

AGRICULTURE COMMISSION MINUTES (not yet approved)

Monday, June 1, 2015

Town Office Annex

7:00 P.M

1. Call to Order: Ron Gross, Chairman, 7:09 pm.

Pledge of Allegiance

2. Attendance: Present: Ron Gross, Chairman; Peter Dean; Marianne Halpin; Carlene Quinn; Kevin Staehly; Emmett Lyman, Liaison, Office of Selectman; Mark Walter, First Selectman

Absent: Bonnie Buongiorne, Tanya Bourgoin

Citizens present: Todd Gelston, Bill Gross, and one other person, unnamed

3. Approval of Minutes: Mr. Dean made motion to accept the April, 2015 minutes. Mr. Staehly, seconded. 3 in favor, 1 abstention. Approved.

4. Chairman's Report: Bonnie Buongiorne and Tanya Bourgoin have been added to the Commission.

An application to become an alternate member of the Agriculture Commission has been received by the town and awaits action from the Selectman's office.

The May 2015 Agriculture Commission meeting was not held. Chairman Gross met with Mark Walter, First Selectman, and representatives from the Friends of the Harris Property regarding the Harris Property. Discussions were about

--putting out information to townspeople

--emphasizing that the project is budget neutral

--gathering ideas to help townspeople understand and support the project

5. Mr. Walter reviewed maps of the property to show size, features, and relationship to the area. He pointed out where the pavilion, tool shed with sink and composting toilet would be located.

Mr. Dean asked if the lower field needed to be organic. Mr. Walter said it would be up to the Town. The Town would seek recommendations from the Friends of Harris Property and the Agriculture Commission. Mr. Walter also noted that the Town has posted 3 documents of the STEAP Grants.

6. Collaboration so far and plans for the Harris Property:

Bill Cross and Todd Gelston, representing the Friends of the Harris Property, discussed things that have been done to date and near future plans:

- F.O.H. has put stones in piles with the help of the Town and its backhoe. The stones can be taken by anyone who needs/wants them. The stones may not be suitable for building walls.
- Fields have been mown.
- There were large piles of wood chips. Students from Franklin Academy helped spread them along the perimeter of the property to cut down on weed growth. According to Mr. Gelston, wood chips are not good as fertilizer as they decompose for 3-4 years,

taking nitrogen from the soil. That is why wood chips are initially a good weed deterrent.

- There will be a portable toilet and water tanks for watering gardens soon.
- Soil has been tested. It is low in potassium, phosphate, calcium. Need 3000# calcium per acre.
- Topsoil has been bulldozed off in the past. It will take time to build nutrients back. Manure, cover crop.
- Names FOH is considering:
 - Sol Harris Lane
 - Sol and Bertha Pavilion
- Ron Gross suggested using the same blue signs East Haddam uses on historic facilities such as the Town Office and historic sites.
- Called for a motion to recommend blue sign for the Harris Property. Passed.
- Tool shed will have a mechanical room, composting toilet, urinal, wash station.
- Water storage tank for irrigation with 10 ft. head pump to roof. Aesthetic and practical.
- Mr. Gelston suggested we get a second structural engineer to compare building requirements. The cost of doing this was discussed. Further investigation by the Selectman's office suggested.
- Mr. Staehly asked how many plots have been leased. Mr. Cross reported that 15 plots for the 2015 season are leased.
- Mr. Staehly expressed disappointment that the topsoil was stripped. We were told that it had been done many years ago.. Mr. Lyman repeated the fact that the site will need lime and nitrogen and that UCONN has tested the soil.
- Mr. Gelston, Mr. Cross, and Mr. Staehly will work together on plans for the greenhouses and hoop houses.
- The Agriculture Commission endorses the concept put forth by the Selectmen and FOH for the tool shed and the pavilion.
- Mr. Dean suggested that the Town investigate the feasibility of water storage in the tool shed. The Commission strongly supported that process.
- Representatives from FOH, Mr. Staehly, and Mr. Lyman will investigate the feasibility of greenhouses and hoopouses. (Mr. Staehly made the motion, it was seconded by Mr. Dean and was approved unanimously.
- There was an energetic discussion about how to engage youth younger than high school age, and this will be investigated further.

7. Peter Simmons has asked the Agriculture Commission to review Chapter 8 of the East Haddam Plan of Conservation and Development, The Strengths and Opportunities for the Town of East Haddam, and Policy and Recommendations.

Mr. Staehly will contact Peter Simmons and see how the Agriculture Commission and Mr. Simmons can work together to discuss and endorse the process.

There was no further business. The meeting was adjourned 8:30 pm.

The next meeting will be July 6, 2015 at the Town Office Annex.

Respectfully Submitted,
Marianne Halpin
Secretary

