

WEST BOYLSTON OPEN SPACE IMPLEMENTATION COMMITTEE MEETING

Animal Medical Center, Conference Room
29 Prospect Street
West Boylston, MA 01583

Monday, August 31, 2009

Members Present: Dr. Tashjian, Brian Bjorklund, Brenda Bowman, Barbara Wyatt, Vin Vignaly

Members Absent: Jim Edmundson, Ray DeSanti

Others Present: Diana Engelbart (Sustainability Committee), Larry Salate (Planning Board), Agriculture Committee Members: Pat Pepi (Chair), Sighe Philbin (Vice Chair), Erin Palumbo, Peg Rotti, Frank Perla

Dr. Tashjian called the meeting to order at 7:10. Vignaly to be clerk for the meeting.

The minutes from the July 27, 2009 meeting were unanimously approved as amended. Motion was made by Brenda, and seconded by Brian.

Ag Committee members recounted their personal experiences and efforts to farm. They want to provide an organization in West Boylston to support existing farmers and insure that there are opportunities to encourage new, young, enthusiastic farmers. Pepi noted that the Ag Committee is a newly formed group and are making good progress identifying areas of potential interest and involvement for the Agriculture Commission.

Dr. Tashjian reviewed recent and historic agriculture issues in West Boylston, with particular emphasis on Malden Brook Farm where they are proceeding with some interesting projects:

- The American Veterinary Medical Frontiers, Inc (AVMF) (www.vetfrontiers.org) is a 501(c)(3) perpetuating foundation whose motto is "Preserving Open Space for the Ages with Agriculture and Veterinary Medicine". The tax exempt status allows swift receipt of donations, fundraising, and financing of project that are not available to "Town" organizations. A very qualified Board of Trustees has been established for this foundation to guide and monitor for many years in the future.
- AVMF is cooperating with Harbin Veterinary Research Institute (HVRI), Harbin, China (www.hvri.ac.cn) through an international agreement with Dr. Jianhua Zhou, of HVRI (A National Chinese Institute of Veterinary Research), and is associated with the Chinese Academy of Agricultural Sciences, and the Chinese Ministry of Agriculture. This could provide the means to implement cooperative college internships and/or training programs that could be expanded to other farms in the region. Equine Infectious Anemia (EIA), antiserums, and pandemic preparations are all part of the international collaboration research. The reason for the change of focus to international cooperative efforts was necessitated by the lack of funding from Federal Stimulus Funds in central Massachusetts. The cooperative effort was supported by a quote in a July 21, 1998, letter from then-Senator Edward Kennedy for "an international union of scientists and doctors to develop vaccines that would benefit man and animal", and "apply the technology of the Chinese Equine Infectious Anemia (EIA) Vaccine, which used a method of attenuation of the virus through the cells of animals, in order to create additional vaccines for viruses such as HIV. By studying

the Chinese methods used in developing the vaccines, it is hoped that many more useful treatments can be developed which will assist animals and humans who are infected with disease such as AIDS.”. AVMF and HVRI will be submitting a combined publication on EIA (Equine Infectious Anemia) to the New York Times and Wall Street Journal. Also, a coordinated website will be established at “ABC@Malden Brook.org”.

