

AGRICULTURE COMMISSION
January 23, 2012
Town Hall - Room 3 - 7:00 P.M.
MINUTES AND MOTIONS

Received for record at Colchester, Conn.
on JANUARY 24, 2012 at 2:49 P.M.
Attest, Nancy A. Bray, Town Clerk

Present: Elizabeth Gilman, Leslie Curtis, Alex Savitsky,
Jeff Savitsky (Alternate), Andrew Lyons (Alternate)

Absent: David Wasniewski, Joanne Becker

Others Present: Stan Soby (Selectman), Adam Turner (Town Planner) ,
Chris Bourque (CT Farm Bureau Liaison), Doug Wray

1. Call to order:
Chairman Gilman called to order at 7:07.
2. Additions to the agenda:
Motion: Add a discussion about funding for farmland preservation and moved up to first on old business agenda made by E. Gilman, seconded by L. Curtis, and unanimously passed.
3. Approve minutes of the December 19, 2011 Agriculture Commission meeting:

Motion: L. Curtis moved that correspondence about the Slow Food movement received at the December meeting be appended to the official minutes on record, seconded by A. Savitsky, and unanimously approved.

Motion: Approve minutes as amended made by A. Savitsky, seconded by L. Curtis, and unanimously approved.
4. Citizens comments:

C. Bourque made comments about three aspects of the Agriculture Commission's charge:
 - a. Reminded the Commission that the study of tax exemption for farm buildings in accordance with CT state statutes was agreed upon as a major goal of the farming community in 2009. This study and its fiscal impacts upon the Town of Colchester is included in a current grant request to the CT Department of Agriculture. Grants will be awarded in February. Mr. Bourque recommended that the Agriculture Commission proceed with this impact study independently in the event that the town's grant request is not approved this round.
 - b. Reminded the Commission that the CT Department of Agriculture has allocated two million dollars for the purpose of municipal farmland preservation and that the Town is working to fulfill the prerequisites for eligibility to receive money for farmland preservation from this source. He noted that bonding for farmland preservation is an important part of positioning the town to be eligible for such state grants.
 - c. Urged to Commission to become involved in inventorying Colchester's farmland assets, which is another prerequisite for eligibility for the state grants discussed in item 2 above.
5. Correspondence:
None received by Commission.
6. Chair report:
E. Gilman requested that Commission members contact her two weeks before a scheduled meeting with requests to add items to the upcoming meeting agenda.

7. Old business:

a-1. Discussion of Funding for Farmland Preservation:

A. Turner said that funding for open space and farmland is a priority in the Town Planner's fiscal year 2013 budget. He also announced that the National Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) study of Soils of Local Importance in Colchester has just been completed. This is a prerequisite for getting funding from the state to preserve our farmland. The

deadline

for pre-qualification of Town eligibility to compete for state Farm Viability Grants is May 31, 2012. He said the Office of Town Planner is continuing to insure that all prerequisites set by the state for these highly competitive grants are being met. He also pointed out that the commitment of substantial money to these purposes is necessary in order for the state to view the Town as truly serious about its commitment to land

preservation

and therefore deems it eligible to receive substantial state grants to help achieve these

ends.

S. Soby reported that Colchester's Board of Selectmen (BOS) and Board of Finance (BOF) are already having discussions about possible sources of funding for land preservation, including possible bonding by the Town to meet these goals.

L. Curtis spoke in favor of a commitment by the town to include potentially several millions of dollars in bonding for farmland preservation to the budget for fiscal year 2013 and beyond. Appropriate funding is critical to take advantage of state matching grants and insure that our land owners can be fairly compensated for keeping their land open for agricultural uses in

the

long term instead of selling out to developers. This is critical to help maintaining the rural character of Colchester over the long term. Also bonding interest rates are historically low right now and land prices are still relatively depressed, so the long term benefit of acting boldly and decisively for the long term is especially attractive in the current budgeting cycle.

