



Agricultural Advisory Board

Remote Meeting Minutes

January 27, 2021

7:00 - 8:30 PM

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 PM.

Attending: Lucy McKain, Ken Hartlage, David Sears

Also: Mark Mathews, Tony Beattie

Ken Hartlage motioned to approve minutes of January 14, 2021. Lucy McKain seconded; motion unanimously approved.

Update from the Chair:

- The Town administrator at the last SelectBoard meeting noted a 3.5% increase in State fiscal aid for 2021.
- The Ag Board has designated \$17,500 budget (Northbound Ventures) for MPIT.
- Devons is opened two days a week for waste disposal.
- Charlie Tully is President of North Middlesex Farm Bureau and we should invite him to one of our Ag Board meetings.
- Two healthy soils bills are pending at the State level; Tony Beattie has been active in that and may talk about it at the end of the meeting.
- Sherrill will place the SelectBoard goals document in the Ag Board's shared Google documents folder.

The conversation turned to a review of the presentation by Chris Chisholm and Ashley Davis from MDAR regarding the APR program. Key points:

- General consensus is that it's a good program but there are impediments: some farms don't have sufficient prime soils; some farms haven't succession plans in place and find themselves in difficult discussion with the heirs as to disposition of the farms in question; the APR

program is important in helping young farmers acquire farms; there is a fairly complicated scoring system used by APR but there are two key features that are important, namely local municipal support and how many other farms in surrounding towns are under the APR program (cluster effect); you can go through the lengthy process (two years) to secure APR approval only to find out at the end that there's insufficient money at the State level to "close the deal"; appears to be a complicated process what with appraisals, etc. and thus daunting; and, finally, town has a fair amount of APR land already.

- Action item(s):
- To circle back to Chris and Ashley to ask if a comprehensive assessment of Pepperell farms has been done to determine eligibility of farms in our town. Is there more land in Pepperell that is eligible - more than we think there might be?
- If no such assessment has happened, how do we make it happen?
- With such a baseline analysis, we could then go to our farmers to discuss APR with them.
- We should also get a sense from Ashley and Chris regarding funding levels. It is harder to "pitch" APR if funding levels are declining or not growing sufficiently to increase APR program.

Discussion turned to the Agricultural Commission. The question placed to the Board was whether to "go big" and ask for adoption of MGL ch. 40, section 8L at Spring Town Meeting or to amend the current Right to Farm Bylaw, section 4: Agricultural Advisory Board. After much discussion, the consensus was to "go big."

Ken Hartlage motioned to approve the following: To charge the Chair to seek approval from the town's SelectBoard to convert the Agricultural Advisory Board to an Agricultural Commission in preparation for approval at the 2021 Spring Town Meeting. Lucy McKain seconded. Motion passed unanimously.

- Action item: Chair will reach out to local Ag Commissions to ask about land bequests and purchases - what does this look like?

Discussion turned to state legislative actions. Tony Beattie informed the Board that Governor Baker had vetoed a legislative decarbonization plan so its returned to the legislature. Tony has discussed with Senator Kennedy and, rather than amending the decarbonization plan, Senator Kennedy has written and is introducing two Bills (1) addressing increasing ability to compost and (2) eliminating surrendering 61A status to install solar on your farm. Tony Beattie will ask the Ag Board and SelectBoard to sign on to this initiative as well as other stakeholders. He also mentioned Black Earth composting company as a possible future guest to an Ag Board meeting.

Discussion turned to stormwater management as there is a Bylaw being considered by the Planning Board. The Chair noted that the stormwater fee was one of the Board's "hot button" issues as the town appears not to recognize that farms provide a great deal of ground water recharge and water filtration and they may be charged multiple fees if they own more than one lot. David Sears noted that the town is applying a blanket solution to the problem and not

accounting for farmers' ability to mitigate water run-off. The science says that high organic matter increases retention of thousands of more gallons of water. Should incentivize farmers to build organic matter to build up their soils and be part of the solution. We should develop quantifiable metrics to be able to measure the impact of organic soils on water quality and infiltration.

- Action item: Invite Ken Kalinowski (DPW) to discuss stormwater concerns.

Discussion turned to Northbound Ventures. Ken Hartlage noted that, while Holly Fowler provided us with an estimate for her services, she has not yet provided a proposal. He recommended that we invite her to an AG Board meeting to meet Lucy and David, and discuss a proposal from them.

Action item: Contact Holly Fowler to discuss meeting with the full Ag Board.

Discussion turned to the commercial kitchen at the Peter Fitz. The Chair will stay in touch with Amanda Huntington who appears to be responsible for its development.

- Action item: the Chair will reach out to Susan McCarthy who is Chair of PACH's Board of Directors to see where we are with food security in town.
- Action item: to locate the Worcester Food Hub business plan. Ken Hartlage has the income statement (P&L); Tony Beattie may have the business plan. Share the business plan with Mark Mathews. Set up return visit to see the Worcester Food Hub with EDaC.

Motion to adjourn the meeting was made by Lucy McKain, seconded by Ken Hartlage. Meeting adjourned at 8:30 PM.

Submitted by Sherrill Rosoff