

Colchester Agriculture Commission  
Minutes of Joint Special Meeting  
with the Colchester Economic Development Commission  
Monday, April 21, 2014, 7:00 P.M.  
Town Hall, Room 3

Attending for Agriculture Commission: C.Bourque (Chair), A.Savitsky, D.Wasniewski,  
A.Zimmerman, L.Curtis (Alternate)

Absent from Agriculture Commission: O.Duksa

Attending for Economic Development Commission (EDC): J.Ford (Chair), A.Bisbikos,  
B.Carr, P.Catalano, B.Curran, J.Dion, B.Fox, K.Issa

Liaisons attending: S.Soby (Board of Selectmen), D.Kennedy and M.Tomasi (Board of  
Education), M.Hallee and C.Vitale (Student Members of Board of Education),  
J.Mathieu (Superintendent of Schools), A.Turner (Town Planner)

Also attending: A.McAvay (Farm Fresh New London County School Initiative Coordinator),  
R.Blessing (Norwich Bulletin), D. Cugno, E.Gillman, C.Iezzi, K.Hackbarth

**1. Call to Order:**

Meeting was called to order by Agriculture Commission Chairman C.Bourque at 7:06 P.M.  
Meeting of Economic Development Commission was called to order by Chairman J.Ford  
at 7:06 P.M.

Agriculture Commission Chairman C.Bourque proposed that the Agriculture Commission  
Agenda Item 3.1 be moved to Item 2. A.Zimmerman seconded. All were in favor, carried.

**2. New Business: Food Hub Project Proposal**

Agriculture Commission Chair C.Bourque summarized the background of why this special  
joint meeting of the Agriculture and Economic Development Commissions was called. The  
students at Bacon Academy had previously petitioned the Board of Education to provide  
GMO-Free Lunch options at their school. A delegation from the schools had come to the  
Agriculture Commission's December 2013 meeting to formally enlist its help in moving this  
initiative forward. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the Commission  
on Rural Development are actively promoting various Farm to School and Food Hub  
initiatives both nationwide and in CT. These governmental initiatives have been allocated a  
pool of one hundred million dollars to fund projects like this throughout the country. There is  
a formal system in place for competitive bidding for these funds by the submission of grant  
requests for specific projects by interested entities.

Grant money for feasibility studies is available in amounts from \$25,000 to \$45,000 to  
explore the options for how to set up and run such a Food Hub in the community.  
Implementation grants of from \$60,000 to \$100,000 are available to fund some of the startup  
costs for a not-for-profit entity whose feasibility studies have yielded a solid business plan.

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NANCY A. BRAY  
TOWN CLERK

These grants require a match by the grant recipient of 25% of any grant awarded which can be contributed in money or in the cost of services expended in accomplishing the goals. This could be one source of funding for our local efforts.

A.McAvay is the Coordinator of the Farm Fresh New London County School Initiative. In February 2014 this group received a federal grant of \$100,000 to advance the agenda of providing more local fresh produce to students in 20 school districts in New London County. (Of 155 groups applying for the last round of such federal grants, just 26 projects were selected for funding and A.McAvay's group was one of these recipients.) She said that her group has a two year schedule first to survey all the food service directors in the 20 school districts which are currently participating , then to survey as many local farmers as possible to determine the level of interest and enthusiasm for this concept, and then to develop a plan of action for implementation.

C.Bourque reported on his research about Food Hubs. Fifteen of these currently exist in New England; right now there are none in Connecticut, but several initiatives are underway. A Food Hub is a centralized processing center where locally grown produce and/or meat can be processed--cleaned, cut up, frozen or canned, and appropriately stored if necessary, for consumption throughout the year--for institutional use in school cafeterias, hospitals, prisons, soup kitchens, etc. Ideally a Food Hub should have access to city sewer and water because of the health and food safety regulations applying to commercial food preparation kitchens. It is also advantageous for such a hub it to be centrally located in a region where there is a good concentration of farming of food for human consumption with efficient transportation routes from the farms to the hub and from the hub to the institutions it serves. Safe transportation of large quantities of food to the hub and subsequent distribution of the processed food need to be an important consideration in the business plan for a new Food Hub.

