analysis of saving a large farm in the Town of Thompson a few years ago in which the townspeople could plainly see the financial advantages to spending some money now to save a much greater amount of money over the long term by preserving a large farm in that town from future development into

residential housing. He suggested that the Town should consider employing P.Stahl to do a similar analysis on the Slembeck parcel for the Town of Colchester based on the data used in the Cost of Community Services study that was completed in early 2013. He feels that it is necessary to educate the public thoroughly using strategies such as this before the matter comes to a vote at a public meeting.

C.Bourque asked L.Curtis (who is also a Board member of the Colchester Land Trust) to put this matter onto the next agenda of the CLT for their input and discussion of ways to educate their membership about this project.

The idea was suggested that the Cost of Community Services Study as presented by P.Stahl be put up as a link on the Town of Colchester website so that everybody in the community has access to this important information.

D.Cugno stated that many months previously he had made an offer to the Slembecks to purchase the farmland--minus the original house and its building envelope--but that offer was never acknowledged. He asked to go on record in these minutes that he is still willing to purchase this farmland and work privately to get the appropriate agricultural easements on this land from the CT Farmland Trust without any funding or other involvement from the town. He said that he feels strongly that three prime agricultural soils on this property should be used for growing crops and the other acreage used to raise livestock, all to be a source of food for the community and to use all this valuable farmland to best agricultural advantage.

7. Old Business:

a) Discussion and possible action about the Farm Building Tax Exemption:

C.Bourque noted that a number of years ago this topic was rated as one of the top five goals of Colchester's farming community. He said it is time to resurrect the Agriculture Commissions efforts to get this accomplished. D.Wasniewski said that this is probably best investigated by a sub-committee of the commission. Further discussion led to A.Savitsky and C.Bourque volunteering to form the nucleus of such a group to move this project along.

MOTION: L.Curtis moved that **“a sub-committee consisting of A.Savitsky and C.Bourque be established to research the Farm Building Tax Exemption status for the Town of Colchester”**. A.Zimmerman seconded.

C.Bourque noted that anybody else in the community who wants to be part of this effort is most welcome to help this core sub-committee figure out the best strategy to accomplish this goal.

VOTE: Unanimously approved.

b) Agriculture Education Committee Report:

D.Wasniewski reported that he and A.Zimmerman had met with three teachers from Bacon Academy (C.Juhl and J.Hage, Science teachers, and K.Christianson, English teacher) and that it was a very productive initial meeting. The next meeting of this group is scheduled for October 7 from 3:30 to 4:30 P.M. At which various ideas for projects to raise awareness among our students of the importance of agriculture to their lives and to our community will be discussed. The goal will be to narrow the options and choose one or two to focus on.

C.Bourque pointed out that the CT Agricultural Education Council might be a great resource for this

Committee. He will get the contact information to D.Wasniewski so they can get professional guidance about projects that other communities are working on and the sorts of innovation that is happening elsewhere to advance these goals. He cited an example of a school in Guilford which got a grant to erect a greenhouse and grow lettuce to be served in the school cafeteria as just one of a number of initiatives being undertaken in other communities. It was also noted that some classes in our schools have already had tours of some of the farms in town including the dairy and cheesemaking operations at Cato Corner Farm.

c) Any other old business deemed necessary: None.

7. New Business:

a) Discussion of Community Agricultural Information Seminars:

C.Bourque said again that he feels it is important to do presentations about various agricultural issues as part of our public outreach at some of our Agriculture Commission meetings as is done in other communities. He cited, as one example, the possibly bringing in a demonstration of new hydroponic systems for raising grass during all seasons of the year which a certain company based in a nearby town would be willing and able to conduct.

A.Zimmerman expressed concern that by our sponsoring such a seminar by a single company with a product to sell might be misconstrued by the public as this commission's giving an endorsement to a specific product vendor. He also was concerned that representatives of a company with a specific product to sell might not be the most objective source of evaluating the cons as well as the pros of such new technologies. S.Soby suggested that one way around this would be to invite somebody from, say, the Agricultural extension service or the CT Farm Bureau to give such a presentation on the latest technologies available in the marketplace for such new methods without endorsing any single company's products. D.Cugno offered the suggestion that several companies might be invited to participate in such demonstrations so that no favoritism would be implied.

C.Bourque will do more investigation about this dilemma and we will continue these discussions at a future meeting.

b) Any other new business--Procedural Issue:

A. Zimmerman requested that each commission member be given a list of contact information for the other members: name, address, email address, and phone number. L.Curtis suggested that each member email her this information and when all are received she will compile distribute a list with all this information by email.

8. Adjournment:

MOTION: A.Savitsky moved to **adjourn the meeting at 8:47 P.M.** A.Zimmerman seconded. **Unanimously approved.**

Respectfully submitted,



Leslie Curtis
Secretary