



TOWN OF ACTON AGRICULTURAL COMMISSION

Meeting Minutes 25 Apr, 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: Acton Conservation Agent Mike Gendron, Acton Conservation Trust Susan Mitchell-Hardt

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 Mar 28th meeting minutes:** Approved as written
3. **Discussion of Farmland of Local Importance (FLI)**

Pat reported on details of Farmland of Local Importance (FLI) stating that there are essentially two parts to the process. The first part involves getting NRCS FLI approval that a specific FLI parcel meets the requirements for farmable land. This is initiated at owner's request. If the land is considered farmable step 2 is to determine market value and align the funding for the conservation easement. 50% funding comes from American Farmland Trust (AFT) and the remaining 50% typically comes from a land trust. There are several Brochures that explain the details, the process and historical funds expended by state. Pat will distribute these to the group and submit them for town filing of meeting materials. The best knowledge on the process is likely to come from talking with people who have been through it. Pat will report any new information gained over the summer in the Sept meeting.
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. Pat suggested we work on this over the summer farming break as our past experience indicates that it takes many months to get consensus across the multiple committees and ACT. The committees involved are Recreation, Open Space, Land Stewards, Historical Commission and Historic District Commission. In order to revise the CR revision 5 to a new revision containing the changes Susan Mitchell-Hardt will need to meet with the ACT board and restart the CR writing process with Pete Westover. Bettina pointed out that Jim Coleman 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.

5. Comprehensive Ag Plan Progress

Pat reported that Paul and Pat had worked on finding a ranking system for farmland preservation priority. While a reasonable ranking system was developed it appeared that it would take a lot more work to implement than the staffing we have would be capable of. Pat met with Bettina and Mike Gendron to discuss pros and cons of rating/ranking systems. A comparison indicated the SVT ranking system would change ranking priority only a small amount from the concept Pat and Paul developed. Since the SVT ranking system has the benefit of being a regionally established precedence and is easy to use it can be readily implemented. The Conservation commission has a similar problem in ranking conservation land and is also considering the use of the SVT rating system. After discussion there was unanimous consensus to use the SVT rating system for the Acton Farmland properties we have listed.

6. Terms of Office

Terms of Office were voted before adjourning for the Summer. While voting on terms may not be required this was done as an insurance measure in the event a vote is required. Bettina will ensure Lisa Tomyl has the following term information that was agreed unanimously by the commission.

Future Term Periods for Ag Comm Commissioners

- Patrick Hearn- 1 year, expiring 2024
- Morene Bodner- 2 years, expiring 2025
- Joe Hebert - 2 years, expiring 2025
- Heidi Porten - 3 years, expiring 2026

7. Non-resident Ag Comm Members

In order to be able to better fill future Ag Comm Commissioner openings the Ag Comm will request permission from the Select Board to allow no more than 1 of 5 Ag Commissioners to be non-resident provided that they meet the remaining commissioner requirements as stated in the Select Board Charge to the Ag Comm. Joe questioned whether other committees had used this process and Bettina answered there were occasional exceptions granted to non-residents. This request was moved by Paul seconded by Pat and voted unanimously by roll call vote.

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. The meeting would bring together the farming related towns people to meet each other, have a good time and allow us to communicate some of our Ag Comm highlights. Examples include:

- Summary of what the Acton Ag Comm is today and how it can benefit the town.

- Status update of farming in Acton showing Acton Farms and Chapter 61 lands map.
- Potential benefits of land easements and Farmland of Local Importance in preserving farmlands and generating income.
- Dialog regarding how the local landowners would like to see the Ag Comm represent them and what they would like to see as future activity.

Morene suggested she would be willing to host such an event in the October time frame. Bettina has drafted a letter to circulate to the farmers.

9. New Property in Consideration

No new property for discussion

10. Sep 26th 2023 Meeting Agenda

Reading of Virtual Meeting Advisory

1. Citizen's Concerns
2. Approval of Apr 25th minutes
3. Acton Farmland of Local Importance next steps
4. Morrison Farm CR update and next steps
5. Ag Plan Update
6. Request for 1/5 non Acton citizen commissioners
7. New Property in Consideration
8. Farmers Meeting
9. Meeting Agenda for Sept 26th 2023

The meeting was adjourned at 7:15 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>