



TOWN OF ACTON AGRICULTURAL COMMISSION

Meeting Minutes

September 15, 2020

6:00 PM

Virtual Meeting

Present: Morene Bodner, Patrick Hearn, Heidi Porten, Paul Simeone

Absent: None

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

Attendees: Natural Resources Assistant Fran Portante and Acton Conservation Trust President Susan Mitchell-Hardt

Regular Business

1. Bettina Abe opened the meeting and read the “Virtual Meeting Disclaimer” and invited the members to introduce themselves.
2. The Commissioners discussed Acton and Massachusetts Laws, Right to Farm Chapter AA and Acton’s new Bylaw; MGL Chapter 40, Section 8L Municipal agricultural commission. The members have all received the documents and plan to refer to them regularly and become more familiar with them.

The commissioners discussed the various aspects of the AgCom’s Charge and how they might execute those. There is a specific procedure for helping to resolve disputes. They discussed preparing a local agricultural plan consistent with existing Town 2020 master plans and Open Space and Recreation Plan. Such a plan would have 7 “ingredients.” Morene mentioned that reviewing a current list of properties in Chapter 61 is a good place to start.

Action item: Bettina will get this from the Assessor’s office.

3. **Motion** made by Paul and seconded by Morene that Heidi be chair. Unanimously approved 4-0. **Motion** made by Heidi and seconded by Morene that Pat be clerk. Motion passed unanimously 4-0. Term lengths approved as follows:

- a. Paul – 3 year
- b. Heidi – 2 year
- c. Morene – 1 year
- d. Pat – 1 year

4. Set up a 2020 meeting schedule:

A quorum of 3 out of 4 commissioners must be present to hold a meeting. This will be easier with 5 commissioners. Bettina remembered that Peggy or Joe Hebert were interested in serving. Morene suggested asking a member of the community gardens to volunteer as a commissioner. Morene expressed concern about the preservation of Morrison Farm property and that it would be a tragedy to put in a huge parking lot and fence for a dog park there. She would like the AgCom to express their opinion to the Select Board and place this on the agenda for the October meeting. **Action:** Morene will draft a letter and share it with the commissioners at the October 13 meeting in advance of the Select Board’s meeting on October 19. Commissioners decided to meet the second Tuesday of the month.

2020-2021 Meeting dates will be (subject to approval from Land Use Department chairman and Town Manager’s office:

office: October 13, November 10, December 8, January 12, February 9, March 9, April 13. Skip May-August and

reconvene in September unless there is an urgent need to convene sooner. **Action:** Bettina will get these Zoom meeting dates approved by Land Use Director and Town Manager's office.

5. According to Acton's Right to Farm Bylaw: "Within 30 days after this bylaw becomes effective, the Board of Selectmen shall prominently post in the **Town Hall, Public Libraries, Town Notice Boards, the official Town website**, and make available for distribution the following disclosure:
"It is the policy of this community to conserve, protect and encourage the maintenance and improvement of agricultural land for the production of food, and other agricultural products, and also for its natural and ecological value. This disclosure notification is to inform buyers and occupants that the property they are about to acquire or occupy lies within a town where farming activities occur. Such farming activities may include, but are not limited to, activities that cause noise, dust and odors. In addition to the above, copies of this disclosure notification shall be available in a public area at the town hall."

This is currently posted in the LUD; on town website. Notice needs to be put up in both libraries. Also has to go in every conference room. Fran mentioned that the Town of Acton should put up "Right to Farm" signs on main roads into Acton. **Action item:** Bettina will speak to Kristin Alexander in I.T. (she has been ordering signs) and Selby about putting up street signs. Design will still need to be discussed.

6. Proposed October 13 agenda items:
 - a. Right to Farm Signs, Routes 27, 111, Rt. 2, 2A.
 - b. Morrison Farm Dog Park opinion letter
 - c. Prospective land purchase or preservation projects place holder. This may require executive session if it includes or may impact a potential real estate transaction.
 - d. Commissioners will review Chapter 40 Section 8L and continue the discussion about the comprehensive local agricultural plan.
 - e. Pat Hearn report on attendance at Oct. 2 Open Space Committee meeting.

Fran suggested that the Commissions to keep close ties with the Open Space Committee. Susan Mitchell-Hardt attends the Open Space Committee meetings, on the first Friday of the month at 7:30am. Pat Hearn asked Heidi if it would be a good idea for a commissioner to attend the next Open Space Committee meeting on October 2, 2020 at 7:30 am and prepare an introduction. Heidi and the commissioners concurred with that plan. **Action:** Pat may also send an email to Open Space introducing the AgCom and expressing the desire to stay in touch. Pat will inform the Open Space Committee of the charge to develop a comprehensive local agricultural plan.

7. Discussion of next steps in preparing a comprehensive local agricultural plan consistent with town master plan and Open Space and Recreation Plan as is defined in the Charge. **Action:** Everyone should review Chapter 40 Section 8L and discuss on October 13. Pat suggests we have the list of farms and a map as currently in the OSRP, which Susan Mitchell-Hardt filled out as part of a MAGIC survey (MAGIC stands for Minuteman Advisory Group on Interlocal Coordination. **MAGIC** consists of planning and select board representatives from the following 13 communities: Acton, Bedford, Bolton, Boxborough, Carlisle, Concord, Hudson, Lexington, Lincoln, Littleton, Maynard, Stow, and Sudbury.)

Pat commented that other towns surveyed while researching agcoms stated they had some difficulty for their other town committees to initially recognize the role of the agcom. So taking an issue and working with the other committees is a good way to raise awareness that we have an agricultural commission.

Action: Agenda for October 13 meeting must be finalized and emailed to the Town Clerk by noon on October 8, 2020.

Respectfully submitted by Bettina Dabney Abe

Meeting adjourned 7:00 pm.

Relevant documents for today's meeting may be found on the Town's public document system at this link

<http://doc.acton-ma.gov/dsweb/View/Collection-12712>

The listed agenda items are those reasonably anticipated by the Chair. Not all items may in fact be discussed and other items not listed may also be brought up for discussion to the extent permitted by law. Reasonable accommodations for people with disabilities are available upon request. Include a description of the accommodation you will need, including as much detail as you can and include a way we can contact you if we need more information. Please allow advance notice. Send an e-mail to manager@acton-ma.gov or call Town Manager's Office (978)929-6611

For more information about the Agricultural Commission, contact NR@acton-ma.gov or call 978-929-6634