



+ TOWN OF ACTON AGRICULTURAL COMMISSION

Meeting Minutes 28 Sept, 2021

6:00 PM

Virtual Meeting

Present: Morene Bodner, Patrick Hearn, Joe Hebert, Peggy Hebert, Paul Simeone

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

Attendees: Acton Conservation Trust President Susan Mitchell-Hardt

Absent: Heidi Porten

Regular Business:

Morene convened the meeting at 6:04 PM as acting chair

The new shorter format virtual meeting advisory was read in its entirety

1. Citizen's Concerns

There were no citizen concerns raised

2. Approval of the 13th April and 13th July meeting minutes:

Both minutes were unanimously approved by roll call vote.

3. Election of Ag Com Members, Membership Term and Assignment of Role

The following slate was composed and unanimously approved by roll call vote

	Term Expiring End of Year	Role
Heidi Porten	2022	Chair
Peggy Hebert	2022	Member
Joe Hebert	2022	Associate Member
Paul Simeone	2023	Member
Morene Bodner	2024	Member
Patrick Hearn	2024	Clerk

4. Easements for Stonefield Farm

Boston Area Gleaners has applied for an easement for an electrical line and an easement for a natural gas connection that would replace the existing propane tanks used to heat buildings and greenhouses. Natural gas emits less CO₂ per unit of heating provided than propane and is far less expensive. The proposal was reviewed by Sudbury Valley Trustees (SVT) and found compliant with the terms of the APR. The Acton Ag Comm as co-holder of the APR is required to participate with SVT in the APR monitoring on behalf of the town of Acton. The town building commissioner was consulted as to how the natural gas connection would be considered in view

of the new town bylaw to ban fossil fuel hookups for new construction. The bylaw is being reviewed by the State Attorney General's office and is therefore not yet in effect. The proposed easement was passed unanimously by role call vote.

5. Expanded Protection for The Morrison Farm Property

The proposal to form a non-profit corporation that would hold the Morrison Farm house, barn and minimal surrounding land as a historical property was circulated amongst the town committees with all positive feedback. The actual lot size and whether a lot for an unoccupied house and barn would have to comply with conventional lot restriction needs to be discussed with the planning board and perhaps the planning board of appeals. The present thinking is to have this proposal on the town meeting warrant for 2022. Bill Alstrom, an active user of the Morrison Farm Community Gardens has expressed interest in being part of the Friends of Morrison Farm. An on-site meeting is planned between Bill Alstrom, Morene and Bettina.

6. Farm Signs: The farm signs are and attractively located and set and almost completely installed. The Ag Comm is pleased with the outcome.

7. New Property in Consideration:

- Hybrid Farm on Nagog Hill Road has a new owner who has applied for a renewal of license agreement that would allow full horse rights on the adjacent 12 acres of conservation land for horses. Bettina reported the Conservation Commission is not in favor of renewing the license, but the land can be used for riding and tethered grazing w/o a license agreement. The land cannot be used for overnight location of horses unless licensed.
- Susan Mitchell-Hardt reported that she and Morene will be visiting the new owners of Stoneymeade Farm to welcome them and let them know of the Ag Comm and the Acton Conservation Trust.
- Susan also asked if the Ag Comm wished to express an opinion regarding the wooded land parcel adjacent to the Wetherbee Road Fields, the "Agricultural Gateway" to Acton. The wooded property is being considered for sale. The Ag Comm did respond that forested properties held in 61B are considered agricultural as well and by consensus were in favor of preserving the present pastoral appearance of the Agricultural Gateway.
- Nashoba Valley Farm bought the adjacent 65 Esterbrook Road property to expand their horse operation and were advised of the CR restrictions on the new acquisition.

8. Agricultural Plan Development.

The group agreed rereading the proposed division of Ag Plan Topics would be a good way to prepare for resuming work on the Ag Plan in December. The Topics and expressed work preferences are listed in the Apr 13th minutes.

New Business:

1. Bettina reported the town now has a new Sustainability Director, Andrea Becerra, who suggested the Ag Comm might want to have a table at the May Day/ Earth gathering.
2. Paul reported that Chronicle had a recent broadcast on the topic of local dam removal and had concerns that the Dam at Erickson Grain Mill factors heavily into the water supply for Stonefield Farm. Bettina reported that there was ongoing activity regarding the 53 River Street dam that is considered at risk. She also explained that Acton is certified as a Municipal Vulnerability Prepared (MVP) Town and that risk mitigation is the focus. It appears there is a movement to restore natural water flows by removing dams and at the same time a movement to modify dams so as to withstand increased rainfall resulting from climate change. All agreed that knowing more about dam removal and related topics would be valuable. Bettina suggested having Alison Fields-Juma give the Ag com an update on this topic would provide information. Morene agreed that Alison is very knowledgeable and Bettina volunteered to contact Alison.

9. Oct 26th 2021 Meeting Agenda

Virtual Meeting Advisory

Alison Field-Juma Update on Dam Removal Activities in the Local Area

Citizen's Concerns

Approval of Sep 28th minutes

Letter of Support for Stonefield Farm Grant Application

Extended Protection for Morrison Farm

New Property in Consideration

Next Meeting Agenda

The meeting was adjourned at 7:15 PM

Linked relevant documents and meeting materials can be found in the Agricultural Commission's page on the Town website or through the following link. <http://doc.acton-ma.gov/dsweb/View/Collection-12706>