

MINUTES
AGRICULTURAL COMMISSION
REGULAR SCHEDULED MEETING
March 8, 2023

OPENING: 7:00 p.m. Chairman Hansen opened the hybrid meeting by announcing the members in attendance.

ATTENDANCE

Burt Hansen, Chair	Present
Dan Cook, Commissioner	Present
Ron Cecchini, Commissioner	Present
Lenita Bober, Commissioner	Present
Tammy Ciak-Bissaillon, Commissioner	Present
Maryssa Cook-Obregon, Commissioner	Present
Zach Barnett, Alternate	Present - Zoom
Sage Fury, Alternate	Present - Zoom

COMMUNICATION

Chairman Hansen announced that the Commission received a resignation letter from Vice Chairman Colson on 2/13/23. At this time, Town Counsel is reviewing appointments of Commissioners. Commissioners Cook and Ciak-Bissaillon are up for reappointment, Sage Fury and Zach Barnett remain as Alternate Commissioners. There will be no new appointments at this time, however, there is interest in others joining the Commission.

The Select Board and Finance Committee will conduct their annual budget hearings. The Agricultural Commission is scheduled for March 25th at 8:35 am. and will propose an increase in their budget.

MINUTES

Commissioner Cook-Obregon made a motion to approve the minutes of February 8, 2023 and February 22, 2023 (with the correction of "Alternate" for Sage Fury). Commissioner Bober seconded the motion. The roll call vote was as follows:

Burt Hansen yes	Maryssa Cook-Obregon yes
Tammy Ciak-Bissaillon yes	Lenita Bober yes
Ron Cecchini yes	Dan Cook yes
Sage Fury yes	

PUBLIC COMMENTS

There were no public comments.

NEW BUSINESS

Open Farm Day Chairman Hansen created a list of all potential events, ideas, requirements etc. for the event which is scheduled for Sunday August 20th. The beginning location could be at Whalley Park with booths set up that will have map locations of the participating farms. The first order of business would be to determine who will participate. Chairman Hansen presented a survey created by Angie Simone which will be sent to the farms to obtain data on which farms will participate and to what extent they are comfortable with it.

Dwight Arnold, Sheep Pasture Road, stated that his wife would be interested as she sells sunflowers and Mr. Arnold grows tobacco where a presentation could be made in one of the growing fields or the barns that hold the product after harvesting. Mr. Arnold noted that one of the barns the barn was built around the Civil War time and is partially constructed of chestnut trees which are currently extinct. Commissioners will visit or contact the farms to gauge their intent. There could be self guided tours inclusive of trails that may be available at each location.

Chapter 61 Protocols - Right of First Refusal Commissioner Cook-Obregon created a document to serve as a guide for municipal staff, boards and residents outlining general steps to follow when landowners intend to convert or sell their Chapter 61, 61A or 61B land. The document is a step-by-step process which will allow for more time for the Town to potentially purchase land for conservation or open space purposes. There have been missed opportunities to conserve land that is now developed or in the process of being developed. Mr. Mike McMahon, 31 Lauren Lane, noted that one of the problems is that Boards and/or Committees are not notified until a portion of the 60-90 day reply period has already passed. There needs to be a system of checks and balances for the landowner, Town, and potential purchaser. Note that landowners need to recertify Chapter 61 status. Chairman Hansen and Commissioner Cook-Obregon will provide the final document to all applicable Boards and Committees.

Community Garden 2023 The garden will be tilled by late April by Commissioner Cecchini. This may be the last time the Agricultural Committee will till the garden as the individuals will be responsible for tilling. Some of the participants already ask for no till plots. The form to reserve a plot is on the website. Availability of garden plots should be posted on Facebook, Channel 15, the library and the Messenger (COA newsletter).

OLD BUSINESS

Trust for Public Land Chairman Hansen related information on the parcel at 56 North Longyard - a potential part of the New England Scenic Trail. The Agricultural Commission would like to start a conversation with TPL, Fish & Wildlife, and National Parks Service that will be responsible for the purchase and maintenance of the land. The intent would be to continue to allow agriculture on the property. Chairman Hansen said there must be a way for conservation and agriculture to exist together for both their benefit. The parcel shares open farm land and wooded areas that support wildlife, trails and a roadway. Henry Gardocki, 573 Thrall Ave Suffield CT, who has leased the land, spoke in favor of retaining the land in its current condition and usage, and noted there are bears and deer there frequently.

Agricultural Committee Website/News Letter Chairman Hansen stated that Selectman Fox will schedule the website on the Select Board's agenda. Alternate Commissioner Fury presented what he had created as of this meeting including information on the farms, their products and

locations, a specific tab for grants that are available, etc. The grant portion will be for farmers to research any available grant funding relative to their business. There is also a section for feedback from farmers to make suggestions on crops or growing information. The website and newsletter are still a work in progress and Alternate Commissioner Fury welcomes input and/or comments. Chairman Hansen will await the meeting with the Select Board before going forward with the website.

Master Plan Committee Chairman Hansen related that there were 3 focus groups in which discussions included topics brought up at the Farmers' Forum including support for farm businesses and a need for clearer regulations. There is a housing focus group at Town hall on March 9th from 6:00 to 8:00 and on March 15th there is a youth focus group at the High School. The Master Plan Committee has been in session for a year and a half and is close to an implementation phase.

Sofinowski/Community Garden Signs Commissioner Cook-Obregon stated that the Conservation Commission agreed to pay for the equipment to post the signs. The Conservation Commission has a credit at IBS that will be sufficient enough for the posts and associated supplies. The purchase order for Souhwoods to create the signs has also been approved.

FFA Commissioner Cook and Mr. Lucas Caron, 148 Hillside Road, presented information on schools that have agricultural programs in the area. Students in Hampden and surrounding counties can apply to various programs at Smith Vocational and Agricultural High School in Northampton if their school does not offer programs. Southwick sends 40 students to other schools for vocational programs each year. Southwick Regional School may be interested in having a vocational curriculum, but as of now there is none available. Commissioner Cook listed several celebrities that have been members of FFA – Jimmy Carter, Johnny Cash, and Taylor Swift. Southwick does not provide tuition for vocational schools, but does provide transportation. Alternate Commissioner Fury suggested a pilot program to gauge interest.

As there was no further business to discuss, Chairman Hansen made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 8:35. Commissioner Cecchini seconded the motion. The roll call vote was as follows:

Burt Hansen	yes	Maryssa Cook-Obregon	yes
Tammy Ciak-Bissaillon	yes	Lenita Bober	yes
Ron Cecchini	yes	Dan Cook	yes
Sage Fury	yes		

Respectfully submitted,

Jean Nilsson

cc:

Select Board
Town Clerk

AG COM 030823

Burt Hansen, Chair

Dan Cook, Commissioner

Ron Cecchini, Commissioner

Zach Barnett, Alternate

Tammy Ciak-Bissaillon, Commissioner

Lenita Bober, Commissioner

Maryssa Cook-Obregon, Commissioner

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Date