

Agriculture Commission

Monday, April 2, 2012

Town Office Annex

7:00 P.M.

1. Call to Order

The regular meeting of the East Haddam Agriculture Commission was called to order by Chairman Harvey Thomas on Monday April 2, 2012 at 7:17 pm at the Town Hall Annex.

2. Attendance:

Regular Members: Present: Scot Mackinnon, Dennie Burak, Peter Dean and Chairman Harvey Thomas. Absent: Jessica Stone. Alternate Members: Present: Marianne Halpin, Linda Stuhlman.

Absent: Peg Carlson. Student liaison absent. Audience of Citizens: EDC rep. Peter Simmons.

3. Approval of Minutes:

The minutes of the March 5, 2012 meeting were approved as submitted. Motion: Burak
Second: Mackinnon.

4. Liaison Reports

A. FFA Students

No student liaison present. Mr. Dean stated that his understanding is that the previous student is pursuing new interests. High school VoAg instructor Cheryl Matthewson will appoint a new liaison.

This update prompted a discussion of the youth liaison program. Chairman Thomas wondered if the Commission could do more to encourage youth participation on this body. Ms. Burak suggested putting the liaison report/participation closer to the beginning of the agenda. (Enacted on an earlier agenda, but liaison absent.) Chairman Thomas asked Mr. Dean if he would be willing to ask the kids in the high school VoAg program "How can we help make this a good use of your time?". Ms. Halpin asked about the size and depth of the VoAg program. Mr. Dean replied that the

program is highly developed with skilled instructors covering a range of topics including dog training, equine studies and forestry. Ms. Burak asked about after school ag. programs. Mr. Dean said there are not a lot of after school programs. Discussion turned toward possible incentives for youth liaisons. Mr. Simmons suggested brokering credits for specific projects that would aid the Agriculture Commission. Chairman Thomas observed that "We have a track to run on. When the students appear, we can incorporate them into the program here" and offer a recommendation letter as an incentive. Mr. Dean said he will talk to Ms. Matthewson about progress on assigning a new student liaison to the Commission.

B. Other

Peter Simmons appeared on behalf of the East Haddam Economic Development Commission to request help in locating participants for a countywide health initiative. Ideally, one farmer and one restaurateur with knowledge of healthy foods would act as representatives to a countywide coalition "to support the reduction of chronic diseases." Members agreed to think about possible candidates. Jeff Savitsky was suggested as a potential farmer representative. Contact Chatham Health District director Thad King 860-365-0884.

5. Ongoing Projects

A. Farmers' Market

Ms. Burak, who is a Farmer's Market sub-committee member with Ms. Stuhlman and Ms. Halpin, presented a summary of the group's activities to date. She said that Jeff Savitsky who has managed the Colchester Farmer's Market, will serve as our "Market Master". Mr. Savitsky will serve as Market Master for the East Haddam Farmer's Market without pay. The market will operate between June 20th and October 31st every Wednesday from 4pm to 7pm. The one exception to this schedule is the Wednesday of the week of the Lion's Club Annual Auction when the market will operate on a day other than . The market will be held across the street at the Congregational Church. The rates charged to vendors: \$100 for a season, \$60 for a half season of participation and \$10 for a vendor to participate once. Expected vendors include beef and pork from John Hall's farm in Killingworth, the committee is talking with Priam Vineyards about wine tastings, three local cheese operations Cato Corner, Beaverbrook (Sankow's) and Beltane Farm plan to combine their efforts for a booth that would offer a selection of products from each. The subcommittee has a website: www.easthaddamfarmersmarket@gmail.com.

They plan to include live animals and offer them for sale, for example, chickens. They plan to have a coffee vendor as well as a spice purveyor. A total of ten to twelve vendors is the immediate goal for the Farmer's Market. Ms. Burak asked Mr. Mackinnon if Ballek's Garden Center would participate in the Farmers' Market. He

replied that inevitably Ballek's would participate in some capacity. Mr. Thomas wondered aloud if "we are cutting the throat of the Rathbun Farmer's Market?." Ms. Halpin and Ms. Stuhlman said "no." Further discussion centered around whether or not Rathbun Library would host a farmer's market at all. The consensus of the Commission seemed to be that whether or not Rathbun does host their July and August saturday market, that group would not be offended by a competing wednesday market. Members lamented the potential loss of the Rathbun's informal market atmosphere and hoped that a way may be found to include smaller scale vendors in the new wednesday market. Perhaps these vendors could ally under a more formal vendors' umbrella to save money and paperwork.

The Farmer's Market Committee has an account with the town with oversight by the finance office. They asked for \$1,000 this year and \$1,000 next year for promotion and basic operations. The Committee's budget is separate from other town committees and commissions including Ag. Ms. Burak said that the Committee's promotional program includes notices to the local on-line and print newspapers. She added that their group met every two weeks in order to make this much progress. Several members have noted that it is very unusual to conceive, organize and enact a farmer's market within a matter of months.

B. Community Agriculture Center

Several commissioners asked for updates on the upcoming presentation on restoration efforts at the town owned Harris Farm and the gist of the information to be covered. Mr Mackinnon said that the April 18th, 6pm session was meant as an opportunity for the public to ask questions and offer suggestions for the Harris project following a brief presentation. The focus this year is to clear the invasive exotics from the cultivatable fields at the site in preparation for community gardens next year with plots from small to large available for lease. Chairman Thomas suggested that local farmers should be invited to the presentation along with local officials and the general public. Chairman Thomas also suggested that the Farmer's Cooperative should make sure that the presentation will be publicly noticed to make certain that the proceedings will be legal. Mr Mackinnon, a member of the Farmer's Coop noted that unless attending local board and commission members are visiting the presentation to conduct business they are exempt from posting a legal notice although boards and commissions, as well as the general public have been notified via posters, emails, websites, etc. Chairman Thomas disagreed. Mr. Mackinnon said he would check with the state Freedom of Information Commission on the subject of legal notice to be absolutely certain.

C. Website Management

No report. (Ms. Stone was absent.)

6. Future Projects

A. Chick Day

Plans were finalized for the Commission's 2nd annual appearance at Shagbark's Chick Day to let townspeople know about the Agriculture Commission's programs. Ms. Burak, Ms. Carlson, and Ms. Stuhlman have volunteered. Mr. Dean agreed to drop of the banner. Ms. Stone will make and deliver all flyers for the event.

B. Other

-The First Selectman, Town Treasurer and Ag. Commission Chairman have all signed the Cooperative Letter of Agreement easing the way for the Ag. Commission to apply for grants and other considerations.

-On the subject of the restoration grant application for the Harris Farm, Chairman Thomas suggested "running drafts of the grant application past" the State Ag. employees who are helping us fill out the grant paperwork. Mr Mackinnon said he would get right on it.

7. Audience of Citizens

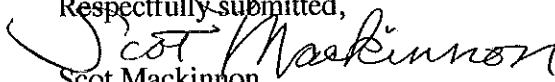
No audience.

8 Adjournment

Motion: Burak Second: Dean

Meeting adjourned at 8:51p.m.

Respectfully submitted,


Scot Mackinnon