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Colchester Agriculture Commission Minutes
Monday, November 18, 2019, 7:00 P.M.
Town Hall Room 2

Attending: Chris Bourque (Chairman), Donna Rosenblatt, David Wasniewski,
Gayle Furman Leslie Curtis (Alternate)
GAYLE FURMAN
TOWN CLERK and Matt Bordeaux (Colchester Town Planner)

Also Attending: Carla Roselli, Gigi Liverant, Bruce Hebert, Peg Filoramo, Juliana
Cameron, Jason Savitsky, Liz Gillman, Darren Cugno, and Sam Wilson

Call to Order:

Meeting was called to order by Chairman C.Bourque at 7:02 P.M.

1. Approve minutes of the Agriculture Commission on October 21, 2019:

Leslie Curtis moved to accept the minutes as submitted by the Secretary. Donna
Rosenblatt seconded.

VOTE: Motion was approved with David Wasniewski abstaining because he had not been
present at that meeting.

2. Additions and/or changes to Agenda:

None.

3. Farming in Colchester Discussion:

Chairman Chris Bourque set the stage for this discussion by announcing that after many
years as the Chairman of this commission, he has decided to retire from this civic job. He was
most enthusiastic in his encouragement of others to step forward, join the Agriculture
Commission to give it new blood and perspective, and continue the mission in our town of
advocating for policies which will foster a healthy farming community going forward well
into the future, even as different administrations at Town Hall come and go.

David Wasniewski advocated for the Agriculture Commission membership to have both
farmers and other non-farming citizens as part of the board. He praised the assistance of the
Colchester Land Trust, in particular, for being an effective advocate for policies in our town
which are intend to keep farming as an important economic engine.

Sam Wilson of Hop Culture Farm and Brewing Company opened the discussion by telling
the group that he and his family, though not legacy farmers, were instead "passion farmers"
who have decided to invest in the enterprise of growing hops and brewing beer on a 30 acre
farm on Cato Corner Road. He and his family have a vision to support agro-tourism in our
town and to partner and collaborate with nearby farmers to broaden the awareness of farming
in our community. He pointed out that his business is very well supported by the age 30 to 65
demographic, but not nearly so much with older and younger generations. He also mentioned

the desirability of having a community CSA (community supported agriculture) which might combine produce and products from a number of different farms in town as differentiated from a single-farm CSA which has been the model which is more familiar in our town.

Matt Bordeaux, Colchester's new Town Planner, joined this meeting after the adjournment of the Economic Development Commission meeting. He was asked to introduce himself to the group and make a few remarks. He has been on the job for just five weeks and came to Colchester from Manchester, CT--where he still lives--and he held a number of positions there related to land use and environmental planning there. He said that he believes it is important to understand that farming is an economic enterprise that has the additional benefit of keeping rural open space productive. He also supports a robust agro-tourism model for helping keep this segment of our local economy financially viable.

Leslie Curtis announced that the project to install "Colchester: A Right to Farm Community" signs along town and state roads in town has been awarded the "2019 Pathfinder Award" by the Working Lands Alliance (a Project of the American Farmland Trust). This award is for raising public awareness about the importance of farmland in the state of Connecticut. Recognition of this effort, in which the Colchester Land Trust, our Agriculture Commission, the Board of Selectmen, the Town Engineer, and the Public Works director and personnel all played significant roles to bringing the initiative to fruition in the summer of 2019 was recognized by presentation of the award--a handsomely framed photo of one of the signs posted at the Tangletree Farm and inscription describing the honor--at a luncheon and awards ceremony at the State Capitol in Hartford on Wednesday, November 6.

The suggestion was made from the floor that all people present introduce themselves to the rest of the group, and this was done going around the room and giving a brief background of their reason for being interested in Agriculture in our town and participating in this discussion of the future of agriculture in Colchester. First the Commission Members did so: David Wasniewski, Leslie Curtis, Chris Bourque, and Donna Rosenblatt. Then (in order of their speaking to the group) were:

Carla Roselli who has a farm on Bull Hill Road where she raises miniature goats;

Gigi Liverant whose home and art studio is on School Road is active in the Colchester Historical Society and was on the sub-committee which produced the 2019 Colchester Farm Brochure;

Bruce Hebert, a relatively new farmer in town with 20 acres on Parum Road who has some innovative ideas about how he wants to put his fallow farm acreage back into production;

Peg Filoramo of Bull Hill Road is in charge of the Colchester Giving Garden which provides its food to the Colchester Food Bank, the Senior Center, and Colchester soup kitchens at our local churches;

Juliana Cameron whose family are legacy farmers on Marvin Road and who is herself a graphic designer who helped with the design of the 2019 Colchester Farm Brochure;

Jason Savitsky of Savitsky Farm on Cato Corner Road who helps his family produce and sell vegetables of all kinds and a number of other farm-related products on land that has been in his family for 108 years;

Liz Gillman of Cato Corner Farm, (the first Chairman of the Ag Commission) owns an 82 acre dairy farm on Cato Corner Road where she raises a herd of Jersey cows and, with her son Mark and his staff, produces a variety of artisanal raw milk cheeses;

Darren Cugno of Cugno Farm on Prospect Hill Road is a certified organic farmer who specializes in growing organic crops and raising forest-raised pigs and free-range chickens for sale;

and Sam Wilson of the Hop Culture Farm and Brewing Company on Cato Corner Road (as previously described on page one of these minutes).

