

Colchester Agriculture Commission Minutes

Monday, September 15, 2014, 7:00 P.M.

Town Hall, Room 3

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Attending: C.Bourque (Chair), A.Savitsky (Arrived at 7:16), D.Wasniowski,
A.Zimmerman, L.Curtis (Alternate)

Absent: O.Duksa

Liaisons attending: S.Soby (First Selectman),
M.Hallee and L.Hickey (Student Members of Board of Education)

Also attending: C.Csere

1. Call to Order:

Meeting was called to order by Chairman C.Bourque at 7:13 P.M.

2. Additions and/or changes to Agenda:

A.Zimmerman suggested that Agenda Item #3 not be acted upon at this meeting, pending further update of its format. All were in favor.

3. Approve minutes of the Agriculture Commission on May 19, 2014:

Tabled: No action taken.

4. Citizens comments:

None.

5. Chair Report:

C.Bourque said that he was pleased to report that there were two new women farmers in Colchester whose work he wished to bring to the attention of the public:

Susan Mitchell of Cloverleigh Farm, 617A Westchester Road (Route 149) is opening a new farm and intends to sell CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) shares for 8 weeks of organically grown vegetables next season. She is also introducing a program of selling 8 weeks of kale for \$80, designed especially for people who are using devices such as their juicers to incorporate raw fruits and vegetables more healthfully into their diets. She may be reached directly by phone at 860-373-6324 to sign up for these innovative programs.

Semkow Farms, operated by Robia Semkow on Parum Road will reopen for the fall season on September 20 and she has been at work this summer building up her inventory of seasonal plants.

Also there are two notable local agricultural themed events taking place in the coming weeks. On Saturday, October 20 the State of CT Department of Agriculture will sponsor a day-long Farm Celebration on the Lebanon Green. More info on CT DoAg website.

On Saturday, October 27 the New London County Farm Bureau is sponsoring a Pig Roast, Farm Maze, and Square Dance at the Jerry Graberck Farm on Route 2A in Preston which is open to the public. The cost for this event is \$12.50 and it begins at 5:00 P.M. The corn maze is "created in the old school way (without GPS), and is remarkable", said C.Bourque. More information is available at the Farm Bureau website.

6. Colchester Farm-to-School update:

M.Hallee and Colchester Food Services Supervisor K.Johnson attended a meeting held by A.McAvey, the New London County School Initiative Coordinator. M.Hallee described the initiative that was being promoted currently. Called the "Harvest of the Month" program, its aim is to demonstrate to both farmers and school system food supervisors that the farm-to-school initiatives are doable and in the interests of all participants. The idea is to coordinate the inclusion of one seasonal crop a month from one farm into school cafeteria lunch menu programs in New London County.

M Hallee also reported that the United Way of New London has been awarded a USDA pre-planning grant to study the feasibility of a food hub location in the region. At its April Joint Meeting, the the Colchester Agriculture Commission and Economic Development Commission were educated about the concepts involved in the creation of food hubs and the virtues of the Town of Colchester as a location for such a regional hub were discussed. It was decided that it is important for Colchester to make its wishes known to the United Way team early in its study to promote the benefits of locating such a food hub here.

A.Savitsky asked the student Board of Education representatives M.Hallee and L.Hickey whether students at Bacon Academy seem realistically interested in eating more healthfully. L.Hickey explained that with a full meal plan, a piece of fruit must be included on the lunch tray. M.Hallee opined that if students know the produce is locally grown, they will be more likely to be interested in eating it. As a side note, M.Hallee told us that apparently there is already an arrangement for the cafererias in Colchester to have a source of CT-grown apples, but other fruits have not yet been so locally sourced. It was also pointed out that the petition to have more healthy food in our school cafeterias was signed by over 500 people in town, many of them students.

C.Bourque said that he is aware of CSA's in the area that are available out until the end of November because more and more farmers are using high tunnel systems to extend the growing season and that there appears to be more and more interest in this sort of extended-season production of foods locally.

The students said there is an interest in starting a garden at the school but needed help with generating appropriate ideas for this, doing feasibility studies, etc. A. Zimmerman said that he belongs to the Colchester Giving Garden group which maintains a 30' x 30' fenced-in garden area behind the Senior Center on town-owned land and the produce is distributed to local food banks and other charitable groups in town. This group could be an excellent source of information for the student initiatives and the person to contact would be P.Filloramo. A. Zimmerman will help M.Hallee make contact with her.

C.Bourque noted that another round of CT Dept. of Agriculture Viability Grants are available and paperwork must be submitted by the end of October. He will take the lead in dealing with the Board of Education to see whether it would be an opportune time for the BoE at its next meeting on Tuesday, September 23, to investigate structuring such a grant request

for student gardens at Bacon Academy. He will also consult Town Planner A. Turner and Economic Development Commission Chairman J. Ford to see whether there are projects that would be appropriate to pursue with potential funding of such Ag Viability Grants.

M. Hallee and L. Hickey also plan to visit a one acre farm in Waterford operated by the Farm Fresh New London County group to get further inspiration for these initiatives.

7. Colchester POCD Update:

On Wednesday, September 17, the final draft of the Colchester Plan of Conservation and Development (POCD) will be on the agenda of the Planning and Zoning Commission at its regularly scheduled meeting at Town Hall at 7:00 P.M. C. Bourque is the official Agriculture Commission Representative to these deliberations, but it was stressed that all citizens are welcome at this meeting. A revised copy of the POCD as it is currently worded is available on the Town of Colchester website: colchesterct.gov. L. Curtis added that the Colchester Land Trust will also be officially represented at this important meeting by its President, A. George. This will be the last opportunity for public input into this document. The P&Z will vote on it once all revisions have been included. This process is drawing to a conclusion.

8. Farm Building Tax Exemption:

C. Bourque reported that he and A. Savitsky have received a list from the Assessor of all farms that qualify for this potential tax abatement program under CT statutes. The requirement is that paperwork must be on file so that the farm is officially recognized as a commercial entity and that the qualifying buildings must be used solely for agricultural purposes. The potential exemption could be as much as \$100,000 per qualifying farm building.

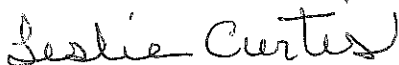
The Assessor provided a list of the 20 farms in Colchester that qualify and has provided their property cards. C. Bourque, A. Savitsky, and J. Nichols of the Farm Bureau are tallying and analyzing this data to discover the fiscal impact to the town if ultimately approved. C. Bourque said that from preliminary data examined, it appears that while this tax break could be of great benefit to the qualifying farms, the total fiscal impact to the Town would be of a manageable magnitude. The cost/benefit analysis is expected to show a win-win for both the Town's qualifying farmers and the its taxpayers.

Once a thorough fiscal analysis has been completed, the data will be presented to the Agriculture Commission and after that to the Board of Selectmen and other interested town government entities.

9. Adjournment:

D. Wasniewski moved to adjourn the meeting at 8:05 P.M. and A. Savitsky seconded. All in favor; carried.

Respectfully submitted,



Leslie Curtis

Alternate, Agriculture Commission