

AGRICULTURE COMMISSION MINUTES (DRAFT)

Monday, Sept. 14, 2015

Town Office Annex

7:00 P.M

1. Call to Order: Ron Gross, Chairman, 7:03 pm.

Pledge of Allegiance

2. Attendance: Present: Ron Gross, Chairman; Kevin Staehly; Peter Dean; Tanya Bourgoin; Mark Henderson

Carlene Quinn in attendance via conference call

3. Approval of Minutes:

Minutes of the August meeting were approved unanimously with amendments.

4. Chairman's Report:

- Chairman Gross expressed his disappointment regarding the comportment of attendees at the informational public meeting held on Aug. 27. He expressed his hope that the members of this commission can rise above the politics and focus on our charge. Mr. Staehly asked for an explanation of the \$30,000 AgComm budget (listed in the handout distributed at that meeting by the BoS) and how it is to be spent. Mr. Gross said that he would question the BoS and report back on this next month.

5. Correspondence:

- Mr. Gross read a letter from Mr. Gelston and Mr. Cross of the Friends of Harris which had been previously read into public record at the Board of Selectman meeting on Sept. 2, 2015. The letter was written in response to the AgComm letter of endorsement sent to the BoS on Aug. 17, 2015.

6. Unfinished Business:

- a) 1 -- A discussion took place regarding the soil amendments necessary to ensure success of the community garden plots. Mr. Henderson stated that he believed it would take 3-5 years to fully replenish soil nutrients. He suggested implementing a program whereby citizens could drop off their leaves, grass clippings and manure to be used as compost and mulch. We could offer unused products back to citizens at a low cost.

2 -- Ms. Bourgoin suggested presenting three clear and concise plans for moving forward with the property: one plan outlining use of the existing grant AS WRITTEN; one plan outlining ALL costs and liabilities of returning the grant; one plan outlining a revision that maintains cost-neutrality to the town while preserving the goals of the projects: agricultural education, sustainability and environmental stewardship.

It was agreed by consensus that the commission would recommend to the BoS that the soil be amended and a composting toilet and above ground water storage be considered.

- b) Mr. Gross reported that Mark Henderson had been confirmed by the Board of Selectmen as an alternate member of the commission on Sept 2, 2015.
- c) Discussion about involving town youth in agriculture was tabled due to the Ms. Halpin's absence.

7. Audience of Citizens:

- Audience of Citizens:
Lynn Branscombe, Kim Barrows, Sue Costomiris

Ms. Barrows questioned the change in meeting date as well as the protocol of commissioners attending meetings via cell phone. She was concerned that without the proper technology in use, members on phone would not be able to fully hear discussions.

Mr. Staehly made the following motion: In the absence of an in-person quorum of regular members, seat an alternate member who is present in the room to vote on behalf of regular members not physically present. Ms. Bourgoin seconded the motion. Motion failed with Mr. Staehly and Ms. Bourgoin in favor; Mr. Gross, Mr. Dean and Ms. Quinn opposed.

Ms. Branscombe reported that she had spoken with the following state employees: Kathleen Taylor (OPM), Nelson Tereso (DECD) and Vincent Lee (DECD) and was told by them that there would be no penalty to return grant.

Ms. Costomiris expressed the need to clarify the terms of the grant to the public. She also offered suggestions for the Harris property, including a cut-flower garden, solar panel installations and garden lease scholarships for low-income citizens.

8. Adjournment:

Meeting adjourned at 8:45 pm.

The next meeting of the Agriculture will be held at the Town Office Annex on October 13, 2015

Respectfully submitted,

Tanya Bourgoin, Acting Secretary