

Colchester Agriculture Commission Minutes
Monday, October 17, 2016, 7:00 P.M.
Town Hall Room 3

Attending: Chris Bourque (Chairman), Olivia Duksa, David Wasniewski,
Leslie Curtis (Alternate)

Absent: ^{Donna} ~~Dora~~ Rosenblatt

Also Attending: Selectman Stan Soby (Liaison to Board of Selectmen),
Randy Benson (Town Planner, arrived at 7:54),
and Charline DaSilva, Melissa Elliott, Jason Savistky, Larua Sokoloski
(all four were representing the ad hoc farm to school working group)

1. Call to Order:

Meeting was called to order by Chairman C. Bourque at 7:05 P.M.

2. Additions and/or changes to Agenda:

None. (But it was suggested by L. Curtis that in the future there should always be an agenda item for "New Business" to cover unanticipated matters brought up in the course of the meeting discussions and deliberations. Chairman Bourque agreed.)

3. Approve minutes of the Agriculture Commission on August 15, 2016:

MOTION: L. Curtis moved to approve the minutes of the August 15, 2016 Agriculture Commission Meeting as submitted. O. Duksa seconded.

VOTE: Approved, with L. Curtis Abstaining due to her absence at the August meeting.

4. Citizens comments:

None.

5. Farm to School:

An ad hoc working group of interested farmers, educators, students, and community members has been formed to further the goals of expanding an agriculture component into classroom studies at all grade levels in the Colchester school system as well as to enhance efforts to bring more farm-fresh, locally produced food into the cafeterias of all schools in town. This group currently has about twenty members including Agriculture Commission members (both of whom are farmers) C. Bourque and D. Wasniewski. Speaking at tonight's meeting about the activities of this this working group were: J. Savistky (local farmer), L. Sokoloski (a Senior at Bacon Academy) and C DaSilva and M. Elliott (both second grade teachers at the Colchester Elementary School).

Chairman Bourque explained that the "Farm to School" initiative has expanded from its initial concept of getting local non-GMO food options into our school cafeterias to getting an agricultural education component included in the curriculum at all grade levels.

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The presenters from the ad hoc working group presented a **list of its current initiatives in our schools, which is hereby included as an attachment to and will be part of the the minutes of this meeting.** There is a great enthusiasm building for this program across the grade spectrum in our schools and interest is growing in the farming community. For just a few examples:

- 1) our second graders are now learning to compost appropriate parts of the leftovers from their in-school snacks;
- 2) the high school students have recently planted 6 apple trees on the grounds of Bacon Academy and created a garden at the high school, tended by students during the year and student volunteers during the summer, and
- 3) several local farmers including Savitsky Farm have recently begun providing some vegetables to the school cafeterias and they and other farmers are working to increase the quantity of fresh and local produce on the school menus in the future.

Chairman Bourque informed us that there are Agriculture Viability Grants available from the Connecticut Department of Agriculture. These grants are competitive, have a 50-50 match requirement, and can be valued as much as \$50,000. The deadline for the current round of grant applications is November 14, 2016. Mr. Bourque has spoken with Jamie Smith at the CT Dept of Agriculture who encouraged him to have the Town pursue this avenue of funding.

Selectman Soby suggested that Chairman Bourque contact the First Selectman's office to set up a meeting with him and the Superintendent of Schools to try to get the buy-in from the Board of Education and figure out a potential source of funding for a potential 50-50 match. Meanwhile the ad hoc working group will identify some projects for which it may be possible to write and submit a grant within the tight time deadline.

No vote was necessary on any of these matters under discussion, but the consensus is that the Agriculture Commission is fully supportive of all these Farm to School initiatives.

7. Zoning Regulation Change Proposal:

Town Planner Randy Benson has been reviewing the new zoning regulations and realized that they do not allow for keeping livestock in Suburban zones. However since the zoning map was redrawn during the last wholesale changes to the code, some large parcels of land were unavoidably re-zoned into the suburban zone. Some of these parcels are large enough that they might very well be able to support the keeping of livestock, and a discussion ensued about the methodology to determine appropriate regulations for this.

It was decided that Mr. Benson and his staff will do an inventory of the number of parcels that may be affected by a potential change in the zoning regulations and also research what ordinances and regulations other CT towns may have in regard to this situation. Mr. Benson will bring a list of affected properties to the next Agriculture Commission meeting (November 19) for further discussion on this topic.

The goal will be to craft language into our current zoning regulations that will provide guidelines to permit such agricultural use of land in the suburban zones that would eliminate much (if not all) of the need for having to use the tool of special permitting on a case-by-case basis when exceptions may reasonably be made to the underlying ordinances. This is a very pro-active approach to making Colchester an even more agriculture-friendly community.

9. Adjournment:

O.Duksa moved to adjourn the meeting at 8:22 P.M. and D.Wasniewski seconded. All were in favor; motion carried.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Leslie Curtis".

Leslie Curtis
Alternate, Agriculture Commission

NOTE: The Attachment on next page is part of the Minutes of this meeting

ATTACHMENT TO MINUTES

Monday: October 17th, agriculture committee

1. Introduce ourselves and others on the committee
 - a. People from all Colchester schools
 - b. Local Farmers: Chris Burke, Dave Wasniewski, Jason Savitsky
2. Current programs in Colchester
 - a. Composting in 2nd grade
 - b. Keepin it Fresh production company
 - c. School garden at middle school
 - d. School garden at high school
 - e. Farm to school
3. Purpose
 - a. Starting small and using current programs as foundation for future environmental operations
 - i. Building garden beds at multiple schools
 - ii. More composting opportunities at other schools
 - iii. Indoor growing systems like aquaponics or hydroponics at schools
 - b. We will reach out to community stakeholders and more staff within the schools to help maintain and keep these programs sustainable and functioning throughout all seasons. With student driven learning, students will experience hands-on learning and will be encouraged to participate over the summer break. A similar model has been successful at the high school and other elementary schools.
 - c. There are various schools that have successfully implemented and utilized these concepts like Mansfield and Natick. When researching and observing these schools it is evident that there are clear environmental and community connections with this educational approach.
 - d. As teachers, we can see how this type of curriculum seamlessly fits into all curricular areas, such as literacy, math, science, social studies, health and physical education.
 - e. Beginning with students at such a young age we have had the privilege of experiencing their high interest and and love of environmental awareness with only the beginning stages of a composting curriculum. As we add to this foundational component, with continued access to real-world connections and student driven learning, students will have more exposure to the content and experts as mentors. If given the opportunity for additional programs students will have the chance to continue and grow upon their current learning as they progress through the grades! Thus developing lifelong learners in an area that impact learning in school and their everyday lives.