

Colchester Agriculture Commission
Minutes of Meeting
Monday, July 15, 2013 – 6:30 P.M.
Town Hall, Room 3

NANCY A. BRAY
TOWN CLERK

Nancy A. Bray

2013 JUL 16 PM 4:15

RECEIVED
COLCHESTER, CT

Members Attending: L. Curtis, D. Wasniewski, A. Zimmerman

Members Absent: A. Savistky (Also J. Becker whose letter of resignation has not yet been officially been accepted by the Board of Selectmen.)

Others Attending: S. Soby (Board of Selectmen), A. Turner (Town Planner)

1. Call to Order:

Meeting was called to order by Vice Chairman D. Wasniewski (acting as Chairman for this meeting) at 6:30 P.M.

2. Additions to Agenda: None.

3. Approve Minutes of the Agriculture Commission on May 20, 2013:

MOTION: A. Zimmerman moved that the minutes of the May 20, 2013 Agriculture Commission be approved. L. Curtis seconded.

Discussion: L. Curtis asked that the minutes be amended to show that the assessment on excess acreage as discussed by the Assessor (on page 3 of the minutes) be corrected to the figure of \$1400 per acre (not the \$1440 per acre that she had transcribed in error in the minutes.) Also S. Soby pointed out that the time of adjournment be corrected from "8:325" to 8:32 P.M.--obviously a typographical error.

Motion (including the above corrections) was **approved, with A. Zimmerman abstaining** because he had not been seated as a full voting member of the commission during the conduct of the May meeting.

4. Citizen's Comments: None.

5. Chairman's Report: None.

6. Discussion and possible action regarding Land Use Issues of Interest to this Commission:

a) Update and status of revisions to Colchester's Plan of Conservation and Development (POCD):

Town Planner A. Turner reported that the Town had received funding and issued a formal RFP (Request for Proposal) to bid on a contract to update the Town of Colchester's Plan of Conservation and Development (POCD). Several bids were received and ultimately the committee selected the firm of Planimetrics headed by Glen Chalder to go forward with this work. This is the same firm that had worked with Colchester to produce the 2001 POCD. A contract with Planimetrics has been drafted and will be presented to the Board of Selectmen at their next meeting on Thursday, July 18, for its approval.

After this has been done the Planning and Zoning Commission (P&Z) will assume the oversight of this project. The Office of the Town Planner will be the main administrative source of information to and liaison with Planimetrics personnel. The expectation is that P&Z will schedule at least one meeting per month for approximately six months after contract approval to review the progress on this project and provide its input. Also it is expected that Chairs of the other Town Commissions will be regularly consulted as this POCD is developed and updated to reflect the changes that have taken place and new dynamics of community development that have become apparent in Colchester during the past twelve years. An important part of this input will be to gather information about the whole range of issues facing this community to come up with a comprehensive new POCD which will help to shape the future character of our town in a thoughtful manner. The Agriculture Commission is looking forward to being included in these deliberations on an ongoing basis.

After the plan has been professionally drafted, there will be a series of five public meetings so that individual citizens and other community groups may have the opportunity to have direct input into the finalization of this very important policy and planning guidance document. The State of Connecticut has set a new statutory deadline of July 2015 for submission of these plans from various towns throughout the state whose POCD submissions would have been overdue by the language of the original statute. Mr. Turner said that he expects that Colchester will be able to submit its updated POCD well before then.

b) Status and timetable of Revisions to Colchester's Zoning Regulations and Ordinances:

The input from all Colchester Boards and Commissions was completed last month. The revisions to the draft document are currently being made by the Town Planner and his staff based on all input that has been received to date. The expectation is that the final draft of the new regulations will be presented to the P&Z Commission during August for discussion and possible further revisions, then presented formally to the P&Z in September for a vote on its intent to adopt these changes. After this vote (intent to adopt) has been passed by the P&Z, there must be Public Notice for a period of 30 days. This will be done by printed notices in the "Rivereast" newspaper referring to the updated draft of the document which will be available for review both online on the town's website (colchesterct.gov) and by paper copies available at Town Hall, as may be necessary. After the 30 days' notice has elapsed, there will be a Public Hearing on these revisions before the P&Z can formally vote for adoption.

A. Turner pointed out that the last complete overhaul of these regulations and ordinances was done about 30 years ago and the document has been revised piecemeal over the ensuing time. In the course of these revisions there came to be some inadvertent inconsistencies within and between various sections of this document such that further attempt to revise the original document had become increasingly inadvisable. Mr. Turner applauded the Agriculture Commission for its very thorough and specific involvement in the process particularly in regard to the many issues of importance to the farming community. He said that our input had doubtless improved the quality of the final document by taking into account the issues of importance to this constituency by suggesting new concepts and wording changes to reflect its best current thinking and practices.

