

Received: December 26, 2008
Office of the Durham Town Clerk

*Special Board of Selectmen's Meeting
6:00 p.m., Thursday, December 18, 2008
3rd Floor Meeting Room, Town Hall*

*Joint meeting with Economic Development, Planning & Zoning, & Board of Finance
Kachina Walsh-Weaver from CCM
Ben Bowell and Kip Kolsinskas from American Farmland Trust*

Meeting Minutes

In attendance: Laura Francis, John Szewczyk, Geoff Colegrove

Kachina Walsh-Weaver opened the meeting by stating the program "Planning for Agriculture: A Guide for Connecticut Municipalities" is a joint venture of CCM and the American Farmland Trust that began a little over two years ago; they found the biggest problem being communication with towns people, officials and the agriculture community; and this guide being a mechanism to start discussions in your own town. She then opened the meeting up to Ben Bowell from American Farmland Trust.

Ben Bowell presented a slideshow which represented the guide "Planning for Agriculture". American Farmland Trust (AFT) is a national non-profit organization, founded in 1980 with 50,000 members nationwide. Its mission is to stop the loss of productive farmland and to promote farming practices that lead to a healthy environment with policy, education and outreach. AFT in Connecticut has a statewide coalition working to increase the state's commitment to farmland preservation. He then talked about how farms provide jobs and support the local economy, how farms protect the water quality and natural resources, and provide rural character and attract tourists. He then referenced chapter 3 and how to get started; understanding agriculture in your town, mapping agricultural resources, identifying issues and concerns, and the review of current policies and regulations. He talked about town agricultural commissions, ordinances, and converting information into action steps; handouts of sample agricultural commission ordinances were then reviewed. A question was asked by the audience about the role of these commissions. B. Bowell responded they are mostly advisory and are tied into municipal affairs.

A question was asked about the Assessors Office and the 490 Act and what the definition of agriculture on a farm was. B. Bowell suggested contacting the Connecticut Farm Bureau who has a guide to this act.

A question was asked about the implication of current changes in farming ie; horse farms that now hold rodeos and how this should be put into a Plan of Conservation and Development. B. Bowell referred to page 27 of the guide, Farmland Protection Programs in Connecticut, stating that 3.9 million federal dollars have been allocated in protection; he then referred to page 30, Recent Example of Municipal Farmland Protection Efforts. He also stated there is federal and state money available to farms that partner with municipalities. Melynda Naples talked about how she would like to sell retail products that are not produced on her farm but are related to her farm.

Section 6 - Promoting Local Farm Viability was also discussed. How towns can play an important role in increasing the visibility and improving the viability of local farms; festivals, farmers markets, and developing local farm product guides.

Laura Francis asked where there may be pitfalls when you propose an agricultural commission. Kip Kolsinskas stated he has not seen much opposition in creating a commission but cautioned you may find some resistance in creating an ordinance and suggested the need to tie in education, stress the committee is only advisory and make all meeting open to voice all matters. Jon Brayshaw, First

Selectman of Middlefield, stated they have a commission whose sole purpose is to manage one property. He stated he felt this would work for town owned property but as far as a commission for privately owned farms did not think it was feasible.

Geoff Colegrove, Town Planner of Durham, talked about an issue of outdoor wood burning furnaces that came before the town Planning & Zoning Commission and how the Farm Bureau sent representatives to the meetings that gave good input, were very informative and constructive, and how they protected the farming community.

Ben Bowell and Kip Kolsinkas talked about ATF and CCM offering up to 25 hours of technical assistance to help communities plan for agriculture. Under the guidance of the projects Advisory Team, at least 5 municipalities will be selected to receive technical assistance to implement one of the strategies discussed in the guide. Possible strategies include, but are not limited to: initiating an Agricultural Commission, reviewing tax reduction options, planning for farmland protection, encouraging buy local opportunities, exploring methods to promote local farms, including agriculture in towns plans (POCD), and right-to-farm ordinances. Applications are due January 23, 2009.

Ben Bowell offered the following resources:

- Ct Department of Agriculture, Ron Olsen, 860-713-2550
- Kip Kolesinkas, 2008 Farm Bill Conservation Programs, 860-871-4047
- John Nichols, Ct Farm Bureau Inc., joann@cfba.org

Meeting adjourned at 8:15 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Beth Moncata