

MINUTES
AGRICULTURAL COMMITTEE
REMOTE PARTICIPATION
August 19, 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	Present
Ron Cecchini, Commissioner	Present
Brett Colson, Commissioner	Absent
Lenita Bober, Commissioner	Absent
Tammy Ciak-Bissaillon, Commissioner	Absent
Diana Flynn, Alternate Commissioner	Absent

7:02 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 Hansen made a motion to table the minutes of July 15, 2020. Vice Chairman Maryssa Cook-Obregon seconded the motion. The roll call vote was as follows:

Burt Hansen – yes	Dan Cook - yes
Maryssa Cook-Obregon – yes	Dennis Clark – yes
Ron Cecchini – yes	Zach Barnett – yes

APR Signs Vice Chairman Maryssa Cook-Obregon contacted Ron Hall, from Mass. Dept. of Agricultural Resources (MDAR) to ask for an updated list of APR land/landowners in Southwick in order to approach those APR farmers to ask them if they want a “Forever Farmland” sign to place on their land. Ron Hall answered that he needs to connect with the Boston office and submit a request for information for this list, which will take a bit longer than expected.

Right to Farm Vice Chairman Maryssa Cook-Obregon received a quote from Westfield Sign Shop. There will be two 18 X 24 signs installed at the end of RT 57 and the other on RT 10/202. Smaller signs in the size of 12 x 18 may also be purchased to be placed at various farming locations. Some of the suggestions included Congamond Road, Sheep Pasture Road, Hillside Road, North Longyard, Rising Corner, Tannery Road, Mort Vining Road, and N & S Loomis Streets. The funds from the CPA will cover both the cost of the signs and the posts. Randy Brown, DPW Director, will assist in placing the signs. Secretary Nilsson requested that

Commissioner Cook-Obregon ask Westfield Sign Shop for a complete invoice in order to begin to process the PO.

Farm Brochure Commissioner Tammy Ciak-Bissaillon discussed the possibility of promoting farms on Facebook with Chairman Hansen. Southwick could do a similar program as Granby CT. Commissioner Barnett volunteered to take pictures of various farm locations in Southwick with Commissioner Colson who may be able to provide the accompanying information. Commissioners Ciak-Bissaillon, Colson, and Barnett now have administrative access to the Agricultural Commission Facebook page.

Census of Farms There has been no further progress on the census.

Community Garden Chairman Hansen stated that the garden is progressing but there have been issues with the well due to the drought. The weather has not cooperated with fence replacement. It was suggested that metal posts replace the wood posts as they would last longer. The Agricultural Commission has a budgeted line item for supplies in the amount of \$500.00, and a gift account in the amount of \$1,029.37 that could be used to purchase the necessary materials.

Lake Management Committee There had been no response from the LMC relative to the meeting invitation.

Land Preservation Properties There has been some discussion on various parcels of land that may be proposed for land preservation. Commissioners, Clark, Hansen, and Cook-Obregon meet with the landowners at 38 Mort Vining in July along with Barbara Hopson from MDAR to discuss APR possibilities for this land. The owners are continuing to research the program and trying to ascertain if they would like to proceed. At this meeting, Barbara Hopson mentioned the option of 'early acquisition' APR via a land trust like Kestrel Land Trust. Commissioner Cook-Obregon later clarified with Barbara Hopson via email what is entailed with an 'early acquisition'. An early acquisition is when a land trust can pre-acquire land as it works its way through the APR process, and then sell the land to a farmer as soon as the APR funding becomes available. This route reduces the purchase price for the next farmer. Pre-acquisitions are a significant decision for land trusts as the trust will usually need to take out a loan to make them work for an APR to go through, MDAR requires that land is and continued to be used for farming purposes for at least 5 years previously. Land owners who are responsible for real estate taxes may consider selling properties to a farmer as an interim owner prior to preservation. The property on Mort Vining Road may be considered with the possibility of selling a few lots along the roadway and preserving the remaining parcel. However, it may take as much as 2 to 3 years to complete the APR transaction. There is also property on North Loomis Street that has a steep slope but could be used as a Christmas tree farm or possibly a vineyard. The Agricultural Committee members will continue to look for interested property owners for preservation.

Hilltop Farm – Suffield, CT Members of the Agricultural Commission attended a site visit at the location that was arranged by Commissioner Cook. It was a very interesting use of land and the project at this farm also promoted agriculture to take place at the site through community involvement and an exchange of ideas. The farm has been preserved though there is a limited amount of activity at this time. The Commissioners agreed that the field trip was well worth attending and will look for other similar locations to exchange ideas.

As there was no further business to discuss, Chairman Hansen made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 7:54 p.m. Commissioner Barnett seconded the motion. The roll call vote was as follows:

Burt Hansen – yes
Maryssa Cook-Obregon – yes
Ron Cecchini – yes

Dan Cook - yes
Dennis Clark – yes
Zach Barnett – yes

The Commissioners agreed to conduct a monthly meeting during the summer. The next scheduled meeting of the Agricultural Commission is September 9, 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