



TOWN OF ACTON AGRICULTURAL COMMISSION

Meeting Minutes 12 Jan, 2021

6:00 PM

Virtual Meeting

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

Natural Resources Assistant, Zoom host, and recording secretary: Bettina Abe

Attendees: Acton Conservation Trust President Susan Mitchell-Hardt

Guests: Robert Ferrara and Anne Forbes, Acton Historical Commission; Terra Friedrichs

Regular Business:

Peggy and Joe Hebert are now members of the Acton Ag Comm.

1 Heidi convened the meeting at 6:08 PM

2 The virtual meeting advisory was read in its entirety

3 Citizen's Concerns

a) Bob Ferrara, Acton Historical Commission – Archeology Bylaw (linked documents)

Bob reviewed the Historical Commission's proposed bylaw to better protect archeological and historical assets. Their presentation had been reviewed favorably by the BoS in Oct 2020 and contains maps of likely pre and post-colonial era Native American activity in Acton. The presentation can be found through the link at the end of these minutes. Pat asked what the effect of the new bylaw would have if a farmer encountered an artifact in a farm field. Bob explained that in such a case reporting of the artifact would be helpful information but that the bylaw was intended to address more substantial excavation and will be designed to be pre-emptive. Bob mentioned that sites of interest are likely near water and that three triggers for investigation would be required. The existence of triggers is typically reviewed when applying for a construction permit and are: land area greater than 3 acres, in an area of high or medium archeology or historical sensitivity and is undisturbed. Paul asked how the investigation would be done and how it would be overseen. Bob explained that an initial professional investigation would have to be done withing 45 days of triggers being raised and that it would likely include construction oversight. If significant indicators are found in the initial survey then a second more detailed study would be done and that phase could lead to construction delays. The intent is to identify the archeological/historical situation as early as possible in any construction process. Heidi asked Bob if he needed an indication of support from the Ag Comm. Bob replied that there would be ample time to provide that feedback before next town meeting.

b) Terra Freidrichs - Herbicide use (linked documents)

Terra submitted talking points that can be found through the link at the end of this presentation. Her primary objective in this discussion was to gather Ag Comm inputs on their knowledge, position or willingness to guide or participate future discussions. The Ag Comm did not provide opinions on the pros or cons of pesticide or herbicide use at this time but did make suggestions regarding the approach that could be used. Pat suggested that there is a huge range of opinion on this subject and that it would be best to have extensive informed public discussions with thoroughly informed and experienced experts representing the various views on pesticide and herbicide use. Pat also suggested that specific bans without well understood and effective alternative materials or practices may drive environmental conditions in the wrong direction so broad understanding is warranted before taking action. Morene and Paul added that the Conservation Commission has more purview than the Ag Comm in this area and Heidi suggested that the newly formed Ag Comm could offer a small bit of input to the discussion but has a large list of important organizational first priority tasks.

4 Approval of 1 Dec 2020 Minutes. The minutes were unanimously approved by roll call vote.

5 Expanded Protection for The Morrison Farm Property (linked documents)

Moreen reported on her conversation with David Honn, local architect and Acton Historical Commission Member. (see the linked document for full detail) David had suggested the following two alternatives:

- a) Sell the house, raze the barn, and use the house proceeds to build a new barn.
- b) Sell the house to a non-profit, Friends of Morrison Farm, with restrictions.

Ann Forbes of the AHC joined the conversation to provide the history of the house and many prior proposals regarding this house and barn. Her summary included the fact that the house has recognized historical value and is eligible for listing on the National Historical Register, and that previous meetings with BoS and other town groups indicated the town would prefer not to be in the business of owning rental property, but also rejected proposals to sell the house with a small amount of property to Habitat for Humanities. Anne and Morene mentioned that the AHC summary of the property and buildings is worthwhile reading. (see the linked documents).

Morene expressed her thoughts that saving both the house and restoring the land to farming would be best overall solution. Ann stated she felt that preserving only the exterior use of the house would be better than taking no action but would prefer the house was preserved with a usable interior. Joe and Pat questioned whether there was enough open land available on the property to allow the community gardens to expand and to have enough remaining open and farmable land to be attractive to a farmer who might occupy and repair the house. Bettina and Moreen mentioned that property attributes include the dignified entrance presence and privacy screen provide by the house and the attractive access path and parking used by both community garden visitors as well as trail walkers. Heidi suggested we plan a walk of the property to be able to better understand the land and proposed concepts. We agreed to plan a farm walk for Jan 30th at 10:00 AM. The visit will have published agenda and minutes.

6 New Property in Consideration: No additional items to discuss this month.

7 Farm Signs: Pat reviewed the cleaned copy of the proposed signage at town entry roads showing stand alone and add-on sign types and locations. The board agreed on the locations and sign types. Pat will create a short BoS presentation for review at the Feb Ag Comm meeting.

8 Agricultural Plan Development: Due to the late hour this topic was postponed until the Feb meeting

9 Feb 9th 2021 Meeting Agenda

Virtual Meeting Advisory

1. Citizen's Concerns
2. Approval of minutes;
 - 12 Jan 2021 Ag Comm meeting minutes
 - 30 Jan 2021 Morrison Farm visit minutes
3. Extended Protection for Morrison Farm- Recap of the visit and continued discussion
4. Farm Signs- Proposed BoS presentation review
5. New Property in Consideration
6. Ag Plan Development Next Meeting Agenda

10 The meeting was adjourned at 7:41 PM

11 Relevant 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>