

**Agricultural Commission
December 18, 2007**



Meeting in room 104, 2 Jabish St., Lawrence Memorial Hall

Members: Grace Adzima, Jon Clements, Hope Gardener, Judy Gillan, Will Shattuck

Associate Members: Susan Gay, Alan Page

Absent Member: Rick Reidy

Visitors: Dan Beaudette

The meeting was called to order at 7:05 pm.

Minutes: Motion by J. Clements to accept the August 21, 2007 minutes, Second G. Adzima, Vote 3-0.

Meeting items:

Update, AcComm Training - Judy and Grace went to the training and it was a good session. At the session, an article in the magazine Business West, which featured D. Albertson, Belchertown Town Planner. The article said that farming was going by the wayside in Belchertown.

Discussed the "Right to Farm" and that it doesn't amount to much support, but is a nice sentiment. It was agreed there is a need to reach people to buy local products. The town needs to have something in place for agriculture to function. The AgComm is working towards that goal.

W. Shattuck said that more women are running orchards, and an increased number of women at the New England Fruit and Vegetable Show. He noted that they are running small greenhouses, etc.

Animal Fencing received information from P. Adzima, Building Inspector and Zoning Enforcement Officer about animal fencing bylaws in the Zoning Bylaws (Chapter 145). The bylaws state most attractive side of a fence has to be built facing to the abutting property. That is mainly for residential and pool fencing. The Zoning Bylaw does not address animal fencing. As for livestock fence, large animals lean and rub on fencing, which break down the fence, and so a new statement in the bylaw needs to be added for livestock. The commission will review the bylaw amendments at their next meeting, and try to ready a proposal for the May 2008 Annual Town Meeting.

The ZEO brought up housing horses, as there is no limit of horses or size of lots to allow keeping horses. D. Beaudette noted the Board of Health and animal inspector say if horses are appropriately housed.

January Farmer Gathering - The AgComm will send out postcards and hold their second annual farmers get together in the Lawrence Memorial Auditorium January 19, 2008, at 4 pm. An announcement will be sent to farmers and a public announcement placed in *The Sentinel*.

D. Beaudette will give an overview of the United States Department of Agriculture Renewable Energy resources and grants. W. Shattuck will contact the N.R.C.S. people and ask if someone can come and speak on natural resources, farm plans, rotation, etc.

Budget - there are some funds available for posting, mailing and such for the commission. G. Adzima will submit the AgComm request for another budget of \$500. for brochures, speakers, etc. She will also submit the Town Report for the AgComm.

Website Design: Hope will be on maternity leave. G. Adzima will ask if someone could take over the website in her absence. Jon said he could try to update the website, and put on the Massachusetts Department of Agriculture Resources link.

Discussed: Farmers Market Website and N.R.C.S. links; ask Computer Director Kevin Hannon if there is a way to see the number of hits on the AgComm website. Also brought up posting old and new pictures of town farms.

New Business – “buy local” update -- The Swift River School and Kelly Irwin of the Mass School Department are using local farm products. J. Gillan suggested inviting Kelly to the farmer meeting, as a success story.

Minutes – next meeting.

Other: Local farmer Bonnie Rae passed away and will be missed. She had her farm on State Street certified as an organic farm.

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Discussed how the AgComm could get farmers interested in attending these meetings.

Talked about placing a signs at town lines to read “we support agriculture” or something similar. A. Page handed out papers regarding a culvert and property access issue. He has reviewed and supported a farmer/ landowner with their issue of replacing a culvert to their backland. He feels signs coming into Belchertown should not say this town supports agriculture, but signs should say “support your local farmer”.

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G. Adzima noted Nathan L'Etoil, Director at the Farm Bureau said he would do a lecture on wetlands and forestry.

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A letter from A. Page to Senator Brewer was brought up – it states his (Page) opinion regarding land and the hoops people have to go through to get a farm up and running. The letter also covers: renewable resources; temporary crossings; equipment allowed and not allowed; and how restrictions affect which trees are culled. He noted when a harvester of forest cannot get to junk trees in backlands, then the valuable trees are taken which the harvester can, and does reach. A. Page also noted there were other issues against keeping land open for farming.

A. Page noted that a “lien” can be legally placed on a property for agricultural improvements, identified in a deed and then legally removed. He feels that proposing some proactive measures would be in order as a Notice of Intent is an intimidating and expensive procedure.

A. Page noted in order to sell a farm product, a farmer needs to have a permit from the Board of Health, not only in Belchertown, but for every town you sell the product in, and feels this is another problem for farmers. J. Clements noted the Conservation Commission was instrumental in getting the AgComm started, and their regulations have to be followed. He noted there are provisions to allow farmers an appeal. He felt the town has worked with people, and with agricultural exemptions.

G. Adzima noted the best the AgComm can do for the public is to inform them of the processes they need to follow, and can offer help through the process. Discussed the way one gets formal recognition as farming for the Chapter regulations for instance, and submitting a Schedule F (farm) tax form and a farm plan to meet standards. Then discussed how if a farmer has a new business, they may not as yet have a Schedule F filed to help them in their request.

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Discussed “outdoor wood furnace” issues and that the Board of Health will hold public hearings to develop regulations for these outdoor furnaces. The AgComm discussed how they can best use energy sources. A. Page said he would update the commission about this at the January 15, 2008 meeting.

Adjourned at 9:05 pm - Minutes Dec. 2007: S. Gay