

Concord Agriculture Committee

Town Hall Lobby
November 21, 2019
7:00 PM

Present:

Brian Cramer, member
Happy Goethert, Chair
Emily Wheeler, member
Melissa Maxwell, associate member
Lise Holdorf, member
Steve Verrill, member
Jane Hotchkiss, Select Board representative

Meeting called to order at 7:10

Approving past minutes

June, September and October minutes will be submitted next meeting

Town update on Millbrook

Emily shared an update about Millbrook Farm. She spoke to Sal Giurleo and asked about the idea of setting up a GoFundMe page for the farm and he was receptive to the idea. He had an understanding from the Town that the construction would cease from end of November through December so that they could have their winter sales. Steve suggested filing for an abatement on taxes because of the reduction in value of the property.

Emily spoke to Mike Lawson at the Chair breakfast. He said that the Town had approached Millbrook initially with some offers to try to mitigate the impact of the construction, but Millbrook had declined (including an offer to relocate them).

Jane Hotchkiss shared that the Town and utilities have all been involved in the process of improving the road because it is very complicated due to the fact that the business is located in a floodplain. She offered to look into whether the tax abatement is a possibility.

Emily asked whether the Committee can lead a GoFundMe effort. Jane said that as private citizens someone could set up a fundraising campaign, but she didn't think it would be appropriate for the Committee to set it up (but she offered to look into it). Emily proposed encouraging Millbrook to set up their own fundraising campaign. Lise asked if the Ag Committee is allowed to promote such a campaign. Jane offered to look into it. Discussing promotion of a funding campaign would have to be something put on the agenda for next meeting and publicly noticed. Emily will report to Sal Giurleo that the Ag Committee cannot spearhead a campaign. Steve moved, Brian seconded, unanimous approved that if a tax abatement is possible, the Ag Committee supports it.

The Committee is short one associate member and Emily's term ends soon, so we need to recruit. Brian had earlier raised the question of committee composition (Liza would be a natural member but lives in Maynard). Jane shared that if you have a business in town, you are allowed to join a committee.

News about farms and farmers

The editor of the Concord Journal announced that he would be holding a public session at Dunkin' Donuts on November 15th and another one on the 22nd. Emily attended the 15th session but the editor didn't show up. The Committee hasn't gotten anything into the Journal in three years.

Emily shared that she heard on NPR that when a Town's local newspaper disappears, the town's borrowing costs go up. Jane mentioned that there had been a lot of controversy about the Town taking over CCTV, so taking on management of a town newspaper is not likely.

Jane asked if anyone had met with the new head of the tourism center, Beth Williams. Part of her agenda is business promotion. Emily had spoken with her prior to the Ag Day market and she was helpful. Jane encouraged continuing to approach her for publicity help.

Angela Cleveland from the consulting group working with the Town's Climate Action Advisory Committee called Emily for feedback on climate-related agricultural issues. (They are delivering a climate action plan, including mitigation and resiliency measures.) She offered to host a roundtable for farmers to discuss climate-friendly practices. Emily asked if that would be of interest to the committee.

December 11th is the public open house for the Climate Action Advisory committee. Discussing the plan and how the Ag committee wants to engage with the advisory committee will be put on the agenda for the December meeting.

Happy suggested that Ag Committee members should try to attend the event on the 11th. The report is coming out in the spring (that is how long the consultants' contract lasts).

Happy shared that Frank Scimone is in the hospital recovering from an operation. She also reported that reimbursements are on the way for Ag Day costs.

There is a balance of about \$1,000 in the Ag Committee account.

Happy also reported that she received a letter from a beekeeper looking for a place for their hives. Scimone already has a beekeeper. Emily suggested the community gardens.

Brian reported from the Pollinator Health Advisory Board. There was a visitor from a sustainable landscaping fair called "Cooler Concord" (Comprehensive Sustainable and Energy committee) asking if the Pollinator Committee wanted to organize another one. They are trying to put out a list of nurseries and hardware stores that carry neonicotinoid-free stock. They are also putting together an article for Town Meeting. The article's aim is that any new licensing agreements with the Town will have a clause in the agreement prohibiting the use of neonicotinoids. They are still working on an explanation for why all licensing agreements wouldn't be subject to the ban and why only neonicotinoids are being banned. Steve asked if there was any distinction between seed treatments and spray treatments. Brian proposed adding discussion of the article to the agenda for December meeting. There are two bills in MA legislature relating to neonicotinoids. One would prohibit retail sales in hardware stores. There is a State Senate bill proposing a complete ban on neonicotinoids.

Happy will invite the Pollinator Committee to the next meeting.

Spring Forum ideas

- Farmer storytelling
- Showing of "What's Growing in Concord" film followed by roundtable discussion
- Showing of "The Biggest Little Farm"
- Speaker from Middlesex Conservation District
- Workshop on seeding

Steve teaches a spring gardening class and after it, several attendees signed up for his CSA. Emily thought the ideas of a seeding workshop could be combined with the Garden CI

Finalizing a date for spring forum will be on the next agenda. Emily will start inquiring about dates at Harvey Wheeler.

Melissa will follow up with friends who participated in a farmer storytelling event in Essex last year

Public comment

Happy suggested next year the Ag Committee have a tractor decorated with lights for the tree lighting ceremony.

Next meeting

December 19th, 2019

Meeting adjourned at 8:45
Minutes submitted by Lise Holdorf

Approved: Carolyn Goethert, chair
Dec 19, 2019