



## **TOWN OF ACTON AGRICULTURAL COMMISSION**

**Meeting Minutes 27 Dec, 2022**

**6:00 PM**

**Hybrid Meeting: Zoom and in person at Town Hall Room 9**

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

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

Attendees: Acton Conservation Trust President Susan Mitchell-Hardt, Acton Conservation Agent Mike Gendron, Dean Charter Select Board Liaison

### **Regular Business:**

Heidi convened the meeting at 6:02 PM

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

#### **1. Citizen's Concerns**

There were no citizen concerns reported.

#### **2. Approval of the Nov 22nd, 2022 meeting minutes:**

Heidi asked if the Nov 22nd draft meeting minutes required any corrections or additions. None were given so the minutes will be posted as written. In the future we will not vote on the minutes if there are no corrections required. At this meeting we did vote and the minutes were approved unanimously by roll call vote.

#### **3. New Property in Consideration**

No new property discussed.

#### **4. Morrison Farm Protection**

Pat reported that ACT has stated they would provide up to \$20k of the cost to write and maintain a CR for the Morrison Farm property with the understanding that this will not be formally approved until the proposal is finalized which includes the standard procedure of requesting funds from the town which, if not available, will be covered by ACT. Other requirements include providing a survey, etc. Conversations with both Historic District Commission and Historical Committee were positive and Ag Comm is on the agenda for their next regular committee monthly meetings on Jan 10th and 11<sup>th</sup> respectively. The Ag comm would like to take the lead on the CR to preserve the land and present functions and would like to have the Historic groups make the recommendations on the buildings as this approach allows each group to focus on what they do best. Morene and Pat spoke to the affection the community gardeners have for the Morrison Farm and suggested we circulate Bill Alstrom's very sincere letter stating this appreciation to the Select Board as well as the Ag Comm. The Covid

Pandemic quickly caused all available open slots at the community gardens to fill and now there is a waiting list so we should consider whether community gardens expansion is possible without impinging on the pasture or meadow which Bettina wisely pointed out are valuable conservation assets supporting pollinators and wildlife. Pat also reported that there is 272.8 acres of crop land in our present Ag Com land estimate and 131.6 acres of that is state owned and presumably not under town control. Morrison Farm is 32.5 acres and approximately half of that is used for conservation forest and hiking trails leaving 16.3 acres of crop land which is approximately 11.5 % of Acton's presently available crop land. Pat stated that after being incorporated almost 200 years we are only 20 years away from complete build out in Acton (per the 2020 plan) so we must strive to maintain the available farmland that we have. Pat also stated we would need to have a draft CR and Warrant Article submitted to the Town Manager's office no later than 1 Feb. Morene reported that she had been in touch with Bill Mullen who still owns the original Friends of Morrison Farm 501c3 that has been inactive. The advice is to start a new 501c3 non-profit with a new name for the support of Morrison farm. Morene also gave historical background on the Littleton apple orchard part of the Morrison estate being purchased by that town using state self-help funds and placing it immediately into a CR whereas Acton purchased the 32.5 acre Morrison farm on Concord Road with town funds and has held it as General Municipal land use category. Dean advised that we should present our draft CR at the Jan 23<sup>rd</sup> select board meeting and put us on that agenda so this also sets the schedule for the writing of the draft CR. Dean also advised that we should properly address adequate parking and access to the property in the CR so that we are planning wisely for the future. Dean also suggested that we collect votes of CR approval and support letters from as many stakeholder committees as possible. Among the most important of these committees emphasized by Dean are OSC, meeting on Jan 19<sup>th</sup> and Land Stewards, meeting on Jan 17<sup>th</sup>. The OSC was also strongly emphasized as being important by Susan Mitchell-Hardt. Morene and Mike Gendron will help with getting us on their agendas. Dean also advised us that if we are not able to coordinate all the necessary preparation for the Select Board by the 23<sup>rd</sup> or the Town Managers office by Feb 1 the property is not at high risk of being lost. Interestingly, he provided an example of a recent developer's inappropriate proposal that was thwarted by town authorities, indicating land is at frequently at risk but authorities are vigilant. This is both comforting as well as alarming and underlines the need to add more protection in the form of a CR as well as insuring town authorities are well supported by the citizens in their vigilance and continual effort to insure proper land use and land preservation.

##### **5. Farmers Forum**

The Farmers Forum idea was briefly discussed. It was agreed that we should finish our plan, scrub the farms list, and prepare a draft brochure before calling this meeting. This meeting should provide opportunity for farmers in Acton to voice concerns and provide guidance on how they would like to be represented.

##### **6. Ag Comm Logo and other Presentation Materials**

Paul and Pat are working on the logo and making progress. Old Sturbridge Village has been contacted to get rights to the use of their plow picture for our logo, Paul has changed the wording to avoid implying that the Acton land was never farmed before European farmers

came. Joe reported his progress with the Brochures and made an all-call for farm photos. Morene eagerly promised many horse pictures.

**7. Comprehensive Ag Plan Progress**

Pat reported that he had completed the draft Partial Acton Comprehensive Ag Plan and did send out the uncompleted draft just before this meeting. The thinking is that this frame work would give us a working document that we could each contribute to according to individual expertise. This, with adequate discussion and revisions, would lead to a completed document the entire group would support. This document would be reviewed with the town farmers to get their inputs before publishing.

**8. OSRP Memo**

The Ag Comm members commented, as requested, on a letter and invitation from Mellissa Settipani-Rufo, Acton Recreation Director, explaining the Acton 2023 OSRP working group is seeking input on four main goals. The general input was that the Ag Comm is OK with the 4 goals but would like to add more recognition of farms in the next level of discussion that would occur in the items beneath these main goals. Morene is the Ag Comm representative to OSRC and will provide our inputs at **the Jan 19<sup>th</sup>** OSRC Meeting

**9. Jan 24<sup>th</sup> 2023 Meeting Agenda**

Reading of Virtual Meeting Advisory

1. Citizen's Concerns
2. Approval of Dec 27<sup>th</sup> minutes
3. New Property in Consideration
4. Update on 2023 OSRP goals from their Jan 19<sup>th</sup> meeting.
5. Morrison Farm discussion
6. Ag Comm Logo, Brochure, and Ag Comm Event Posters
7. Comprehensive Agricultural Plan
8. Meeting Agenda for Feb 28<sup>th</sup> 2023

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 7:14 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>