

Agricultural Commission working session

January 24, 2023

Attending: Eric Piper, David Sears, Lucy McKain

Guest: Tony Beattie, Steve Caggiano

The working meeting came to order at 7:00 PM

No votes could be taken on any item as the meeting agenda was posted too late. The meeting is entirely informational.

No minutes were approved.

Sherrill Rosoff confirmed that Rita Thibodeau, Assistant State Conservationist for Programs of the NRCS has been scheduled for our next meeting. We've been trying to schedule the ALE presentation for several months now. We've had an earlier presentation about the APR program by Chris Chisholm of MDAR, and so this presentation is a follow on and completes the land conservation picture for farmers.

Sherrill Rosoff then introduced Steve Caggiano, the new owner of the Gardener Farm. Mr. Caggiano lives in Tyngsborough and grew up on a hog farm. In addition to the Gardener Farm, he and his wife own two farms in New Hampshire. They intend to restore the house and farm outbuildings and bring Angus steer to town!

Other updates: Upswing Farm continues to expand its operation. Upswing has used the services of NRCS to advise them regarding irrigation and drainage issues on their land. They have plans to expand the number of hoop houses to extend their growing season and expand their CSA business. The Maker Farm has returned its summer camp programs to its farm location. Kimball Farm is also under new ownership and expanding their farm operations not only through CSA shares but farmers markets in the Boston area.

Sherrill shall be forwarding to the Commission a proposal from Holly Fowler regarding a Phase 2 of our effort to examine the feasibility of a commercial kitchen and food hub in town. Senator Kennedy, who secured the earmark, will be visiting the Peter Fitz for a tour of the facility this coming Saturday. The \$500,000 earmark specifies the development of a food hub and commercial kitchen at the school. However, the school lacks the docking and warehouse spaces needed for an operational food hub.

Charlie Tully and Holly Fowler (who drove down from Vermont) visited the commercial kitchen at the Fitz. Sherrill also drove Holly around the town showing her our farms before her departure back to Vermont. She was very impressed with what she saw! In a follow-up phone call with Charlie Tully, Charlie noted that while he is not yet ready to launch a commercial kitchen, he is also not interested in the Fitz location. One of his primary concerns is how community users and commercial users can cohabit the kitchen's space.

Sherrill is scheduled to drive to Fremont, NH to visit Evan Eppler (Three Rivers Alliance) and Katie Porter (New Hampshire Food Alliance). The purpose of the visit is to visit the Three Rivers Alliance new warehouse location and see the operation. Sherrill has reached out to the Boston Area Gleaners in Acton as they, too, operate a food hub. A meeting is yet to be scheduled.

The meeting adjourned at 8:30 PM.