

Colchester Agriculture Commission
Minutes of Meeting
Monday, November 19, 2012 - 7:00 P.M.
Town Hall, Room 1

Attending: J.Becker, L.Curtis, E.Gillman, J.Savitsky(Alternate), D.Wasniewski
A.Savitsky (arrived at 7:42)

Liaisons attending: S.Soby (Board of Selectmen),
A. Turner (Town Planner--arrived at 8:13 due to scheduling conflict),
C.Bourque (New London County Farm Bureau)

Also attending: S.Desrosiers, S.Muirhead, D.Wray

1. Call to Order:

Meeting was called to order by Chairman E.Gillman at 7:04 P.M.

2. Additions to Agenda:

None.

3. Approve Minutes of the Agricultural Commission on October 15, 2012:

MOTION: J.Becker moved that the minutes be approved as submitted. D.Wasniewski seconded. There was no discussion and the motion was **approved with one commission member (E.Gillman) abstaining** because she had not been present at the October meeting.

4. Citizen's Comments.

None.

5. Chairman's Report:

E.Gillman called upon Commission members to try to stay aware of legislation at the national level which could affect local programs. She pointed out that the Farm Bill has not yet been passed by congress and needs to be addressed by this lame duck congress in order for many federal programs (including those that allocate grant money funding) to continue seamlessly.

6) Old Business:

a) Updates from Town Planner concerning the Slembeck Farm.

(Note: This topic was actually addressed at the end of the Old Business when Town Planner A.Turner was able to be present with this commission .)

A. Turner reported that he is still dealing with three different parties who are interested in buying the Slembeck property to keep it protected for active agricultural use. He reported that there are still many other other state and federal agencies and other conservation groups

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involved in trying to put together a successful transaction to keep protections on this parcel going forward. Mr. Turner said that he is continuing to do what he can to facilitate the private purchase of this farm so that it can remain in agricultural usage, but since this will be a private transaction there is a limited role for the Town to play at this stage of the negotiations between the seller and the prospective buyers.

b) Update on Town's adoption of regulations suggested in “Guidance & Recommendations for CT Municipal Zoning Regs and Ordinances for Livestock”.

(Like 6a, this item was discussed nearer the end of the Old Business part of the agenda when A. Turner was present.)

Selectman S.Soby distributed a draft of the Agricultural Uses addressed in the comprehensive revision of the town's planning and zoning ordinances and regulations which has been prepared by the office of the Town Planner. Regulations are being presented to and feedback is being requested from all the Town's boards and commissions prior to release of the entire document online for all the citizens to read and comment on.

Chairman Gillman charged each of the CAC members and alternates to carefully review the Agricultural Uses document prior to the December meeting. Town Planner A. Turner will be present at this next meeting to answer specific questions about the concepts and wordings in this document. It was noted and discussed that language still present in this draft makes it obvious that the Planning and Zoning Commission (P&Z) has not yet acted favorably on the Agriculture Commission's official recommendation that the Town's adopt the principles and language in “Guidance & Recommendations for CT Municipal Zoning Regs and Ordinances for Livestock”. Mr. Turner reported that the P&Z had discussed this at length at a previous meeting but determined not to act on the CAC's recommendation in this case.

Mr. Turner said that staffers G.Therrian and C.Grimord had worked very hard to draw up this new document (which is over 200 pages), starting from scratch, the first such comprehensive revision of these regulations and ordinances in more than 30 years. The plan is that shortly after Thanksgiving the entire document will become available on the Town website and the general public will be solicited for further input. There will also be public hearings about the contents of these new rules and regulations.

The goal of this commission is first to understand the current draft of this document. If there are disagreements in principle with the P&Z's approved draft, the intent would be to raise them first with A.Turner at the next meeting. After that the next step might be to schedule a joint meeting of the Agriculture Commission and the P&Z to discuss and, hopefully, amend the document where there are areas of concern within the farming community with the provisions as set forth in the current draft of these rules and regulations.

c) Discussion and possible action on the formation of a local CERT training for response for livestock emergencies.

C.Bourque reported that a plan is taking shape at the state level to have the Town of Colchester take the lead role in setting up training of CERT teams who are specifically trained as first responders to emergencies involving large animal livestock. The Town of Colchester has identified more than 12 volunteers with livestock handling experience to participate in specialized training to become CERT certified in this specialty. J.Williams (Head of Region 4 of the State Emergency Management office) has given the green light to this approach.