Colchester is in an ideal geographic position to capitalize on this concept and opportunity. It can potentially benefit both the community, in this case with an initial emphasis on improving the quality of food in our school cafeterias, and the local farmers who would get a centralized place to sell and have their harvest processed for safe consumption both during and after the growing season.

There are many communities and groups in New England as well as throughout the country who are making this concept a reality using a variety of business models. The Norwich, CT, Greenfield, MA, Vermont Fresh Network, Farm Fresh Rhode Island, New Milford, CT, and New Palz, NY operations were all discussed in some detail by various people at this meeting. Typically, significant amounts of grant money (up to amounts into the high six figures) are used to fund the up-front capital costs of starting-up the hubs. Experience in these places has been that the hubs become financially self-sustaining within three to five years after startup. Our community could take the best of what has already proven to be successful in other places and decide on a model that would work here. Clearly enough work has been done by other communities that we will not have to re-invent the wheel to do a good feasibility study.

So grant money is being made available and the next USDA grant round will close on May 1. Town Planner A.Turner has already obtained and reviewed a copy of the grant form and understands what information is required for its submission. Superintendent of Schools J.Mathieu made a short appearance during the meeting to assure the joint Commissions holding this meeting that he is very willing for the Colchester Schools to take a leading role in the advancement of this initiative.

B. Curran of the EDC asked about the impact of these (presumed) added costs of having local farm to school lunches would be to the taxpayers in Colchester. M. Halle and D. Kennedy both said that the cost of school lunches is designed to be self-sustaining in the Colchester Schools. That is, the salaries of the cafeteria employees are paid by taxpayers in the Board of Education budget, but the food served is a separate category with its own cost center funded directly by cost of the school lunches served. In Colchester, taxpayers do not subsidize the cost of the food. B. Fox of the EDC asked whether this project might lead to using some student labor as an education opportunity as well as cost savings to the project. These and many other issues can be addressed in a feasibility study, hopefully funded by grant money and not directly by local taxpayer dollars.

D. Wasniewski said that there has been an increasing awareness that the existence of robust local food systems are in the nation's best interests. Fifty years ago most food was locally produced. But since then there has been an increasing commercialization and much more highly centralized production of our nation's food supply. The initiatives under discussion at this meeting are representative of a "back to the future" concept that is gaining traction in the public consciousness. D. Cugno (a farmer of locally grown vegetables who sells his food at local farmers' markets) pointed out that the nutrition content of our current food supply is actually only about 20% of what the nutrition content of our grandparents' food supply used to be. K. Issa (EDC) asked about the awareness among our high school students of these food and nutrition-related issues and P. Catalano (EDC) asked if the students were actually interested in eating the sort of healthy and nutritious food that is being proposed by this initiative. K. Hackbarth, a current student at Bacon Academy, answered that the awareness of GMO issues along with concepts of water resource sustainability, etc., are currently being taught in some of the Bacon Academy classes and that many of his fellow students are becoming more aware of and interested in these issues which will affect the quality of their lives.

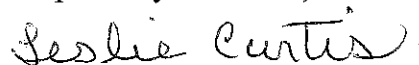
J. Ford recommended that he, C. Bourque and J. Mathieu meet with A. Turner and other interested parties to do the work necessary to prepare and submit a grant proposal for a feasibility study for the creation of a Food Hub here in Colchester. A. McAvay suggested that it might be helpful for this team to consult with the New London County Food Policy Council. The goal is to work to submit a grant proposal to to move this idea forward in by the Thursday, May 1 deadline for this upcoming USDA grant round.

### **3. Adjournment:**

L. Curtis moved to adjourn this special meeting at 8:06 P.M. and A. Zimmerman seconded. All in favor; carried.

The Economic Development Commission likewise adjourned this Special Joint Meeting item on their agenda at 8:06 and then they moved to another room of Town Hall to proceed with additional items on their own published agenda.

Respectfully submitted,



Leslie Curtis  
Alternate, Agriculture Commission