D. Wasniewski pointed out that much credit needs to be given to C. Bourque (a Colchester farmer who also works for the New London County Farm Bureau) who chaired a subcommittee made up of working farmers which drafted an extensive revision to the wording of the Section 8 which specifically addresses Agricultural Uses. Mr. Bourque and several other members of the Agriculture Commission subsequently presented these concepts to the P&Z at two of their regular meetings in May and June. During these two meetings there was much constructive and collaborative discussion between the members and representatives from these two commissions about these proposed revisions to the

original draft. A. Turner said that C. Bourque will meet with him to review the language in the final draft of these regulations before they are sent on to the P&Z in August as described above.

c) Update and status of recent developments regarding the Slembeck Farm on Prospect Hill Road:

The Slembeck family is currently in discussion with a willing buyer for its 75 acre farm on Prospect Hill Road. This is a private transaction so not all details can be made public at this time. The general concept is that most of this parcel will be kept in agricultural use by the farmer who wants to purchase it. The P&Z has looked favorably on the potential new owners' request to split off the existing house and the original barn on Prospect Hill road for eventual sale, and to allow the potential owner the ability to build a new house and barn on a flag lot in a three acre envelope behind the existing buildings and to keep the rest of the land (approx. 68 acres) in agricultural use. The Connecticut Farmland Trust is involved in helping this vision come together to allow most of this land to remain in agricultural use. It is agreeable to holding the agricultural conservation easement on this farmland and to be its steward in perpetuity.

The town has an interest in this transaction since this land it is considered by the Office of the Town Planner to be one of the key parcels to keeping the so-called "central corridor" of Colchester primarily in agricultural and/or conservation use rather than having the land be sold without legal protections against its possible use for further, more intensive, residential development. More details will follow as this transaction progresses towards a sale and more details become public.

7. Old Business:

a) Resignations from Agriculture Commission:

E. Gillman, former Member and also Chairman of the Agriculture Commission, has submitted her resignation to the Board of Selectmen and this resignation has been "accepted with regret" by them.

Commission Member J. Becker has also written and submitted a letter of resignation from the Commission, but so far this letter had not been officially received in the Office of the First Selectman so there has been no action yet taken on this.

Currently there are officially openings for one Member and one Alternate (formerly held by J. Savitsky) on the Agriculture Commission. As soon as the paperwork for J. Becker's resignation can be located and acted on by the Board of Selectmen there will be openings for two Members and one Alternate.

b) Discussion and possible action on nomination and election of candidates for Agriculture Commission membership/officership:

C. Bourque has completed his application for the Agriculture Commission and mailed it to Town Hall where it should have arrived. There is also an application from O. Duksa which is pending. These applicants have to be scheduled to be interviewed by the Board of Selectmen at one of their regular meetings and then to be considered for membership by vote of the Selectmen at a subsequent meeting following the interview. (Attendance at a meeting of the Agriculture Commission is strongly urged for any applicant who has not attended in the past, though both of these candidates have frequently attended and participated in meetings of this Commission so that requirement could prudently be waived in these two specific instances.)

A.Zimmerman expressed his interest in becoming a full Member of this commission instead of just being one of the Alternates. S.Soby said that they method to do this would be to email the First Selectman with this request and said that such a change in membership title would be able to be expeditiously handled. Both D.Wasniewski and L.Curtis told Mr. Soby said that they would encourage the Board of Selectmen to approve this change of membership status so that Mr.Zimmerman could become a regular voting member of this Commission as soon as possible.

c) Discussion and possible action regarding sub-committee formation and membership:

D.Wasniewski discussed his interest in recruiting several teachers at Bacon Academy to for the education and communication subcommittee which he chairs. He asked whether there was any requirement at Town Hall that members of our sub-committees must be Colchester residents. S.Soby said that as a practical matter there are many methods for allowing out-of-town residents to contribute to sub-committee activities such as Mr. Wasniewski has proposed; for instance, they might be recognized as “regularly scheduled guests”, “technical experts”, or “liaison to Bacon Academy”, etc. So no impediment apparently exists to having interested and knowledgeable people contribute effectively at the subcommittee level as Mr. Wasniewski has envisioned.

d) Any other old business deemed necessary: None.

7. New Business: None.

8. Adjournment:

MOTION: A.Zimmerman moved to **adjourn the meeting at 7:20 P.M.** L.Curtis seconded. Unanimously approved.

Respectfully submitted,



Leslie Curtis
Secretary