



## **TOWN OF ACTON AGRICULTURAL COMMISSION**

**Meeting Minutes 22 Feb, 2022**

**6:00 PM**

**Virtual Meeting**

**Present:** Morene Bodner, Patrick Hearn, Joe Hebert, Peggie Hebert, Heidi Porten, Paul Simeone

Natural Resources Assistant, Zoom host, and Recording Secretary: Bettina Abe

Attendees: Acton Conservation Trust President Susan Mitchell-Hardt; Kate Despres, Biologist, Educator and Manager/Farmer Daisy Hill Farm

### **Regular Business:**

**Heidi convened the meeting at 6:01 PM**

**The virtual meeting advisory was read in its entirety**

#### **1. Kate Despres Daisy Hill Farm, Acton**

Kate spoke about her background as a Biology Teacher, the Daisy Hill CSA and organic farm in Acton and her interest in farming. Kate has also taught Acton community education classes in farming and composting and has produced several YouTube videos on specialty crops that have been featured as part of the Assabet Village Food COOP promotion. It was interesting to have her perspectives. The Ag Comm welcomes her inputs and will look forward to collaboration with her in future farming efforts.

#### **2. Citizen's Concerns**

There were no citizen concerns reported.

#### **3. Approval of the 25 Jan, 2022 meeting minutes:**

Minutes were unanimously approved by roll call vote.

#### **4. Expanded Protection for The Morrison Farm Property**

Morene met with Town Manager John Mangiaratti, Andrea Becerra and Julie Pierce Onos to discuss future plans for the Morrison Farm Property. There appears to be an increasing awareness of the importance of this property as part of the Concord Road Historic Corridor and the value of the land and community gardens to the townspeople. The concept of a "Friends of Morrison Farm" non-profit met with support as did protecting the land with a conservation or agricultural restriction. The main concern on the part of the town is minimizing cost impact, particularly in the case of keeping maintenance cost minimal on historic buildings. The guidance we received was to hold town meeting discussion of this issue until 2023. Heidi

mentioned Natick Community Farm used a “go fund me” campaign to raise over \$600K towards a new barn/greenhouse to replace the one recently lost in a fire.

#### **5. New Property in Consideration**

Susan Mitchell- Hardt reported that there was no new property to report on this period.

#### **6. Walking Trail Extension to Stonefield Farm.**

The issue is that Field-Pond Foundation has delivered \$15,000 funding to Boston Area Gleaners with the understanding this would help to finance the APR as well as to provide a walking trail connection from the Assabet River Rail to the Farm. Multiple concepts for the walking trail as well as their arising complications were discussed.

- A path connecting the south most farm field to the rail trail was discussed. Dogs would not be allowed because they pose a food safety risk of dog manure near crops. Domestic or wild animal manure is strictly disallowed near food crops. Insuring dogs are kept on leash is unenforceable and not in alignment with risk levels to the farmer.
- A short trail with an elevated birding station was considered. The wetlands, forest edge and open field in this part of the farm is known to be attractive to many birds. The elevated platform at Great Meadows National Wildlife Refuge, 299 Monson Road, Concord is a good example but it would be very expensive to build and liability would have to be considered.
- A visit to the farm volunteer/packing area would be properly accessed directly from the farm frontage and not the rail trail. Likewise accessing the rail trail by walking across the farm land and then private property is already causing concern with the private property owners. A possible solution to this is to better mark the nicely designed and landscaped access to the rail trail that is just a short distance down the public road from the farm.

Discussion will continue. Presently no overwhelmingly clear solution has been found.

#### **7. Comprehensive Agricultural Plan**

Bettina mentioned that the Town of Acton Ag Comm web page now has a more specific set of plan topics spelled out and reviewed each item of the Draft Comprehensive Ag Plan outline. This draft outline has the assigned names for each of the topics and serves as a guide for each contributor to use in assembling their part. As an example, Bettina did a walk through of how the draft describes the process for conflict resolution and what the Ag comm responsibilities are in this regard. There was some discussion as to the type of concerns that might arise and how the plan should address these.

Heidi has set up Google docs for all of the plan topics, per Paul’s outline, and has confirmed each of us has access. Names have been added to the topics section title to clarify who is the primary contributor to each section.

The next step is for each of us to submit drafts of our assigned parts so that we begin to see what the whole document will look like. Some members have already entered their draft

materials. When we have all submitted our sections we can then decide on how to best review the parts and integrate the parts into the whole.

There was discussion about the importance of having a web presence for the Ag Comm so as to be visible to the younger members of the town who are on-line oriented. Bettina pointed out that other committees in town have used linked web pages to complement their presence on the Town of Acton web site.

**8. Arbor Day Ag Table**

Bettina mentioned that the location for the April 29<sup>th</sup> Arbor Day event has not yet been set. Ag Comm is planning to staff a table with members and a few posters of local farming and will consider providing animals if the location permits.

**9. Mar 22 2022 Meeting Agenda**

Reading of Virtual Meeting Advisory

1. Citizen's Concerns
2. Approval of Feb 22<sup>nd</sup> minutes
3. Extended Protection for Morrison Farm
4. New Property in Consideration
5. Next Steps Regarding Stonefield Farm Walking Trail
6. Comprehensive Agricultural Plan
7. Next Meeting Agenda

**The meeting was adjourned at 7:36 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>