C. Bourque pointed out that the citizens in Town of Pomfret, CT, which is much smaller than Colchester, had recently approved bonding of this magnitude for these same purposes, so

we

as a town should not be afraid to aim high to have the funds necessary to preserve a large portion of our agricultural heritage as land becomes up for sale from time to time in the

future.

E. Gilman noted that many surrounding towns have voted in favor of very large bonding

issues

to preserve farmland and other open space. She noted examples such as the Town of Glastonbury whose citizens voted to bond for multi-millions of dollars in order to save large tracts of farmland along the Connecticut River when development threatened to displace historical agricultural uses.

A. Lyons pointed out that residential development of former agricultural lands and other

open

space is very expensive in the long run to all taxpayers in town since with increased

residential

density comes the need for more expensive civic services (schools, police, etc.) and

increased

wear and tear of the local infrastructure.

C. Bourque related that the Colchester Land Trust (CLT) Landowner Contact Committee is

which it currently working on identifying and prioritizing a list of farms and open space parcels
suggested deems critical to attempt to preserve in accordance with its mission statement. He
grant that the Agriculture Commission do the same from its unique perspective since the state
programs. requires that towns identify such priorities as a prerequisite for eligibility for its various

a A suggestion was made to have a subcommittee of the Commission assigned to work on
project to identify the Agriculture Commissions list of factors to consider in order to have a
methodology in place to rank and prioritize future potential important preservation
projects. S. Soby suggested that a five member subcommittee is probably an optimal number to get
this important task done. E. Gliman requested that each Commission member recommend a
list of five people with areas of expertise to possibly be subcommittee members in the future. She
asked that these names be given to her no later than February 13, 2012.

A. Turner indicated that he would like to discuss farmland ranking strategies with the
Commission at a future meeting.

of Motion: "That the Agriculture Commission strongly recommends that the Colchester Board
and Selectmen and Board of Finance allocate a meaningful level of funding for
preservation of farmland in the town of Colchester for the fiscal year 2013 budget
approved. beyond." Moved by A. Lyons and seconded by A. Savitsky; unanimously

7. Other Old Business (continued):

a. Discussion and possible action on the status of the Economic Impact of Open Space grant:
in February. No new information available. State grant request recipients will be announced

b. Discussion and possible action on by-laws:
will A very rough draft of proposed by-laws was produced by D. Wasniewski with input from
L. Curtis. This document will be forwarded by email to all Agriculture Commission
members. S. Soby also requested that he receive a copy of this draft. Any comments
and suggestions for improvement should be sent directly (and solely) to D. Wasniewski
for his consideration for incorporation in a second draft. This updated draft document
be discussed at the February meeting.

c. Discussion and possible action of 2007 Farmland Viability Survey recommendations:
E, Gilman asked Commission members to refresh themselves about these suggestions
and be prepared to discuss them at the February meeting.

d. Discussion and possible action on procedures for handling farmer's concerns and complaints:
Gilman C. Bourque suggested that someone on the Commission contact towns such as
Guilford, Thompson, and Sterling, CT, to determine what their procedures are. E.
volunteered to contact these towns and get relevant information in order to report back to
the Commission in February.

C. Bourque also suggested that a distinction be made about the Commission's role in resolution of conflicts between members of the community vs. its advocacy role when, for example, agricultural interests and town regulations might be at the root of a dispute between a farmer and a town entity or department.

e. Discussion and possible action of change in 490A acreage requirements:
No new information available. Table this until a future meeting.

f. Discussion and possible action on future location of Colchester Farmers Market:
J. Savitsky reported on communiques between the Colchester Farmers Market and Ned Tewksbury of the Quinnebaug Valley Engineers. No Commission action necessary.

8. New Business:

a. Discussion of Tax Exemptions for Farm Buildings:

C. Bourque pointed out that this was identified as one of the original major concerns of the Colchester farming community. Discussion about this was tabled until a future meeting.

9. Adjournment:

A. Lyons moved to adjourn at 8:43 P.M., seconded by A. Savitsky; unanimously approved.