

**Town of Colchester**  
**Agriculture Commission Minutes**  
**October 19, 2020**  
**Pavilion, Colchester Rec Plex**

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Gayle Furman  
TOWN CLERK

**Members Present:** Donna Rosenblatt, Carla Roselli, Leslie Curtis

**Others Present:** BOS Liaison, Rosemary Coyle

**1. Call to Order:** Donna Rosenblatt, Chairman, 2:30pm

**2. Approve Minutes January 27, 2020:** Carla Roselli, Vice Chairman, moved to approve minutes, seconded by Leslie Curtis. **Motion Carried Unanimously.**

**Approve Minutes September 2, 2020:** Leslie Curtis moved to approve minutes, seconded by Carla Roselli. **Motion Carried Unanimously.**

**3. Additions/Changes to Agenda:** None

**4. Citizens' Comments:** One citizen present, Tim Francis. No specific comment offered.

**5. Chairman's Address:** Donna Rosenblatt spoke briefly, encouraging all members to download the Board and Commissions Handbook off the Town of Colchester Website. She indicated that there should be a return to civil discourse: refraining from interruption during a presentation, keeping presentations on point and clear, answering questions clearly and being honest if the presenter did not know the answer immediately.

Ms. Rosenblatt also asked for clarity in progress reports for ongoing projects.

After the COVID-19 restrictions have been lifted regarding Town Hall meetings, the new Commission Members will attend other Board/Commission meetings to introduce themselves.

Ms. Rosenblatt asked that if anyone is approached by citizens or Committee Members regarding a possible Agriculture Commission issue, to please ask them to contact herself or Ms. Roselli.

**6. Meeting Calendar 2021:** Ms. Rosenblatt distributed a tentative 2021 meeting schedule, asking members to review to make sure they would be available on those dates. Discussion/ratification will be done during November's meeting.

**7. Old Business:**

**Farm-to-School** is currently tabled until such time as the school and education committees feel our assistance is required

**Farmer's Market** is ongoing, but limited, due to meeting restrictions secondary to the COVID-19 guidelines.

**8. New Business:**

**Creation of a Mission Statement:** The Statement of Purpose at the top of the Agriculture Commission was distributed. It was discovered via Ms. Coyle, that this was created by the Board Selectmen when the Ag Commission was created.

Ms. Rosenblatt suggested that we should have a "Mission Statement" and asked the members to consider how this should be worded.

**Additions to Webpage:** Links to agriculture-based organizations and resources should be included on Agriculture Commission webpage to assist farmers and citizens with agriculture concerns.

Ms. Roselli also recommended guidelines for farmers who had just moved to Colchester or were thinking about moving to Colchester.

**Presentation by Leslie Curtis:** Ms. Curtis provided a handout, advocating for agricultural easements on property and asking the town to provide financial assistance for these easements more quickly. A copy of the handout is included.

**9. Adjourn:** Carla Roselli motioned to adjourn seconded by Leslie Curtis at 3:56pm. **Motion Carried Unanimously**

Submitted by:

Donna Rosenblatt, Agriculture Commission Chairman

## Reasons to Recommend Concept of Permitting the Municipal Funding of Agricultural and/or Conservation Easements to Preserve Our Rural Heritage

CF Farmland  
Trust  
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### Background:

The Town of Colchester's current regulations require its outright ownership of any land which is purchased using its municipal tax dollars. Such transactions remove land so purchased from our municipal tax rolls. And this also makes the Town fully responsible for future property maintenance expenses on these lands.

The requirement for ownership also is understood to mean that no town public funding can be used to partner with not-for-profit land conservation groups to help purchase conservation and/or agricultural easements on property here in town.

Easements on land have been historically used to extinguish future development rights (as well as specific other land use restrictions) on acreage which a willing landowner and a willing conservation group (whether an agency of the state or one of the many non-governmental groups like the Connecticut Farmland Trust or the Colchester Land Trust) agree to mutually acceptable terms. Once an easement contract is signed, its terms will govern land uses on that property in perpetuity rather than only apply to the property-owner who is party to the original contract.

Lands protected by covenants of easement contracts remain on the local property tax rolls. Landowners can sell or transfer such assets to other owners who will be well aware that they will be bound by the terms of the easement documents. The participating conservation group is the responsible party for stewardship of the property to insure that the terms of the easement contract are followed to the letter and/or that violations are duly reported and re-mediated.

This is not a radical idea. Several other towns in our state (among them our neighboring town of Lebanon) have been using their municipal funds to participate financially with private conservation groups in their efforts to fund such easements for agricultural or open space land preservation purposes.

According to the 2020 Budget Survey, about two-thirds of those who responded answered the question about the value to them of preserving open space and farmland as either Very or Somewhat Important way to preserve our rural environment and is seen as a positive civic goal. Easements provide great "bang" for the land conservation "buck" and will be a wise use of local taxpayer dollars.

## Recommendation:

That the Colchester Agriculture Commission should advocate for this concept before our Board of Selectmen. The recommendation should include that a task-force be authorized by the Selectmen to identify and recommend specific changes which would need to be made to the language of current Town government rules and regulations to permit public funds to be spent to support the efforts of private land conservation groups to fund such agricultural and/or conservation easements that are deemed by the Agriculture Commission, the Conservation Commission and/or the Open Space Advisory Commission to be a worthy municipal benefit.

## Notes:

Over time, without a plan and civic or private land conservation efforts and interventions, the natural tendency is a relentless trend towards the steady reduction of open space and farmland into more intensive development by both residential and commercial land uses. This proposal to increase the ways which the Town of Colchester is authorized to expend municipal funds for land conservation purposes is intended to be an additional option that our town can use in the goal to protect important parcels that give our town its “rurban” character. Appropriate opportunities to do this arise with great degree of unpredictability.

The Colchester Land Trust (CLT) is an accredited private 501(3)(c) charitable organization whose goal is to foster the protection of open space and farmland in our town. This is an entirely volunteer operation whose success has depended upon private philanthropy as well as from grants from private or public conservation entities at both the state and national levels. CLT, however, has only a finite ability to raise funds necessary for its land conservation mission.

The CLT has been approached by many landowners over the years who desire to preserve their properties from future development, many of these in our town are “land rich” but cash poor, having insufficient outside income to take advantage of potential income tax benefits of donating their land to the CLT or any other land conservation organization. In the future some financial assistance from our town will help all such efforts be more successful at this goal as opportunities arise by landowner request. The great need is for private groups to be able to partner with the Town when land conservation goals are mutual by having a nimble financial partnership methodology to help raise the money to fund these civic investments in the long-term quality of life here that a majority of our citizens value.