It was also reported that Town Fire Marshal R. Gustafson has agreed to set up this specialized training here in Colchester after the first of the new year. The goal is to have each town in the Region 4 of CT (largely those on the Eastern side of the state) have its own trained first responder teams for livestock emergencies to augment the 30 member existing CERT certified responder team. The New London County Farm Bureau will promote this training and funds will be available from FEMA and the state Farm Bureau to underwrite the associated costs of these training sessions.

d) Discussion and possible action on finalizing the Agriculture Commission By-Laws:

D. Wasniewski had previously presented a draft of proposed by-laws for this commission which were circulated via email from the Chairman to the members. L. Curtis made some further revisions to the Wasniewski version which she sent to E. Gillman. These revisions dated 11/19/12 were also printed out and presented to the CAC for further comment at the meeting. Several changes were recommended by S. Soby and others present at the meeting, and the resulting changes will be incorporated by L. Curtis who will send this draft to E. Gillman. Commission members will get this document by email prior to the next regularly scheduled meeting. The intent is to have a final draft to vote on these By-Laws at the regular December meeting of the CAC.

e) Discussion and possible action on the tax rates for the 490 program with the goal of adhering to the current CT Dept of Agriculture guidelines for valuations of all farmland in town:

C. Bourque, D. Wray, and L. Curtis all pointed out that this topic was one which was identified in the Agriculture Viability Study from 2007 and was given a very high priority by the farming community at a well attended forum several years ago. So the Agriculture Committee clearly has a mandate to begin to address this concern.

The 490 legislation by the state of Connecticut provides guidance to the towns about valuation dollar amounts for various classes of farm and forest lands in CT towns, but these state Dept of Agriculture guidelines are not mandatory or enforceable at the local level because CT is a Home Rule state. C. Bourque suggested that before we could begin to study how to recommend changes to the "perception that there may be inequities" in the current valuation results, we first would need to completely understand current valuation methodology as is put into practice by the Assessor. He suggested that the CAC might invite the Assessor to a meeting of the CAC to give a presentation to the Commission about the specifics of the valuation methodology that is currently used for all 490A (Agriculture) and 490F (Forest) properties here in Colchester.

Chairman Gillman will invite the Assessor to come and do so at the earliest possible regularly scheduled CAC meeting. As soon as the Assessor has agreed to a specific date to do this, this topic will be put on the agenda.

f) Any other old business deemed necessary.

C. Bourque reported that he has been coordinating the effort to utilize the Zagray Farm for

some sort of town supported agricultural enterprise which might supply food crop or crops (while not being in direct competition with the local Farmers' Market) and also might have an agricultural education component. He has so far met with the Grange, the Garden Club, the Historical Society, the Quinnebaug Engineers, the UConn Agricultural Extension Service, and now the Ag Commission in an attempt to bring together all interested constituencies to further these goals of making the Zagray Farm a more productive agricultural resource for this town.

One idea that he mentioned is that there may be a way to grow and harvest a grain crop on this old farm using the historic machinery owned now by the Quinnebaug Engineers. Such a crop, for one example, might be used to bake bread for the local soup kitchens. This is just one idea for the synergies which might happen in a well thought-out and diversely supported endeavor. He asked if the CAC would like to take a leadership role in such an effort. This idea will be mulled over by the commission members and addressed more formally at a future meeting, but no action was taken on this idea at this meeting.

7. New Business:

S.Muirhead came to this meeting to describe briefly her idea to create an interest group or club to sponsor the public screening of documentary films pertaining to the food supply and many of the issues which relate to this topic. She said that she has already received permission from many independent filmmakers to exhibit their work in a public setting and asked if the CAC would be interested in helping with this initiative.

Because this was not on the official agenda for this meeting, Chairman Gillman asked S.Muirhead to come to the next regularly scheduled meeting to make a more formal presentation of this idea. Also it was suggested that this would be a great area for an Education subcommittee to investigate and report back to the full Commission.

MOTION: L Curtis moved that the Colchester Agriculture Commission form an Education subcommittee. A.Savitsky seconded.

Discussion consisted of ascertaining that commission members D.Wasniewski and J.Becker would volunteer to serve on this subcommittee. Also C.Bourque and S.Muirhead said they would like to participate in these subcommittee discussions.

Motion passed unanimously.

8. Adjournment:

MOTION: J.Becker moved to adjourn the meeting at 9:09 P.M. D.Wasniewski seconded. Unanimously approved.

Respectfully submitted,



Leslie Curtis
Secretary