

Agenda Minutes
North Branford Agriculture Commission Meeting
Monday, October 5, 2009
Town Manager's Conference Room
909 Foxon Road
7:00 p.m.

1. Call to Order and Roll Call:

Call to Order: Chairperson Clifford Potter called the meeting to order at 7:08 p.m.

Members: Joe DeFrancesco Jr., Ryan VanWilgen, Gerald Adinolfi, Dudley Harrison

Alternate Members: Dudley Harrison, Harry Juniver

Also Present: Town Planner Carol Zebb, Town Manager Richard Branigan (joined meeting at 8:30 p.m. and left at 9:21 p.m.)

2. Approval of Previous Months Minutes

Alternate Member Harrison moved, seconded by Alternate Member Juniver to approve the minutes of Sept, 2009. The motion was carried unanimously.

3. Unfinished Business

None at this time

4. New Business

Chairman Potter reminded the Commission to forward to him any agenda items that they would like to discuss at any future meeting.

a. Ag Comm. Upcoming holiday events and displays

Chairman Potter discussed last year's Christmas tractor decorations in the front yard of the Town Hall noting a temporary power run was done with limited lighting but now there's an improvement of a permanent power service which can enhance future displays. The members discussed this year's plans to decorate and agreed to pursue the same Christmas holiday idea with the tractors set back more from the road for better security. Member Joe DeFrancesco Jr. offered to donate his tractor for display with decorated staple lights and Member Ryan Van Wilgen also agreed to provide a tractor but requested that it be decorated without exterior damage. The Commission decided to do nothing for the fall season.

b. Farmer's activity Columbus Day weekend at Honeywell

Alternate Member Dudley Harrison mentioned that he has been contacted by the event organizers with a letter invitation and form to fill out if he wanted to participate. The members discussed how late in the season it was to do a farmers market because the vegetable season was finished. Chairman Potter said that the Commission did its part in its last month's decision to provide the farm brochure mailing list to the event organizers.

c. Discuss feature farms in The Sound newspaper update

Chairman Potter talked to Fran Lescovich who agreed to be next month's featured farm. He also talked to reporter Pam Johnson from The Sound who acknowledged the paper was okay with continuing the farm articles. Member Ryan VanWilgen asked what would be next for Jan. and Feb. and the Commission members agreed to sit out those months and start up again in the spring with perhaps the Chairman's suggestion of Rivezzi's horse farm.

d. Potato Fest ongoing info. New meetings for 2010, new info

Chairman Potter didn't see the need to go to the Park & Rec committee meetings until the Commission sent out its brochure letters out with its farm survey. Alternate Member Dudley Harrison stated that the potato fest was not really meant to be a fund raiser. Town Planner Zebb stated that the Town Manager had reported the following information at his staff meeting: expenses were about \$65,000 and gross revenue was about \$81,000 with about \$15,000 made. Member Ryan commented that there should be a farming focus. Chairman Potter explained the existing agricultural activity at the potato fest and he felt that the Commission should continue to try to do. He added the suggestion of early press articles and the renaming the area Augur Farm park to draw attention to the farming aspect. Commission members suggested and generally discussed the possibility of other activities, such as an animal display, distributing discount coupons to be used at farm stands, having a slide or computer monitor show of farming activities in the Commission's tent, attaching farm pictures on the hay ride wagon, having a second wagon for these very popular rides and another tractor exhibit. Members also discussed the need to know the farms in Town for exposure and what other activities such a group farm tour on a weekend and special dinners with farm grown products that might be done to accomplish this.

e. Filming of agriculture activities. Who has what tapes?

