



## TOWN OF ACTON AGRICULTURAL COMMISSION

Meeting Minutes Dec 1, 2020

6:00 PM

Virtual Meeting

**Present:** Morene Bodner, Patrick Hearn, Heidi Portner, Paul Simeone,

Natural Resources Assistant, Zoom host, and recording secretary: Bettina Abe

Attendees: Acton Conservation Trust President Susan Mitchell-Hardt; Acton Select Board Liaison, Dean Charter; Natural Resources Director, Tom Tidman; Acton Open Space Committee Chair, Andy Magee

Guests: Peggy and Joe Hebert, Terra Friedrichs

### Regular Business:

- 1 Heidi convened the meeting at 6:00 PM
- 2 The virtual meeting advisory was read in its entirety
- 3 Paul and Heidi recused for next business item (Discussion with Christa Collins, Sudbury Valley Trustees). Maureen accepted Heidi's request to become acting chair for this agenda item.
- 4 **Christa Collins of Sudbury Valley Trustees (SVT) briefed the meeting** on the proposal for Boston Area Gleaners to purchase the Simeone Family's Stonefield Farm and the Agricultural Preservation Restriction (APR) that would be placed on the land. Presently Gleaners and the Simeone family are discussing terms while Acton Open Space Committee (OSC) has been discussing funding of the APR with SVT and the Acton Community Preservation Committee (CPC). In this case the town would not own the land but would be a co-holder of the APR along with SVT which is not unusual but is a new experience for Acton. Gleaners would use the land as a farm so an APR rather than a conservation restriction was considered more appropriate. Christa explained that there are 2 types of APRs, public and private, and that this APR would be private meaning that the State would not negotiate the terms and the APR is processed through the Mass Dept of Ag Resources (MDAR). In a Public APR the State would own the APR and the price/acre that can be paid for the APR is limited. Gleaners is presently negotiating a \$500k grant to help in their land purchase. Andy McGee, chair of the Acton Open Space Committee, explained that the Simeone Property is particularly attractive in that it offers both farm land/buildings as well as forested land. There are approximately 25 acres of crop land and buildings and 23 acres forested land abutting the Assabet Valley Rail Trail and also abutting 100 acres of conservation property in Maynard. The commercial value of the APR is based on the value of 16 house lots on an 800 ft cul-de-sac but the purchase price will be less than this amount because of the APR. Gleaners will maintain the land so there will be no land maintenance cost to the town but the open space is preserved for both the forested land as well as the farm land and buildings. The Stonefield Farm proposal appears to be a win-win for all. Christa stated the proposal presently assigns SVT responsibility for monitoring the APR. Andy explained the price of monitoring will be included in the CPC request and that the request would most likely be submitted to CPC before Dec 16th 2020. The CPC will vote on the proposal, along with other proposals they are considering, and recommend or not recommend at the 2021 annual town meeting currently scheduled in June. Andy stated bonds are not being considered to raise funds for the APR purchase.

Both Pat and Morene agreed that the Ag Comm should be a co- holder with SVT on the Stonefield Farm property APR as well as attending and providing Ag Comm support to OSC and CPC meetings as necessary. Pat and Morene were the only Ag Comm members not recused for this topic.

**5 Approval of Nov 10<sup>th</sup> and Nov 17th Minutes.** Two meetings were held in Nov to cover the full agenda as the Nov 10th meeting agenda was cut short by a Zoom collision. Several minor amendments were made and the minutes of both meetings minutes were approved unanimously by roll call vote.

**6 Citizen's Concerns:**

**6a)** Terra Friedrichs asked what the approximate schedule for the Simeone Farm proposal would be. Andy McGee outlined the approval process and stated the proposal would be reviewed in CPC committee meetings along with other proposals and if selected would be presented as recommended by the CPC to the town at the annual meeting in June. In addition, the Board of Selectmen are informed along the way and have liaison at both the OSC and Ag Comm meetings.

