



**Agricultural Advisory Board**  
**Meeting Minutes**  
**February 26, 2020**  
**Conference Room C, 7 - 9 PM**

Attending: Tony Beattie, Ken Hartlage, Sherrill Rosoff

Absent: David Sears, Lucy McKain

Meeting came to order at 7:14 PM.

Tony Beattie reported that Shon Rainsford, from the Worcester Food Hub, visited the Peter Fitz kitchen along with Tony and Amanda Huntington (representing the Peter Fitz Collaborative). Shon was very excited about our resources at the Peter Fitz: very enthused about the stove hood, traps, sinks, rolling carts. Shon will help us develop a business plan by sharing the Worcester Food Hub financials - Ken cartilage has volunteered to follow up with Shon in this regard. We want to know start up costs and running costs. Shon received a \$500,000 grant which is keeping the Hub running. Ken said this is grant season but most are oriented toward food kitchens in low income areas but that there are marketing development grants that might be available to us. After some discussion it was agreed that our efforts should be an incubator kitchen for food entrepreneurs and leave the Food Hub for another day. We probably don't have enough bandwidth to do much else and must be a legal entity to run a commercial kitchen. Presumably our efforts would pursue the non-profit route because that's where all the grant money is. We would need to get licensing, etc.

So next step is devise a business plan. Thereafter, a.) approach local farmers to determine their interest turning produce into products and b.) attract food entrepreneurs who will want to use the kitchen to create products.

An enclosed farmer's market extending from June to late Fall is another use of the Peter Fitz space.

Next steps for Peter Fitz commercial kitchen:

1. Sit down with Shon Rainsford to review the Worcester Hub and commercial kitchen financials. Ken will reach out to Rebecca at MDAR if there's someone there who could talk us through the Checklist.

Next steps for seeking information from local farmers about their needs:

1. What do our farmers need help with? How can we assist them? Ken receives lists of state and federal grants. If we knew what a local farmer needs or wants to do then we can match them up with grant money especially since most farmers may not have the time to investigate potential grant monies. They may also need help with grant writing.
  1. Set up meetings one on one to talk to us about their businesses and what they're trying to achieve and can we, as an Ag Board, help them out?
  2. Tony: devise the "hit list of farms" - and Tony has to arrange the meeting to make the initial introductions. And the meetings would be with us.

Discussion moved to the Town's Solar Power bylaw:

Tony Beattie noted that when they wrote the bylaw last Fall, it specified side property setbacks. Now the State is allowing farms to "harvest" solar - but not on tillable land which creates a problem for farmers because farmers need to use all their land. Tony doesn't know how many farmers would want to do this, but he doesn't want the setbacks to be a barrier for anyone to develop solar. Ken: why wouldn't farmers have been exempted in the first instance? Tony responded that Town Counsel said we had to define a farm.

Tony will write a draft of a bylaw for the next meeting which includes how the state identifies a farm, thereby qualifying for relief from the Solar Power Bylaw. (Active, viable farm, 5k annual income, at least five acres.)

How do other town's treat tax assessment of their local farms? Tony Beattie and Sherrill Rosoff will inquire around neighboring towns.

Discussion turned to the town's stormwater management fee. The town voted to assess fees on every property owner to pay off the cost of monitoring our pollution runoff on our roadways. Farms do a lot to filter water already, and have even given permission to the town to dump stormwater onto farmland. Ken Kalinowski (DPW) explained to Tony that the town is going to build catch basins to prevent stormwater run-off from polluting land.

Tony was told he could combine the three bills into one; he went to the Town Assessor and was advised NOT to combine the three bills. Dave Sears is in with Tony, Virginia Malouian, Billy Graves, the Bloods, - generally farmers are pissed about this. Ken: best ammunition is what other towns are doing with their farms.

Ken Hartlage noted that no other community in the State is taxing conservation land for stormwater management fees. So Nashoba Conservation Trust refused to pay it.

Tony: should be getting credits to farmers for filtering water for the town. Tony will find out from his farming buddies what other towns are doing. Ken can draft a bylaw; (Paula was the one who asked Beverly Woods about what other towns were doing regarding conservation.)

Discussion turned to the kid's summer camp that the owners of Rock Maple Farm on Boynton Street want to do - and for which they failed to seek licensing (camp or daycare) or zoning exemptions (right to farm?).

Tony noted that to be a farm, the principle source of income has to come from livestock and/or produce. 61A provides another definition of a farm. Regarding Rock Maple Farm, what would

happen to the farm if they're not allowed to do the children's camp as an important source of income for them? Does the definition of a farm have to be exclusive in terms of activities being done on the land? Is it possible for farmers to make money from other activities while also farming? The Ag Board is advisory to other Boards and may be called upon to give its opinion in this matter.

The question was raised about what is the answer for long-term sustainability of our farms. Is the answer in zoning? Commercial development? Sherrill Rosoff will investigate what Groton is doing regarding its town revenues (tax base), zoning, commercial development, protection of farms etc.

Motion to adjourn by Tony Beattie; seconded by Sherrill Rosoff. Meeting adjourned at 8:38 PM