Alternate Member Dudley Harrison reported he was successful in finding two historical farming films which he would give to Chairman Potter to make copies which included the Donald Augur interview. He noted that the film on the Newton farm was probably gone. Member Adinolfi knew where the film of the little school house history was and could get it if the Commission was interested. Chairman Potter suggested running the Donald Augur interviews on public access cable and Member Ryan Van Wilgen noted the need to have good interesting information or people don't listen for long. Chairman Potter said that agenda item should be kept on the next agenda.

f. Possible town land rental issues, Ag Com. Input to Town

Chairman Potter stated this issue came up at the last Town Council meeting and there was a need to propose a policy from the Agriculture Commission for the Town to be able to deal fairly with the leasing issue. Members discussed the possible length of a lease with suggestions from a minimum of three years to a five year period, no subleasing, the type of crops to be grown, the use of the best farming methods that would mention specific requirements like liming/fertilizing standards, a reasonable contract and RFP (request for proposal) that somehow protected our own town farmers and the interest of the existing long term farmers now using the land by

putting more teeth into the contract to be fair to them if there was competitive bidding from out of town farmers. Copies of the RWA's leasing document was distributed. Chairman Potter suggested research of other towns in what they did and the Commission be ready for the November and December meetings to develop that policy. He would tell the Town Council during its Oct. 6th meeting that the Agriculture Commission had started to work on this item during its Oct. 5th meeting

g. Possible tax adjustments (farmer's taxes) updates

Member Joe DeFrancesco Jr. gave the Town Manager a copy of the Town of Lebanon's study report of the tax effect on farm building property tax exemptions. Also, the Town of Hebron was added. He stated that there was a benefit while the tax impact was not going to be significant noting that the Town's recently retired Assessor had figured about a \$14,000 amount which was not substantial. He thought some farmers would not apply for it.

Chairman Potter felt that the town granting a tax adjustment would be a show of good faith to the farmers that would only result in a little tax break. It was important to have the worst case scenario based on all eligible farmers taking the break. Other Commission members commented that if the existing farm lands were sold for development, then the Town would realize higher town costs and this was the real benefit in giving the farmers a tax break.

Town Manager Richard Branigan joined this meeting discussion at 8:30 P.M. He explained the overall process. The new Assessor starting Oct. 13th would have to compile the information correctly, nothing would happen with the Town Council until early December, then a January agenda budget amount would be forwarded to the Finance Committee for further review, then back to the full Town Council for its consideration. Town Manager Branigan also stated that a referral to the Agriculture Commission from the Town Council was scheduled for its October 6, 2009 meeting for the Commission's recommendations on what restrictions and type of farming crop should be placed on Town-owned farm land and at what locations so that a policy and guidelines for a RFP could be developed. As to the Commission's discussion on a "local farmer" preference, he felt a revised purchasing ordinance would have to be done that had a farming leasing exemption because the nature of the bidding process didn't allow a bidder to be grandfathered in. He suggested to the Commission to look at what other towns did and to use that as a tool to evaluate pre-bidders or after bidders along with the suggested use of a performance bond for restoration of the land. He felt that the result of this review should be the establishment of a fair level of revenue and fairness on the process for all town farmers while doing it legally. Town Manager Branigan left the meeting at 9:21 P.M.

h. Tractor pull needs, info and updates

Chairman Potter heard from CT Bragging Rights that they would not be able to do a pull this fall, however, they would put it in for next year's schedule. Commissioners Potter and Ryan VanWilgen discussed possible arrangements on getting blocks and pursuing with Blakeslee in order to get the Commission's own pulling blocks by the time of the next pulling event on the Augur Farm.

i. Open farmer forum, pick Nov. date

Chairman Potter noted that the Commission's November meeting was on the 2nd and confirmed that the date of the Farmers' Open Forum was set for Wednesday, November 18th at 7 P.M. at the Town Hall Chambers. A special agenda notice would be done.

j. Member's items to be discussed

Member Adinoldfi suggested the fencing of the Augur Farm with a gate at Totoket Road to eliminate the parking of cars. Also, members raised the issue of having bleachers for the tractor pull and perhaps Fran Merola could be asked if the ones at Totoket Woods Park could be transported over instead of building our own.

h. Visitor's Comments

None.

5. Farm Friendly Facts

No discussion at this time concerning this matter.

6. Adjournment:

Alternate Member Juniver moved, seconded by Member DeFrancesco Jr. to adjourn the meeting at 9:38 p.m.. The motion was carried unanimously.

Submitted by:

Carol A. Zebb

Carol A. Zebb – Acting Recording Secretary