

AGRICULTURAL COMMISSION MEETING

MINUTES

April 16, 2019

Attendance: Steve D'Aquila, Jim Dunn, Tom O'Shea, Chris Hugo, Eileen Charbonneau, Ryan McKay
Absent: Maleah Gustafson
Others Present: Amy Parker & Guest, Christine Shustack

The meeting was called to order at 7:25 p.m.

SUBCOMMITTEE:

The subcommittee reported that they are making progress on scoring the Chapter 61A parcels. Scoring for forty (40) parcels has been completed with about ten (10) more to go. The subcommittee will begin work on the Chapter 61B parcels once the 61A parcels have been completed.

Jim brought copies of a color-coded graph showing the completed parcels sorted by highest to lowest score with each color representing the score of a subcommittee member. The parcels are grouped into four divisions (A, B, C, D) with A being the highest priority. The graph identifies the top 25% priority parcels so far. The next step, after all the parcels have been scored, will be to create a color-coded map.

It was observed that the graph shows some parcels as having large discrepancies in scoring among subcommittee members. The subcommittee will revisit those properties and attempt to come to a closer consensus.

Steve asked how non-subcommittee members feel in regards to their comfort level with backing what the subcommittee recommends. Eileen stated that she has high confidence in the subcommittee and does not have reservations in backing their recommendations. Ryan asked if the group A properties were definite priorities versus the group D properties.

Jim explained that the subcommittee's work on this project is being done to provide an informational guide to assist in coming to a conclusion regarding any properties that come before the AgComm for right of first refusal. It is not the only criterion, but a tool to assist in making a decision. It is not meant to be a definitive document.

Steve asked if the subcommittee should give a presentation/explanation of their rationale of their scoring to the rest of the committee on each property, noting that it would entail a tremendous amount of added work for them to make such a presentation. Tom suggested that when a parcel comes before the AgComm for right of first refusal, the subcommittee could then present a detailed explanation of their findings at that time.

Steve suggested we not ask for specific details on each property, but will vote on accepting the findings of the subcommittee as a whole once they've completed their work and all AgComm members are present.

MINUTES:

Tom made a motion to accept the March 2019 Minutes of the Agricultural Commission Meeting. Jim seconded the motion. A vote was taken. (Eileen abstained). The motion passed.

EDUCATIONAL SERIES PRESENTATION:

The spring education offering is entitled "Love Your Soil: Caring for the Underground Community that Helps You Grow". It will be presented by Kate Gervais. The presentation is scheduled for Thursday, May 9, 2019 at 7:00 p.m. in the Holden Senior Center.

Promotion: Kate will create a flyer which will be forwarded to Eileen who will make color copies and post in various locations throughout town. Eileen will contact Maleah regarding a Press Release for the Holden Landmark as soon as the information has been obtained from Kate. Information regarding the presentation will be posted on the town's electronic sign and on the Facebook pages of the Town of Holden, Holden Agricultural Commission, and the Holden Garden Club. Steve will reserve the large room at the Holden Senior Center and start a thread to invite volunteers to get soil samples. Tom will take a soil sample from his property and obtain the results for Kate to use as an example. Content of her presentation will include how to take a soil sample, where to send it, what the results indicate, and what to do next. Her presentation is designed to be a lead in to a composting presentation to be scheduled for a later date. Chris agreed to video tape the presentation.

Jim reported that Kate's employer is expecting compensation of \$100. However, since this information was not related to the Holden Agricultural Committee until after arrangements had been made, the fee will be waived if the Holden AgComm cannot meet the fee.

PROMOTION FOR OTHER ORGANIZATIONS:

Steve received and passed on an email regarding an upcoming composting workshop to be sponsored by the Leicester Agricultural Commission.

FARMERS MARKET:

Rickey Evangelista of Hancock Dairy Farm, a vendor at the Holden Farmer's Market approached Eileen to ask if it would be possible for the vendors of the Farmer's Market to set up on the day of the town-wide yard sale (Saturday, May 11, 2019) in their usual location. Eileen passed this request on to Steve who inquired about it with Town Manager, Peter Lukes. Mr. Lukes stated that as long as the Market has met their necessary Board of Health and permitting requirements by that time and provided they set up earlier than the beginning of the sale so as not to interfere with parking, it would be allowed. Opening day for the Farmer's Market is prior to the town-wide yard sale (Tuesday, May 7, 2019) so this should not be a problem. Only regular Holden Farmer's Market vendors will be allowed and the market must be under the auspices and guidelines of the Holden Farmer's Market. Eileen will contact Rickey with this information.

Jim spoke with the Holden Farmer's Market Manager to inquire whether they need any support for this year. He was told that they would appreciate the banner, but otherwise they are all set. Jim will try to schedule the banner to be up for one week of each month of the Market. Jim will give Ryan the scheduled dates and Ryan will contact the Light Department.

OLD BUSINESS:

Christine Shustack returned after having submitted a citizen's petition to have an article placed on the Town Meeting warrant to repeal the excise tax on animals and equipment used by not-for-profit outfits. Christine is desirous of obtaining the backing of the Holden Agricultural Commission when she goes before the Board of Trustees next week. She stated that she copied the Rutland and Hubbardston petitions to create a petition to repeal

excise tax in Holden on farm equipment and animals for non-incorporated agricultural entities.

Ryan indicated that he was not in favor of supporting her petition because it leaves out incorporated farms. Christine explained that it wasn't designed for for-profits, but rather for owners of rescue animals, hobby farms, backyard chickens or horses and the like.

Both Ryan and the "guest" pointed out that farms that provide the owner's sole income are technically "for profit" but in reality they don't really make a profit. The mission of the Holden Agricultural Commission is to support local farmers.

Jim noted that doing away with the excise tax on non-incorporated agricultural entities would not change anything for incorporated ones so supporting Christine's petition would not harm them.

Steve questioned how the Town benefits.

Jim noted that it costs the Town more in man hours to assess and collect the taxes than not to.

Tom made the following points:

- 1.) Excise tax exists to offset a burden – for example excise tax is levied on vehicles because vehicles contribute to wear and tear on roads and the money from the excise tax is used to maintain the roads. What is the burden to the Town that an excise tax on farm equipment and animals offsets?
- 2.) If it is a burden to the Town to collect the tax, costing the town more to do so than not, shouldn't it be repealed for both incorporated and non-incorporated agricultural entities?

Steve asked if any committee member would be willing to support Christine before the Board of Selectmen. No one stepped forward. The committee unanimously felt it could not support her petition in its current wording.

CENTRAL MASS GROWN:

As Maleah was absent, there was no report offered on Central Mass Grown.

On a motion made by Ryan, seconded by Jim, the meeting was adjourned at 8:37 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Eileen Charbonneau