



Agricultural Advisory Board

Remote Meeting Minutes

4/04/20

Attending: Ken Hartlage, Lucy McKain, Tony Beattie, Sherrill Rosoff, David Sears

Meeting was called to order at 7:09 PM.

Ken Hartlage moved, and Lucy McKain seconded, a motion to approve minutes of 3/26/20. Unanimously approved.

Tony Beattie announced that an amendment to the Town's solar bylaw would require a presentation to the Planning Board. David Sears recounted his experience three years ago seeking \$40,000 for solar support for his farm (dairy operation) but encountered stipulations from the State that didn't make it worthwhile. He noted that the State (through MDAR) is looking for solar projects/energy improvements but these are targeted for large projects: \$75,000 and higher. He thought Carl Hills, who operates on a larger scale than most other farmers in town, is a better candidate for these grants. Farms have to have a real demand for this to make sense: a good example might be the Blood slaughter house which uses a lot of energy. Tony Beattie noted that in the last year farms can now sell electricity to which David Sears agreed (SREC market) but it still didn't make financial sense for him. Lucy McKain has also investigated solar energy and noted that a complete farm energy assessment is required. The cost to pay an engineer to do that assessment was \$2400 so she dropped it. The cost seemed very unreasonable.

The Board decided to table the solar amendment discussion for now.

Tony Beattie stated that he sent the stormwater fee amendment to Town Counsel but has not heard back. He will follow up.

The next agenda item was an update on the Peter Fitz commercial kitchen. Ken Hartlage received very good financial information from the Worcester Food Hub which he can use to model costs for operating a commercial kitchen in Pepperell. We need to ask Amanda and Craig to provide utility information for the Peter Fitz as energy and labor are two big chunks of total costs. We need to figure out costs on an hourly basis. The Peter Fitz Collaborative are the landlords and would be behind the commercial kitchen venture whether it was local or more regional, as Tony Beattie suggested it could be. The commercial kitchen could be an important

way in which our town (and region) could help sustain itself should food supply chains become strained (as they are now due to Covid-19).

The comment about local sustainability moved the conversation to our Farm List submitted to the Town Administrator. The list was placed on the Ag Board landing page, not the front page Covid-19 updates. Ken Hartlage noted (as did Lucy McKain) that there are announcements on both the [mass.gov](https://www.mass.gov) site and MDAR regarding best practices regarding social distancing for the farming community and how towns can buy locally from their farms. Sherrill Rosoff will send members the links or pdf's of these Covid-19 updates from the state and will also send this information to the Town Administrator. Further discussion about the Town Administrator's role in filtering information on the Town website ensued.

Sherrill Rosoff told the Town Administrator that she would update the Farm list (working with Martin Cadek).

Tony Beattie noted that, although not possible to do right now, face-to-face conversations were the most effective way of engaging the farm community so that they know the Ag Board is operational, and an advocate for them.

Ken Hartlage has drafted a letter of support for Eric and Emily Piper stating the Ag Board's support for their request for a special permit from the Planning Board. The letter focuses on the farm's economic benefits to the Town.

The meeting adjourned at 8:45 PM.

Submitted by Sherrill Rosoff