**6b)** Terra stated that there was public concern regarding use of herbicides particularly on town owned lands. She would like to gather a group of Acton citizens with these concerns and get time on a future Ag Comm agenda. She will communicate further with Bettina regarding scheduling.

**7 New Property in Consideration:** No additional items to discuss this month.

**8 Expanded Protection for The Morrison Farm Property:** Bettina reported that she has requested an onsite meeting with Selby, John Mangiaratti, Morene and Dean Charter and will let us know when we have a date. Morene reported she is speaking with Littleton on how they managed their similar situation and how they provided for maintenance of farm buildings. Bettina will provide Amy Green's contact information to Morene as Amy may be able to help in this effort. Morene has recently visited the Morrison Farm house and barn and commented that the house has value as an example of the depression era farmhouse architecture that should be considered for preservation and that the barn appears to need work. She has also visited Concord to see how they were able to structurally stabilize these very old buildings. Bettina suggested timing a Morrison Farm proposal for the 2022 town meeting might be wise. Dean Charter mentioned that the 2021 CPC List was already long and that timing Morrison Farm for 2022 would be better balancing of CPC funding requests. In addition, this will give us time to hold public forums on this topic as required. Additional detail on an external meeting held to gather information on best practices in historical building management is attached.

**9 Farm Signs:** Pat reviewed photographs of present signage at town entry roads and commented that on several larger 2 lane roads the town entry point was very cluttered with existing signs, the town line marker posts at Liberty St, Stow St and Nagog Hill Rd are very simple, attractive and have the historical stone boundary markers remaining at their base, the state "Attractions" sign boards on Rt2 exit ramps are presently being used to announce specific farms and have room for another 4 farm signs, and the small road entry points on Strawberry Hill Road and Pope Road have no signs. Heidi commented that the state has regulations on where the attraction is located vs the exit ramp "Attraction" sign that determines their eligibility for posting as an attraction. Morene suggested we consider adding the RTF sign to the bottom of existing large white signs of the type seen on Routes 27, 111, and 2A and Heidi suggested we add a sign at the Lawsbrook Road entry. Pat volunteered to tidy up our graphics and put

our sign thoughts together in a format suitable for presentation so we can further consider, clarify and agree our sign request before submitting to the Select Board. Bettina has received quotes of \$20.85 for making durable metal signs of the correct size.

**10 Agricultural Plan Development:** Paul discussed his proposed Table of Contents that would be used to guide the formation of our Agricultural Plan. The format was considered a very complete starting point by all. Bettina suggested we think about the tools and procedures we would like to use as we collaborate in writing this plan. Morene suggested we add a farming history section as an introduction and Bettina showed examples of content in the Acton Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP) that we might want to adjust for our agricultural perspective and insert into Paul's table of contents. Bettina will email her thoughts on this. Morene added that in the case of the OSRP the state mandates certain content, format review, meetings with numerous other town bodies as well as public forum discussion and that while this is time consuming the discipline results in a high quality and thorough document. Pat commented that the Acton 2020 plan and OSRP are very impressive and set the bar very high for documents of this type. Pat mentioned that the 2020 master plan and the OSRP are due for updates soon so we should ask their writers what they require as inputs from the Ag Comm and when they would like them. A further question is whether the Acton Ag Plan is a standalone plan or is it a chapter in a larger town plan, or both. The group discussed whether having a completed comprehensive agricultural plan prepared by 2022 would be a reasonable goal. This will become clear as we go forward.

**11 Jan 12<sup>th</sup> 2021 Meeting Agenda**

Virtual Meeting Advisory

1. Robert Ferrara, Acton Historical Society - Discussion of Proposed Archeology Bylaw approximately ten minutes
2. Terra Friedrichs – Herbicide use – approximately ten minutes
3. Approval of Dec 1 2020 minutes
4. Citizen's Concerns
5. Extended Protection for Morrison Farm
6. Farm Signs
7. New Property in Consideration
8. Ag Plan Development
9. Next Meeting Agenda

**12 The meeting was adjourned at 7:23 PM**