

DRAFT MEETING MINUTES; April 27, 2023

Agricultural Commission

Christopher C. Hugo, Secretary

Call to Order: 7:30 PM

Roll Call; Wendy Somerset, James Dunn, Christopher Hugo, Ryan Mackay, Nancy Rocheleau

Discussion on Previous minutes;

Insufficient quorum for March meeting.

Confusion regarding January meeting on who was to take the minutes. Jim volunteered to write them up.

Discussion on Conflict-of-Interest Training Requirement;

Wendy sent out the link. Should take about an hour to complete.

Discussion on Goals;

Wendy is working to update the list of farms in Holden on the Mass Grown and Fresher website, many local farms are not on the list.

Jim moved to have Wendy in her official role as Chair Person of the Holden Agricultural Commission notify local farms of the availability of free advertising on the Massachusetts Grown and Fresher website.

Seconded by Chris – All in favor, So Moved

NEW BUSINESS

Discussion on Educational Series;

Wendy brought up the need of more education about farming in local schools. Farm kids aren't treated well by their classmates indicating a lack of understanding regarding the importance of local farming.

At a recent Farm Bureau Legislative Breakfast Jim had the opportunity to talk to Senator Ann Gobi on the subject. She would like to see the creation of an Agricultural Volk School, but realizes this is a long shot. At the very least there should be Agricultural related courses in Massachusetts Public Schools.

OTHER

Discussion on Town's GIS website; Jim reported the Town's GIS website now includes overlays showing all the APR's in town, as well as conservation restrictions and WPR's (Water Protection Restrictions). DPW created the overlay from data downloaded from the State's database. Flaws in the database prevented the creation of an Easement overlay.

Discussion on Open Space Preservation Fund; Jim reported the Town Budget was wrapping up and the normal annual contribution to the Open Space Preservation Fund did not survive the budget process, nor did it last year.

Discussion on Central Mass Mosquito Control; Randy asked if the Town had looked into Central Mass Mosquito Control. According to Jim it was studied many years ago but not followed up on as public opinion was people did not want to be sprayed with pesticides.

Discussion on Friends of The Red Barn; Chris reported local grower Joe Provost had taken over most of the Barn's garden space with plans to eventually open a Farmers Market on the Barn property. However, this is a test year to see what grows and deal with megafauna. The Red Barn participated in the Town wide yard sale attracting 10 sellers. We also had a successful food drive over the winter.

Discussion on Farmers Market; Jim reported the Market would open in a few weeks and that the appropriate papers had been signed for the banner. Although there are guaranteed spots for local farms this year's market is mostly out-of-towners. The Market behooves the Town justifying the use of Town property and the cost of electricity and cleanup.

Discussion on Agricultural Tourism; Nancy inquired as to the status of The Farm at SummitWynds request to hold Weddings on the property. Jim responded the Commission had written a letter on the Farm's behalf approving of the activity which was approved by the Town.

Ryan further described his own Agri-tourism operation in Rutland contrasting to his property in Holden. The Rutland property offers a Farm Store, Kitchen and Petting Zoo, while the Holden property is strictly a farm.

Discussion of Meeting Schedule; Wendy suggested that if there were no topics ongoing that required the Commission's immediate attention, we should take the summer off. Jim thought meeting monthly was important. On the other hand, the Farm Bureau takes the summer off and that appears to work for them. Wendy added summers are farmers' busiest time of year and with 3 members of the commission being farmers, to schedule a meeting without knowing if a quorum can be reached would be a waste of everyone's time. Randy suggested the Commission meet with the Rutland Agricultural Commission at least once a year to see how they do things and consider joint operations as we have done in the past.

Chris motioned; To schedule the June meeting jointly with the Rutland Agricultural Commission. June 20th the Lilac Hedge Farm's Rutland property, 216 Wachusett St. Ryan seconded?

All in favor, so moved

Further discussion on the summer schedule tabled until the June meeting.

Wendy motioned to adjourn, Ryan seconded

All in favor, so moved 8:47PM