

Agricultural Commission Meeting Minutes

Meeting Date: October 15, 2019

Commission Members Present: Sighle Philbin (Chair), Daniel Mercurio, Kate Simmarano, Mollynda McArthur, Amy Marold

Commission Members Absent: James Amaral

Others Present: Don Varney, Rich Simmarano

Called to order 6:34 pm (move to order: Sighle; second: Daniel)

Topic:

Review and Approve minutes from September 18th meeting:

- Daniel added that Bob was not only enthusiastic about the AgCom's decision to get involved, but also invited us to speak at the next meeting and that the Board of Health (BOH) does not want/need farm animal issues on their plate as they have things like EEE and other important issues. Bob would rather have the AgCom deal with farm animals
- Mollynda stated that AgCom unanimously decided that they would be comfortable taking steps and action(s) to promote "conflict resolution" where applicable
- Amy made motion to accept the minutes with addendums, Kate seconded; motion passes 5-0.

Discuss Board of Health Farm Regulations:

- The possibility of an incorrect motion made the BOH at the October 9th meeting regarding the non-commercial farm regulations was made. Rather than state "I make a motion to pass the draft regulations with amendments", the motion stated "I make a motion to pass the amendments to the draft regulations". AgCom will mention this error at the next BOH meeting
- A list of farm animal complaints from 2016 to present was generated by request from the BOH secretary was passed around and reviewed. The unanimous consensus was that the BOH regulations do not come close to reflecting the quantity or degree of complaints the BOH receives. 100% of the complaints were from chicken odor or rooster noise. It was noted that all of the chicken odor complaints were from lot size of 0.41 acres or less.
- Sighle discussed the Massachusetts Association of Agricultural Commissions and strongly suggested the AgCom reach out to seek guidance on protocol and authorities among other

things. She stated that any local AgCom can join and there no dues necessary. The Town office would be used as the address. This could provide potential help for us.

- Don wondered what happens to people who don't comply with BOH correspondence regarding complaints. He asked what has been the protocol in the past to resolve complaints
- Kate suggested a citizen petition to nullify the BOH's recent regulations be put on the town warrant for May 2020. This would be done to buy time for the AgCom to execute goals and objectives they have set for assistance in resolving issues about farm animals
- Daniel asked the AgCom what their thoughts were on drafting up their own set of non-commercial farm regulations they could suggest to the BOH. He wondered if it was reasonable, based on the nature of the formal complaints, to draft regulations for roosters and chickens. Don would like to know from the BOH what the result has been of the complaints, from both parties involved. Sighle appreciates the need to inspect animal housing. Don states that his chicken coop gets inspected yearly from the Animal Inspector and that it doesn't bother him. Amy seconded that regarding her horse barn. Rich spoke to the people's willingness to allow assessment of their property when someone does not approach them in a punitive manner. He believes that for the most part, people seek out best management practices and want to do the right thing. Don stated he had to petition the State of Mass. to continue inspecting his beehives once the mandatory inspection process stopped. Daniel commented that, outside of a commercial setting, he did not feel comfortable having an approval authority continuously inspect his animals when no previous or current complaints are on file. He believes inspections in this setting are designed to follow up with formal complaints that get filed. Sighle reminded the AgCom that Bob Barrell, BOH Chair, had suggested the animal inspector sit on an AgCom meeting.
- Daniel made a motion to move forward with a citizen petition to nullify BOH regs, move forward with contacting the Massachusetts Association of Agricultural Commissions, and to draft their own recommended regulations that would address complaints from recent years. Amy seconded; motion passes 5-0. Delegated that Daniel would create a draft for the citizens petition and farm regs, and that Amy would contact the MAOAC.

Discuss Town Webpage Updates:

- In moving forward with their overall goals and objectives, Daniel spoke about updating the town page and adding links that may be useful for town residents. He passed out a draft that explains the difference between a Right-to-Farm community and having backyard farm animals. The AgCom read it over, and pending a spelling correction from Kate, the AgCom liked it. Kate asked who would be the one to update links and post things to the webpage, Daniel said he would ask Nancy Lucier.
- Amy made a motion to accept and upload draft of "RTF vs Backyard animals" to the website, Sighle seconded; motion passes 5-0.

- Facebook. Daniel suggested that Facebook is an effective tool that can be utilized to not only get the word about farm related topics/regulations, but that it can be a fun and interactive forum for town residents. People could post pictures of their own farm related activities, children, etc. Sighle expressed her reservations as it may overstep some boundaries and come off as too assertive. Kate suggested to start the Facebook page for informational purposes only to start. Molly suggested the page could also be used as a tool for town residents to provide feedback and/or complaints, and that the AgCom could provide direction for their concerns. Molly stated that while it may not be appropriate to use Facebook to solicit donations, it would be appropriate to use Facebook to request signatures for the town warrant
- Daniel made a motion to have the AgCom create a Facebook page. Molly moves to table the motion until Amy contacts the MAOAC and receives feedback regarding an AgCom Facebook page, Amy seconded; motion passes 5-0.
- Additional links will be discussed at the next meeting but may include the following: USDA, MSPCA, MADA, Guidelines for keeping chickens, Minimal management practices, Bee a good neighbor

Unforeseen Business:

- Daniel asked Sighle if previous AgCom's kept a full executive board (chair, co/vice chair, secretary, etc). Sighle said in the past they used to have co-chairs. Kate believed that would be a good idea in the event one person is unavailable.

Sighle made a motion to adjourn, Amy seconded; meeting adjourned at 7:53 pm.