



TOWN OF ACTON AGRICULTURAL COMMISSION

Meeting Minutes March 25, 2025

6:00 PM

Hybrid Meeting: Zoom and in person at Town Hall Room 126

Present: Heidi Porten (chair), Kate Despres (co-chair), Bettina Abe, Bill Alstrom (clerk)

Ian Bergemann - Community Conservation Specialist

Attendees: Fran Arsenault - Acton Select Board Liaison, "Liam" - new Acton resident

Via zoom: Acton resident Travis Odom

Regular Business:

Heidi convened the meeting at 6:09 PM.

The hybrid meeting announcement was read in its entirety.

1. **Approval of the meeting minutes of January 28, 2025** – Bettina made a motion to approve the minutes, Kate seconded. The minutes were unanimously accepted.
2. **Concerns from the Public.** None were presented other than the interest in a potential chicken keeping by-law.
3. **Chicken by-law** – A proposal for a chicken keeping by-law had been sent to Ian and Fran by Sudhir Prabhu. Sudhir was invited to this meeting but did not attend. The Commissioners have several questions for Sudhir and invite him to attend our next meeting on April 22.

Travis Odom presented ideas about the value of roosters – especially if a resident wished to breed chickens. And in his experience other forms of fowl such as guinea hens are much noisier. Liam also expressed his interest in the town adopting a chicken keeping by-law.

Bill presented several questions about Sudhir's concerns and about the role of Ag Com regarding establishing a by-law for farm animals. Bettina clarified that Ag Com was a platform for such discussions and would be consulted for opinions. But the actual composition of a by-law would emanate from other committees such as Planning or the Board of Health. There would also be a

process of public outreach before a final submission to the Select Board – who would potentially vote that a by-law be included as a warrant at Town Meeting.

Ian was directed to email Planning and BOH to inquire to the number and nature of any complaints from residents about chickens kept in residential areas.

The chicken by-law discussion will remain as a “standing agenda” item for Ag Com but will be returned to on April 22 if Sudhir Prabhu attends and participates.

4. **Comprehensive Agricultural Plan Discussion** – Members applauded the nature and comprehensiveness of the plan – acknowledging and commending the work by previous commissioner Pat Hearn. Ian said our approval and formal submission to the Select Board would likely take another year. Ian discussed some refinements to include more graphics. Bill suggested more “paragraph breaks”. Bill offered to make some recommended edits to enhance readability. Kate will also have some suggestions and asked about the missing “References and Citations”. Ian will reach out to Pat.

Ian suggested we work on establishing a working definition of a “farm” in Acton to facilitate a clearer determination of just how much farming is occurring in Acton.

5. **Morrison Farm Update** – Ian is still in the process of developing a public outreach project that would gauge public support for MF protection or other uses. Members agreed that the MF house has been an obstacle to planning a future for the property. There was discussion of the proposed “historical corridor” along Concord Road. Should the house be preserved or removed? The Morrison Farm discussion will resume with Ag Com’s September meeting.
6. **New Property in Consideration** – Ian showcased the SVT “SuAsCo Land Protection Prioritization Multi-Model Viewer”. It is a story map that could be a tool in identifying land in Acton as possible candidates for consideration. Combined with the Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP) a chart could be assembled that shows land that should be a priority for protection. Ian will provide Ag Com with an overview of the OSRP at the next meeting.
7. **Annual Commission/Committee Reports** – Ian filed the annual Ag Com plan reflecting activity in 2024.
8. **Ian will follow up on the Ag Com current members update** on the town website. He continues work on an “Invasive Species” page for the website and may at some time create a comparable AG Com webpage.
9. **Ian announced a North Acton Community Garden** renovation project for April 25. The objective is to restore several plots that have become too shaded to be productive.

10. Next Month's Agenda (April 22):

Review and accept meeting minutes of March 25, 2025

Concerns from the Public

Chicken By-law discussion

Comprehensive Agricultural Commission Plan – refinements

Morrison Farm Update

New Property Consideration

Next Month's Agenda

Bettina motioned to close the meeting at 7:19 PM. Kate seconded. The vote was unanimous.

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>