



## **Agricultural Commission**

### **Remote Meeting Minutes**

**April 12, 2023**

**7:00 - 9:00 PM**

Meeting came to order.

Present: Eric Piper, David Sears, Sherrill Rosoff

Guests: Tony Beattie, Chuck Walkovitch

Sherrill Rosoff provided an overview of the progress made this past winter. Holly Fowler presented the Phase 2 proposal to the Planning Board in February to validate the findings of the Stakeholder Engagement Report. If the report's findings are confirmed, Holly Fowler will create a three year business plan. She showed Sherrill, Eric, and Tony what such a business spreadsheet would look like where produce is calculated down to the price per pound; the P&L is benchmarked to other food hubs, and all information is transparent.

The Agriculture Commission's view of a commercial kitchen is that it is a food processing center that processes, bottles, labels, and stores lightly processed foods. Farmers focus on the marketing and selling their processed products. The Western Processing Food Center is the template for a commercial kitchen in Pepperell.

The Planning Board arranged a site visit to the Boston Area Gleaners/Boston Food Hub as they wanted to see a food hub in operation. Many food hubs sell produce to each other, making use of the infrastructure investments of other food hubs to bring produce into the distribution channel. This is a model that Three Rivers uses effectively. As a result of their visit to the Boston Food hub, the Planning Board became aware that a food hub has a significant trucking and warehouse component. They move a great deal of food produce and have a pipeline of grant and private support.

We re-engaged with the Planning Board on March 13th; and at that meeting the Planning Board approved the Phase 2 proposal. The earmark funds are being administratively handled by MDAR and must be spent by fiscal year 2026.

However, after the Planning Board's approval, we were then informed by the Town Administrator that the earmark funds could not be used for further feasibility analyses.

Discussion then turned to two USDA grant programs:

**Local Food Promotion program** (deadline May 2nd) developing coordinating or expanding supply chain; hiring experts for technical assistance.

**Regional Food Systems Partnership** - planning and design, implementation and expansion - support partnerships in early stages in convening and developing strategies for community inclusive approaches; feasibility studies, etc. capital needs and gaps.

The grant application process is complicated; perhaps the local USDA office in Westford can be of assistance.

The remaining discussion covered the Spring Town Meeting, and the Commonwealth's efforts to develop agri-tourism. Eric Piper noted that there is a State Commission dedicated to that economic development effort. There is a 2022 report available on the [mass.gov](https://www.mass.gov) site.

Motion to adjourn: David Sears, seconded by Eric Piper.

Meeting adjourned at 8:46 PM.