

Minutes of Agricultural Commission meeting July 17, 2007
Submitted by S. Gay



Members present: Grace Adzima, Judith Gillan, Will Shattuck, Associate members Alan Page and Susan Gay

Absent: Hope Guardenier, Jon Clements, Richard Reidy

Guests: Cindy Bright, Lori Klekotka, Joel Wilson

Meeting started at 7:00 pm

Grace Adzima opened the meeting.

Cindy Bright was instrumental in organizing the community garden on Jackson Street, New England Small Farm Institute (NESFI) property. She came to this meeting with an update on the garden area. She said there are 29 gardening spaces, and Arnie Voehringer was helpful in preparing the land for the gardeners. Cindy said the gardeners bring up a wish to do their garden as a business. Grace said that maybe this winter time, the commission could have a series of information sharing about gardening. Perhaps, the first in the series could be with weed control in a garden area.

Grace greeted audience members visiting. Two people who bought a farm on South Washington Street were present and wanted to share their issues in trying to run this farm. One person explained the issue. It was noted that this woman bought this farm to make a horse farm; she noted the previous owner had the property in a Chapter, and the property was taken out of Chapter when the property changed hands; she noted that this came as a surprise to her as it was in her legal paperwork that it would remain in Chapter.

The visitors said their issue is trying to reclaim the rear portion of the property for use of the horses. They explained that they have a broken down culvert on the right of way to the rear of the property. It is in such disrepair that it was causing harm to their animals. They started repairing the culvert, and they state that their neighbors called the town office of conservation, to say these new owners were repairing a culvert to build house lots in the rear of the property.

This property owner states she cannot afford to hire professional engineers for plans the town office of conservation said they require. She said it was a very costly purchase for the property; and she noted she is schooled in equine handling; and noted it is her intent to have a horse farm. This owner said she was under the belief that Belchertown was encouraging open space and farming, but she will need to halt her plan for a farm at this time.

The commission members mentioned contacting a Farm Bureau expert and find out what issues need to be resolved for the owner to get access to her back land pasture. The members also mentioned the owner may want to have the timeline for when the pasture was last in farm use.

Other:

Brought up ideas to think about: commercial kitchen at NESFI; compost business; community garden tour; mobile poultry process truck for smaller business enterprises; and discussed having lectures regarding farming, given by one or two people, one time per month for a couple of months. Judy will see if she can get someone to give a lecture for Sept. 15, 2007.

Grace said Debbie Struss from *The Sentinel* is in support of and willing to put a column or a space for information about farming in the paper on a regular or intermittent basis. The AgComm can tell the farmers in town that we are here and that the AgComm would like to know if there are any issues facing the farmers in town. If anyone comes up with information they feel the public would enjoy, bring it up at a meeting and the AgComm can get it to Debbie Strauss.

Alan Page made a suggestion to place a notice in *The Sentinel* saying the Agricultural Commission meets every third Tuesday of the month at 7 pm, and also note that everyone is welcome. Then specifically ask farmers to come to a meeting to discuss any issues they are facing with farming practices. Various issues may come up with farmers, and the commission can see if there are similar issues and then they may be able to find a resolve.

Grace noted: at the end of July there will be an antique tractor meeting on the common. There will be flyers from the AgComm for public information. These will show where various farms are located in town. Also noted that the farmers market is on Thursday afternoon starting at 3 pm. Someone brought up types of products offered for sale and wondered about a jewelry stand they saw at the market.

The AgComm will review Chapter 145, Zoning Bylaw, Schedule of Use section, regarding agriculture at the next meeting. They hope to bring changes to the Fall Town Meeting for acceptance. A second meeting will be held this month to review them, on July 31, 2007 at 7 pm.

The AgComm website is up and going. If there are any ideas for the site, please bring it up to the AgComm members.

Grace noted that Gary Racicot, Board of Health, is the animal inspector for the Town of Belchertown, and he stated that he does do animal inspections, does not have a report barn book, nor second rabies control. He said that those items would need to be referred to the local town veterinarian.

Also noted that Jon Clements, AgComm member is also on the Community Plan Steering Committee (Master Plan), and if someone has a strong position about agriculture in Belchertown, they may bring it both to the Board of Selectmen, and the Community Plan members as an addition or update to the plan.

The town fair is scheduled for Sept. 21, 22 and 23, 2007.

Meeting adjourned at 9:15 pm.