



TOWN OF ACTON AGRICULTURAL COMMISSION

Meeting Minutes 4th Oct, 2023

6:00 PM

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

Present: Morene Bodner, Patrick Hearn, Heidi Porten

Ian Bergemann Land Stewardship Coordinator

Attendees: Acton Select Board Liaison Fran Arsenault, Acton Conservation Agent Mike Gendron, Acton Conservation Trust Susan Mitchell-Hardt, Bettina Abe – Highly valued Ag comm supporter

Absent: Joe Hebert

Regular Business:

Heidi convened the meeting at 6:03 PM

The virtual meeting advisory was read in its entirety

1. **Citizen's Concerns** None reported
2. **Approval of April 25th meeting minutes:** Approved as written by unanimous roll-call vote.

3. Discussion of Farmland of Local Importance (FLI)

The recent work on Farmland of Local Importance (FLI) indicates there is opportunity for many landowners in Acton to have their property certified as FLI. The FLI designation helps to secure Ag land preservation grants that require 50% of the parcel land is designated farmland. Pat stated that the Farmland Information Center fact sheet on Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP) and Agricultural Land Easements (ALE) showed Massachusetts as having received large sums for farmland preservation since 1996. The amount going to Massachusetts 1996 through 2019 was over \$84M which is 5th highest funded state in the nation. The land owners would have received twice that amount. The most recent version of this program removed some of the restrictions that were placed on earlier versions. Mike commented that the ACEP programs have received funding through 2031 so it is viable for present use. There was a discussion about how to communicate this program that resulted in agreement that we should do further research on the details of applying, the amounts typically granted, and put together a letter and attached fact sheets to communicate this to OSC, Conservation, Land Stewards, Recreation, Historic District Commission, Historical Commission as well as at upcoming farmers meetings. Pat agreed to start putting together an information package and to send both Ian and Mike a note with the details of what had been done thus far.

4. Morrison Farm CR Update

The latest thinking on the Morrison Farm CR is to resubmit the CR to the Select Board with an envelope around the historic property so the CR would not include that part of Morrison farm. Bettina pointed out that Jim Colman of the Conservation Commission had inputs that we would need to address so that we can be assured of the conservation commission support for the CR. The thinking is that once Jim Colman's concerns are addressed we will send the final new revision out to the Committees that we have been working with (OSC, Conservation, Land Stewards, Recreation, Historic District Commission, Historical Commission) with a note summarizing the new approach. We would not present to each committee as we did in the past. Pete Westover is available to take inputs in writing the final version. Susan Mitchell-Hardt stated ACT is not recommending Citizen's petition although it could be an option.

5. Comprehensive Ag Plan Update

Pat has added a table of contents that is indexed to topics and subtopics. He will also incorporate Morene's additions on Horses and other edits as well as showing a summary of all properties and all types of agriculture in appendix 1 while also showing the Assessors table of chapter lands in appendix 2.

6. Letter of Support for Moritz Parcel Acquisition

Ag Comm was asked to provide a letter of support regarding town acquisition of the Moritz parcel and placing a conservation restriction on the land. This parcel is adjacent to the Wetherbee conservation land and part of the Acton Route 2 entrance scenic corridor. A letter describing the details will be provided. Morene moved that we write the letter of support and Hedie seconded. The motion was approved unanimously by roll-call vote.

7. Non-resident Ag Comm Members

A lively discussion on allowing up to 20% non-Acton citizens to serve on the Ag Comm was held. Recruiting in general was also discussed. Pat emphasized that although a lot of the initial ground work for Ag comm functionality has been laid it is also true that there will be a significant ongoing work stream of communications, outreach, presentations, farmer meetings, etc. and that this requires new members have both time and basic computer skills. Heidi agreed. There appears to be some precedence for allowing a small percentage of a town commission to be non-residents so this is a possible option. In general we should all spread the word that we are recruiting but also bear in mind the future workload of the Ag Comm so we can find good fits. We will invite new potential members to attend Ag Comm Meetings as guests to get an idea of what it is all about.

Pat will contact Usha Thakar and Dylan Frazier of Boston Area Gleaners to see if they have interest in joining and Morene will contact Bill Alstrom who is an active and capable member of the Morrison Community Gardens.

8. Farmers Meeting

Organizing a meeting of the Acton Farmers was discussed as a means to generate a wider town understanding, support and direction setting for the Ag Comm and farming in Acton. A target

date of Tuesday Dec 5th was set. The concept is to have a meet and greet “Ice-Cream-Social” environment with perhaps a few brief welcoming remarks and then informal personal chat sessions. At this point we would not have guest speakers but instead rely on brochures, posters and the personal conversations to achieve the following:

- Communicate that the Ag Comm exists, what has been done thus far and form a coalition of interested citizens
- Ask for property owner guidance on how the Ag Comm should represent them and what they consider to be our most important objectives
- Recruit volunteers for future commission openings or related support groups

Ian agreed to update the farmers letter that Bettina had started last year and create a mailing list that will allow us to reach all the identified land owners. The list work is necessary as not all farm land parcel addresses are the same as the owner’s postal or email address.

9. New Property in Consideration

This topic was addressed in the earlier agenda item of support letter for Moritz Parcel Acquisition and CR.

10. Oct 24th 2023 Meeting Agenda

Reading of Virtual Meeting Advisory

1. Citizen’s Concerns
2. Nora Masler – Planning Committee, Discussion of Zoning
3. Approval of Oct 4th minutes
4. Acton Farmland of Local Importance next steps
5. Morrison Farm CR update and next steps
6. Ag Plan Update
7. Request for 1/5 non Acton citizen commissioners
8. Farmers Meeting
9. New Property in Consideration
10. Meeting Agenda for Nov 28th 2023

The meeting was adjourned at 8:04 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>