



TOWN OF ACTON AGRICULTURAL COMMISSION

Meeting Minutes 28 Mar, 2023

6:00 PM

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

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

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

Attendees: Jody Harris from Acton Conservation Trust, Acton Conservation Agent Mike Gendron

Absent: Paul Simeone

Regular Business:

Heidi convened the meeting at 6:05 PM

The virtual meeting advisory was read in its entirety

1. Citizen's Concerns None reported

2. Approval of Feb 28th meeting minutes: Approved as written

3. Discussion of Farmland of Local Importance (FLI)

Pat reported on the Acton Farm Land of Local Importance survey that was completed by Al Averill of AFT/NRCS. Al has identified 12 additional soil types that can potentially expand the amount of designated agricultural land in Acton if approved by an onsite NRCS survey indicating that soil type meets its qualifying conditions on that property. An initial check indicated numerous farms in Acton will have soil types identified as potential FLI. The intention of this program is to make more farmland eligible for agricultural preservation funding. After discussion it was agreed that we need to have a more detailed question and answer session with NRCS, and perhaps run a trial case, so that we can speak in a more informed way to Acton land owners. Pat will contact NRCS for their recommendations on how to proceed.

4. Morrison Farm CR Update

The latest thinking on the Morrison Farm CR is to resubmit the CR with an envelope around the historic property so the CR would not include that part of Morrison farm. Bettina will discuss with Susan Mitchell-Hardt and depending on that conversation we will write a note to the select board letting them know we would like to bring the amended CR to the next town meeting and whether they would like for us to brief the select board or go directly to the Town Manager's office with the request.

5. Comprehensive Ag Plan Progress

Pat reported that the plan had been updated to include history items from Paul and Morene and a general tidying and reorganizing. The farm properties list is now at 43 farms of approximately 570 acres total. The SVT story map rating system is being used to rank protection priority. There may be a few adds and deletions in the final form. A helpful step towards completion would be to add an auto-indexing Table of Contents linking the section/subsection bolded headings and also adding auto-indexing Citations and references to numeric superscripts. This would allow us to organize the final document while keeping the TOC updated and allow entry for all the citations and references required for the final document. The plan is approximately 80% complete. It appears that the updated Town 2020 plan will not be a total rewrite but instead an updating provided by 5 working groups. As we start to finalize the Comp Ag Plan we can review our plan with these other working groups to learn what they think we need more of or less of, etc. In summary the plan will continue to evolve until we consider it final for the first issue and then evolve incrementally year by year as needed.

6. Terms of Office and Recruiting New Members:

We need to resolve Terms of Office in our April meeting before adjourning for the Summer. There was discussion of making a request to the select board allowing out-of-town residents farming in Acton to be Ag Comm members. There was general consensus that up to 1/5 (20%) of the commissioners could be out of town residents. Also there was consensus that residents owning managed forestry are eligible for Ag comm membership as farmers. Pat spoke to the need for having a certain percentage of the commissioners/committee members of any organization to have time available to take on assignments for the group to thrive. While much of the initial heavy lifting will be done in the formative stages of the Ag Comm there will always be a need to organize activities, plan events, select and invite speakers, coordinate state and federal programs, etc. Bettina and Morene suggested we contact our active farms to advise them of the Ag Comm presence, activities, and need for participation.

7. New Property in Consideration

No new property for discussion

8. Meeting with Parham Pouladdeg of Silverstone Stables

Mr. Parham Pouladdeg met with Pat, Bettina, Christin Guichard (Planning), and Mike Gendron to discuss potential plans for vertical farming at Silverstone Stables. Vertical farming is a very capital intensive but also a potentially highly productive emerging agricultural field. Information regarding grants, employment resources for emerging farmers and building codes/zoning requirements were discussed.

9. Apr 25th 2023 Meeting Agenda

Reading of Virtual Meeting Advisory

1. Citizen's Concerns
2. Approval of Mar 28th minutes
3. Acton Farmland of Local Importance next steps
4. Morrison Farm CR next steps
5. Ag Plan Update/ Farmland Priorities
6. Terms of Office/New Member Recruiting
7. New Property in Consideration
8. Meeting Agenda for Sept 26th 2023

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 7:27 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>