

MINUTES
AGRICULTURAL COMMITTEE
REMOTE PARTICIPATION
June 10, 2020

OPENING: The remote Zoom meeting is being held in pursuant to the Governor Baker's March 12, 2020 order suspending certain provisions of the Open Meeting Law, G.L. c.30A, 18 and the Governor's March 15, 2020 order imposing strict limitation on the number of people that may gather in one place.

ATTENDANCE

Burt Hansen, Chairman	Present
Maryssa Cook-Obregon, Vice Chairman	Present
Dennis Clark, Commissioner	Present
Dan Cook, Commissioner	Present
Zach Barnett, Commissioner	Absent
Ron Cecchini, Commissioner	Present
Brett Colson, Commissioner	Absent
Lenita Bober, Commissioner	Absent
Tammy Ciak-Bissaillon, Commissioner	Present
Diana Flynn, Alternate Commissioner	Absent

7:00 pm: Chairman Hansen opened the meeting announced the meeting date, Commissioners Roll Call attendance, that the meeting was being recorded, and noted the regulations associated with a remote meeting.

MINUTES

Chairman Burt Hansen made a motion to accept the minutes of May 13, 2020. Commissioner Clark-Bissaillon seconded the motion. The roll call vote was as follows:

Burt Hansen – yes	Dan Cook - yes
Maryssa Cook-Obregon – yes	Tammy Clark-Bissaillon - yes
Dennis Clark – yes	Ron Cecchini – yes

PRESENTATION

Ron Hall Agricultural Preservation Restriction Program Coordinator for the Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources attended the meeting to give the Agricultural Commission an overview on the APR program. As some of the members of the Agricultural Commission are newly appointed, Mr. Hall presented information about the APR program beginning with its inception in the 70's to help preserve agricultural land. Chapter 70 was adopted in 1978 which allowed land owners to apply for State funding which would preserve their land in perpetuity against development, and still allow the land to be used for farm associated purposes. Evaluation of land required that at least 50% of the land was prime soil in accordance with State standards. Currently the maximum spending cap per acre is \$10,000.00 with a minimum of 5 acres. Once a parcel of land is approved, a stewardship program monitors the properties to ensure the land stays in accordance with the APR program. Allowable

construction would be limited to an agricultural based structure such as a barn. There are three principals for a 15% match one of which is to identify properties in APR so no building permits will be allowed with the exception of agricultural accessory usage. State funding for the program has been stable, and some funding from USDA has also been available. The Department of Agricultural is looking into other means of funding the APR program. Mr. Hall stated that the Town of Southwick will get a letter from the State notifying the Town of their qualification of the 15% reduction. Mr. Hall encouraged the Agricultural Committee members to contact land owners to determine their interest in the program. Vice Chairman Cook-Obregon requested a listing of all APR land in Southwick so that verification can be made to ensure the accuracy of the Town's records. Commissioner Clark noted that a Warrant Article for "right to farm" signs be installed on local roads. Mr. Hall will provide any other information and assistance as requested by the Agricultural Commission.

38 Mort Vining Road A letter was issued by the law offices of J. S. Smith & Associates of a plan for development. The mapping showed the development of 13 residential properties along Mort Vining Road. Commissioner Clark stated that the Town would a Right of First Refusal. A letter will be issued to the Select Board requesting that the Agricultural Commission be allowed time to review the option for the Right of First Refusal.

Signs Vice Chairman Maryssa Cook-Obregon contacted some farmers in the Town concerning the "Right to Farm" signs. The Kestrel Land Trust will provide the signs at no charge.

FY 2021 Budget Chairman Hansen is not aware of any proposal for the requested budgeted line items for the Agricultural Committee.

Farm Brochure Commissioner Tammy Clark-Bissaillon stated that she is aware of a potential new listing for 9 Babb Road. The property owner has a traveling petting zoo and makes goat milk related products such as soap. There has also been an advertisement for Billy C's honey. Commissioner Tammy Clark-Bissaillon stated that she would contact the farm business owners for more details on their operations.

Community Garden Chairman Hansen stated that there were only three plots remaining. All gardeners have been working on their plots with the exception of one. There is also a turtle that was in residence that has since been relocated to a more appropriate area outside of the fencing. Chairman Hansen noted that repairs need to be made on the posts and gates. Committee members Ron Cecchini and Dan Cook may have some material to use for repairing the fencing. Funding for material may also be available from an existing purchase order from the Conservation Commission. The donated hay bales were a welcome addition to the gardeners and the Committee may provide them again for the 2021 growing season. Commissioner Tammy Clark-Bissaillon requested that a notice be posted to the gardeners to save seeds for donations.

Warrant Article A Warrant Article will be presented at the Town Meeting on June 16th for \$2,500.00 from CPC funds for Right to Farm Signage proposed by the Agricultural Commission to be placed on Town Roads.

Congamond Lake Irrigation Vice Chairman Maryssa Cook-Obregon had a conversation with farm owners who use the water on South Pond for irrigation. One farmer stated that he did not use the water this year, but Mr. John Coward, Coward Farms, was upset and expressed his concern that the advanced notification was not sufficient. No notifications were made regarding treatment dates and questioned of irrigation water from the lakes would compromise their crop. They support the treatment but timing is essential with crop-growing. Vice Chairman Maryssa

Cook-Obregon contacted Mr. Dick Grannells, LMC, with plans for advanced notice to farmers and what effect the water could have relative to a crop failure, and who would be responsible for a financial loss due to the irrigation. Mr. Grannells informed Vice Chairman Maryssa Cook-Obregon that the treatment, usually installed in early May, was dependent on water temperature and plant growth. A short window of opportunity for the treatment is also dependant on the algae bloom. Vice Chairman Maryssa Cook-Obregon will get a list of framers who use the lake water for irrigation so early notification can be made to all.

As there was no further business to discuss, Commissioner Colson made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 8:12 p.m. Vice Commissioner Clark seconded the motion. The roll call vote was as follows:

Burt Hansen – yes
Maryssa Cook-Obregon – yes
Dennis Clark – yes

Dan Cook - yes
Tammy Clark-Bissaillon - yes
Ron Cecchini – yes

The Commissioners agreed to conduct a monthly meeting during the summer. The next scheduled meeting of the Agricultural Commission is July 10, 2020

Respectfully submitted,

Jean Nilsson
cc:

Select Board
Town Clerk

Burt Hansen, Chairman

Maryssa Cook-Obregon, Vice Chairman

Dennis Clark, Commissioner

Dan Cook, Commissioner

Zach Barnett, Commissioner

Tammy Ciak-Bissaillon, Commissioner

Ron Cecchini, Commissioner

Brett Colson, Commissioner

Lenita Bober, Commissioner

Diana Flynn, Alternate Commissioner

Date

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