

2014-12-11 Agriculture Commission Meeting Minutes

December 11, 2014

The meeting was called to order at 6:32 PM

Commissioners Present: A. Meek, K. Dennis, M. Johnson, R. Cousens (6:40), K. Morneau (FFA), H. Hopps (alt), V. Cole (alt), Amy Kemp (6:45)

Audience of Citizens: K. Hermanot, B. Hopps, Nick from Plainfield Ag

Approval of Minutes: November 2014 minutes were unanimously approved.

Unfinished/Continuing Business

a. Treasurer's Report (B. Molodich absent): K. Dennis moved to table until January, M. Johnson seconded, motion unanimously passed.

b. CT Farmland Trust Application(A. Meek): K. Dennis moved to table until after results from 2015 Farm Survey. H. Hopps seconded and the motion passed unanimously.

c. 2018 PoCD: According to Phil Chester, Lebanon Town Planner, the PoCD can be amended at any time and changes are not restricted to the state-mandated 10-year PoCD schedule.

d. 2015 Farm Survey:

For January meeting, Commissions each to bring a question they'd like to see in the Survey. Use survey as an educational tool and see if UConn will advise regarding best phrasing and distribution for a statistically valid survey of town attitudes toward farm and preservation.

New Business:

Guest Speaker, Phil Chester, Lebanon Town Planner and State Ag Consultant

KEY POINTS:

- Sterling's Zoning Regulations never once mention Agriculture, which should be the goal and purpose of all zoning regulations here.
- **Agriculture Viability Grants:** \$500,000 available annually from the state via Agriculture Viability Grants for every town. Grant applications are due annually on November 2nd. Suggested examples of possible funding applications include:
 1. Hire consultant to review zoning regulations to see if farm friendly;
 2. "Sterling Grows" bumper stickers;
 3. Appraisals, surveys, legal costs associated with Farmland preservation;
 4. Costs related to establishing a Farmer's Market, town newsletter;
 5. Consultant to perform a study of cost of community services study (Chester can provide names, e.g., Paula Coughlin), look at Town budget and associated dollar per land uses of residential, non-residential, commercial, and farmland/open space (e.g., TLGV Paul made a presentation of her study of cost of community services study to the Lebanon Board of Finance).
 6. Grant matching funds from town can be volunteer/staff in kind hours; e.g., hour of Town Clerk's or Selectman's time (amount of hourly wage); designer of farmer's market pavilion as labor in kind, etc.
- Other Ag/Preservation measures by Lebanon: Combined Conservation (previously Heritage) and Agriculture Commissions with combined preservation mission; Zoning regulations that have exemptions for Agriculture.
- **Farmer's Market Joint Venture Grant** [p. 8]. State will fund but needs cash match: Lebanon did a bond referendum.
- **CT Farmland Trust:** Can provide matching funds for state or federal preservation funds. For example: Agriculture Commission is positioned to assist getting \$\$ for easements on the land for farm preservation.

- **Farmer's Market** joint venture [p. 8]: State will fund but needs cash match (Lebanon hit up the two big local agriculture producers, including The Farmer's Cow). *Sterling needs to make it attractive for larger agriculture producers to move here.*
- **Farmland Restoration Grants** [p. 8]: \$20,000 available with an in-kind labor match (translation, they'll reimburse you for clearing land, excluding wetlands. This is a labor-intensive application requiring process and photo documentation, but it is up for the taking as individual applicants can get as many as you apply/qualify for. *Ag Commission needs to make it our role to publicize and promote grants like this just for clearing land.* NB this is Federal dollars of which CT taps into and provides half. State is the primary applicant for such grants and few municipalities are tapping into these funds although towns are always picked over the state!
- Determine and document who are the town's top ten tax-producers (always farms/agriculture) and use the Farm Survey to help broadcast this information. Further broadcast through additional farm-friendly practices that Sterling is open for agriculture vs commercial or residential development.
- Above establishes necessity of emphasizing agriculture in the PoCD, Zoning: Ideal future plan for town is to preserve entire town for farmland and conservation (see Lebanon PoCD). Amendment needs to assert that future zoning, all P&Z requests have been reviewed by P&Z and found consistent with ideal Ag-friendly PoCD. PoCD has little authority except with CT OPM (Office of Policy and Management) and thus with funds received by the town from the state—need for accord of Town PoCD with State PoCD so that are town is explicitly designated by the state as an area of conservation so we can petition/qualify for funds. PoCD can even recommend Town staffing levels and other recommendations that Town staff and all Boards and Commissions must read and follow, such as farm/agriculture education, etc (though funding/budget does not necessarily following PoCD staffing recommendations, recognizable gap can be useful in future town initiatives).

New Business:

January Next Steps: Questions for survey, goals for commission. Review Lebanon website for survey results.

Any Other Business:

Reminder: Ag Commission meetings are now held in the former Trooper's office.

Adjournment: R. Cousens made a motion, seconded by R. Cousens to adjourn at 7:49.

Unanimously approved.