- The significance of cooperative efforts with DCR and MDAR for the future of Malden Brook Farm and the Town of West Boylston in general was discussed. Dr. Tashjian noted that these agencies are strong supporters of properly located and managed agriculture operations. He praised Paula Packard and Jim French from the DCR; as well as Michelle Padula of MDAR; and encouraged the Ag Committee to use these agencies to the fullest extent possible. Engelbart offered her technical writing skills to the aid of Malden Brook Farm.
- Dr. Tashjian discussed the opportunities for reviving agriculture on portions of properties in West Boylston that were acquired by DCR. There are limitations due to the surface water quality concerns, but he has been allowed to lease portions along Prospect Street and referenced others along Prescott Street and Fairbanks Street. He has worked with the DCR and MDAR for years to keep the Malden Brook Farm in service, which as the name states, has Malden Brook running through the center.
- Dr. Tashjian raised the concerns noted by the OSIC on soil botulism on properties along Prospect Street in its June 15, 2009 letter regarding the land transfer with DCR. The Committee encouraged the Ag Committee to investigate the information and make their decisions. Requests to the Selectmen that testing be conducted are needed to make sure that this concern is not forgotten in the process. Using the University of Pennsylvania, School of Veterinary Medicine is not the issue; but the testing needs to be done by a qualified laboratory certified in this specific protocol.
- Dr. Tashjian explained that there are 14 biocontainment laboratories in the US, with two in Massachusetts. These are different from the AVMF program, which will monitor existing wildlife and farm animals. The biocontainment labs potentially could release contaminants that would damage or overwhelm our open space, agriculture, and environment with serious permanent lethal consequences. Continued vigilance is needed.

Vignaly explained the “Last Frontier” noted to be a priority area of protection in the OS&R plan refers to all undeveloped property from Holden along Malden Brook to the Wachusett Reservoir. Principally along and west of Prospect Street that is owned by private parties or the DCR. This area provides a regional corridor to extensive open spaces in adjacent towns on both ends.

Vignaly and Bowman reported on the Selectmen’s meeting regarding the APR Municipal Application on August 5th, 2009. Following a lengthy question and answer session, the concerns of the Selectmen that this would cost the town money was addressed and they voted to sign the paper. Vignaly said that the support letters sent from Open Space Committee and Agricultural Commission were very much appreciated because he believed these were the reason the application was signed.

Pepi noted that the Ag Committee is interested in a Community Farming program, increasing participation in the Chapter 61, 61A, and 61B programs, and promoting the school agriculture

program. She explained that someone is working with the schools to have a gardening/farming aspect included on these properties. They have started to look into a Right-To-Farm bylaw, but do not expect it to be ready for the October Town Meeting.

Vignaly began a discussion of potential directions that the Ag Committee could follow. Pepi explained that they are getting things together and will meet again tomorrow night to go into more detail on this. The OSIC expressed its support for them and offered any assistance that they might need or joint meetings to discuss issues of shared interest. Vignaly reviewed the Open Space Plan Action Items relative to agriculture, plus recent additions that became evident during the APR application process. The top 5 discussed were:

1. Ensuring that the tracking system implemented by the Building Inspector to prevent issuance of local permits for unauthorized construction on protected farmland, as noted in the APR Application.
2. Draft a Right-To-Farm Bylaw and begin public education and publicity.
3. Establish a Town policy outlining general steps to be followed when landowners in town intend to convert or sell their Chapter 61, 61A or 61B land. (Vignaly gave Pepi examples of this from Williamsburg and Wendell)
4. Compile an inventory of existing and historic farmland that should be protected.
5. Establish an Ag Committee Web Page (assistance from the IT person in West Boylston, Karen Paré, to the Planning Board was great!) Salate will provide contact information to Pepi. This will allow for advertising of Ag-related issues and area farmers markets. (Sterling, Holden, and Worcester already have them!)

The Agriculture Committee thanked the OSIC for all the information and ideas, and they adjourned at approximately 8:50.

Wyatt reported on the Economic Development Committee's discussions of the need to stir up business activity, and that the town was told it does not qualify for ETA because the business vacancy rate is too low!

Bowman expressed concern over the 40B procedure in town and encouraged people to get involved with the repeal of 40B petitioning.

Dr. Tashjian explained to the committee that there is no funding available (about \$1,000) to sponsor a tent at the Sterling Fair this year. The committee thanked him for past sponsorship, because most members did not know that it cost anything.

Next meeting was set for Monday October 5 at 7:00 at the Animal Medical Center.

Bowman motioned to adjourn the meeting at 10:30, seconded by Bjorklund. Unanimous.

Submitted by: _____ Approved: 10/5/09
Vincent P. Vignaly