



TOWN OF ACTON AGRICULTURAL COMMISSION

Meeting Minutes 24 Jan, 2023

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, Joe Will (Recreation Commission and Land Stewards), Jody Harris (Acton Conservation Trust), Joe Cooney (Acton Conservation Trust)

Regular Business:

Heidi convened the meeting at 6:04 PM

The virtual meeting advisory was read in its entirety

1. Citizen's Concerns

There were no citizen concerns reported.

2. Approval of the Jan 24th meeting minutes:

Heidi asked if the Nov 22nd draft meeting minutes required any corrections or additions. Pat reported that there was one misspelling that would be corrected. With that correction added the minutes were approved unanimously by roll call vote.

3. New Property in Consideration

No new property discussed.

4. Morrison Farm Protection

Pat reported the Morrison Farm CR Proposal was presented to the Select Board. The proposal had 5 strong letters of support from Open Space Committee, Conservation Commission, Land Stewards, Historic District Commission, and Historical Commission. Very supportive letter from a number of the Community Gardeners were also included. The Select Board elected to not take the proposal to town meeting, primarily because the uncertain future use of the historic buildings would expose the town to potential high restoration or maintenance costs. Joe Will added that the Select Board also requested we talk with the Recreation Commission. His thought was that presently the availability of the AB Regional High School lower playing fields reduced the need for soccer fields for the Recreation Commission. Joe also mentioned that Katie Green may have files and a spread sheet regarding Morrison Farm past proposals that may shed light on options and decisions regarding Morrison Farm. Morene reported that establishing the 501c3 non-profit would first require that the CR be accepted by town meeting

and the State Department of Conservation Services. Follow on meetings with Recreation Commission and Historical Commission have been scheduled. Joe Cooney mentioned that the select board decision should not be considered a failure and that land use decisions are typically the long game. He also commented the Select board has much important other work on their plate just now so that may be a factor. He suggested 1x1 conversation with select board members could be effective and that perhaps group meetings with multiple committees each at below quorum attendance. This can be done w/o violating open meeting laws. Mike Gendron provided very positive feedback on the amount of work that was done in a short amount of time and feels that progress was made.

5. Farmland of Local Importance

Pat explained the Connection to Al Averill and Farmland of Local Importance. Al who is a soil scientist affiliated with NFS/NRCS will provide at no charge a survey of the town's land using arial maps to locate land that is being farmed but not shown presently as Prime Farmland or Farmland of Statewide Importance. The objective of this program is to make more funding available for farming and farm preservation through an added category of farmland. Al does need a written request from the town to perform the analysis. This request typically comes from the Town's Ag Comm Chair. We agreed that we should put a presentation from Al on the agenda for our 28 Feb Ag Comm meeting.

6. Ag Comm Logo and other Presentation Materials

Paul and Pat are making progress on the Logo. We were denied rights to use the Sturbridge Village Plow photograph but Paul was able to find a substitute picture that Bettina cropped. We should be able to have a completed logo soon. Joe reported his excellent progress with the Brochure and received the following inputs: Add Daisey Hill farm to the list, show Acton Arboretum with the three community gardens on the farm list; emphasize local fresh food rather than agriculture being the backbone of the economy.

7. Comprehensive Ag Plan Progress

The CR for Morrison farm took most of the available time this month, so only small progress was made on the comprehensive plan.

8. OSRP Working Group

Pat and Bettina reported on the OSRP working group liaison meeting of 19 Jan. This is the initial meeting of several that will serve to provides inputs to the working group who will create the next OSRP revision. The meeting was done as a round robin with 4 tables, each with its own goal to which comments were added from a rotating set of town staff and town committee/commission liaisons. The Ag Comm was able to provide suggestions regarding land preservation and the importance of agricultural soils.

9. Terms of Office

Pat and Bettina explained that according to the town clerk's office the present terms of office of all Ag Comm Members are all expiring in June of 2023. We believed we were operating on a staggered schedule with some terms extending to 2024 as voted in our Sept 2021 minutes. How this disconnect occurred is not understood. We need to resolve this by submitting new terms

of office to the Town Clerk before we adjourn after the April 2023 meeting. Pat also pointed out that recruiting new members as associates would provide an opportunity to have enthusiastic, and highly qualified people get the necessary introduction for town committee work.

10. Feb 28th 2023 Meeting Agenda

Reading of Virtual Meeting Advisory

1. Citizen's Concerns
2. Approval of Jan 24th minutes
3. Al Averill AFS/NRCS on Farmland of Local Importance
4. Morrison Farm discussion
5. Logo and Brochure
6. Ag Plan Update
7. Terms of Office Update
8. New Property in Consideration
9. Meeting Agenda for Mar 28th 2023

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 7:29 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>