Unfinished business of this commission was the next topic of discussion and Liz Gillman passed around a copy of the "Top Seven Priorities for Colchester Farming Issues as Determined at a Meeting on February 26, 2009", a copy of which is attached at the end of these minutes for future reference. Of the seven items on this list in the order they were prioritized by Colchester farmers at that meeting, four have been accomplished over the years and three (Items 4, 6, and 7) remain unfinished.

Item 4 of this list: ("Authorize additional tax exemptions that the state allows for farm machinery--beyond the original \$100,000 exemptions--farm buildings and extra property tax abatements on certain types of farms.), was discussed at length. Chairman Bourque pointed out that though efforts were made by previous Ag Commissions to advocate for this tax exemption for farmers who file M28 forms with the Assessor's Office, there was never the manpower available to complete this task. Leslie Curtis volunteered to lead a sub-committee of interested citizens to re-activate this project. Anybody interested should email her at lesliescurtis@yahoo.com to indicate willingness to serve in this capacity. This job will involve getting assessment records for all farms filing the Form M28 and then getting the current tax card information about these entities to see who will qualify for increased tax relief under this provision enabled by state law. Once the scope of the problem is identified, the next step must be to advocate for how the potential reduction to the dollar amount of the Town's Grand List could be offset by more potential investment in the agricultural economy of our town by the farmers who qualify to be beneficiaries of such reduction in their property tax.

Item 6 of this list (about increasing awareness of agriculture in the curriculum of the Colchester Public School) has, likewise, been on the radar of this Commission for a very long time. Chairman Bourque has recently been in touch with the Colchester Board of Education and has provided input to the Curriculum Director about how other towns in CT have incorporated such concepts into their curricula. To be effective, our school system needs to give continuity to such educational plans which, ideally, will be an effort integrated into the curriculum from kindergarten thru high school graduation.

Item 7 of this list (Make it easier for farmers to obtain and maintain the agricultural tax status 490A and 490F) requires that there be a real test case which comes before the Agriculture Commission by a farmer seeking redress to an incorrect assessment of the tax category of his property. The Agriculture Commission cannot act on hearsay in this matter, but only on facts which are duly brought to its attention in a public meeting.

Darren Cugno expressed an interest in getting better signage to individual farms whose property is not situated along state roads. Chairman Bourque reminded us that every year there is an opportunity for Towns to apply for an Agricultural Viability Matching Grant of up to \$15,000 to get directional signs to local farms installed on town road signposts. Leslie Curtis volunteered to be the point person to collect the information from any farmer who is interested in signing up for inclusion in such an effort. If enough farmers show support for this initiative by emailing her at lesliescurtis@yahoo.com, she has volunteered to help form a sub-committee to compile the necessary information to give to the Town Planner to make an application for this CT Department of Agriculture matching grant.

In closing, Chairman Bourque urged all new farmers in our town to reach out to the CT Department of Agriculture for a consultation with a representative who has knowledge of both state and federal guidelines for best farming practices who can provide a management plan BEFORE they bring any of their plans to Town Hall for approval. He also pointed out that the Farm Bureau has a very helpful booklet to guide new farmers or farmers who plan to expand their operations to be able to avoid bureaucratic delays with local land use officials and so expedite the implementation of their plans.

4. Citizen Comments:

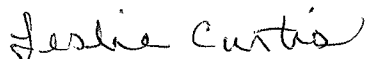
None further.

5. Adjournment:

Donna Rosenblatt moved to adjourn the meeting at 8:45 P.M. and Leslie Curtis seconded.

Meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,



Leslie Curtis
Recording Secretary at this Meeting and
Alternate on the Agriculture Commission

Attachment to minutes: The document entitled "Top Seven Priorities for Colchester Farming Issues as Determined at a Meeting on February 16, 2009"

Top Seven Priorities for Colchester Farming Issues as Determined at a Meeting on February 26, 2009

On February 26, 2009, the Town and the Colchester Land Trust jointly held an open meeting to present the findings of the Survey of Colchester Farms completed by Llyn Kaimowitz and funded by an Agricultural Viability Grant awarded by the Connecticut Department of Agriculture. The meeting was attended by approximately 50 to 60 farmers, town officials/staff and other interested citizens. There were 20 recommendations from the report. It was decided to select the top seven priorities by having each person vote for five of their own top priorities based upon feasibility, affordability and impact. The votes were then tallied up each recommendation. The numbers in parentheses are the total votes each suggestion received. Note that there was a two-way tie for fourth place.

(Note: full report is available at http://www.colchesterct.gov/pages/ColchesterCT_BComm/EDC/docs/FarmSurvey.pdf)

1. (32) Formally adopt the State's definition of farming as well as the right-to-farm law as town policy.
2. (29) For zoning and tax purposes, broaden right to farm policy to allow farms by right to engage in business activities that are not traditional farming but are related to or consistent with farming.
3. (19) Investigate 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.
4. (16) Authorize additional tax exemptions that the state allows for farm machinery (beyond the original \$100,000 exemptions), farm buildings and extra property tax abatements on certain types of farms.
4. (16) Create an Agricultural Advisory Board to deal specifically with farm-related issues as they are impacted by and interface with the Town rules and regulations.
6. (11) Involve the Colchester school system in farm awareness programs as a means of stemming future problems as well as educate local students about the role of Colchester's farms in food production and their community.
7. (6) Make it easier for farmers to obtain and maintain (with a sense of security) the agricultural tax status 490A and 490F.