

Agricultural Commission Meeting Minutes

Meeting date: November 19, 2019

Commission Members Present: Sighle Philbin (chair), James Amaral, Amy Marold, Mollynda Mcarthur, Daniel Mercurio, Kate Simmarano.

Also attending: Don Varney, Marc Saad, Amy Saad, Dominic Scalera

6:34pm Sighle moved to open meeting; Dan seconded.

1. Review and Approve minutes from October 15, 2019 meeting
 - a. Minutes were distributed, all members in attendance reviewed them
 - b. Unanimous vote to accept minutes as written.
2. Appoint executive board for the commission
 - a. Amy nominated Dan for co-chair, Molly seconded; Dan accepted nomination
 - b. Nomination confirmed by unanimous vote
 - c. Sighle agreed to continue as co-chair
 - d. Other administrative topics discussed
 - i. Sighle reviewed the original AgCom (Agricultural Commission) guidelines from the town administrator from the time the commission was formed
 - ii. Reviewed definition of a "farm" per the state of Massachusetts
3. Discuss Board of Health (BOH) farm related topics
 - a. At their most recent meeting BOH voted to table their proposed regulations. They expect to pass some form of regulations by May 1st, 2020
 - b. BOH requests a preliminary draft of our proposed regulations by their January meeting; AgCom and BOH will then collaborate on final
4. Dan reviewed draft on AgCom's non-commercial farm animal regulations
 - a. Basis for regulations
 - i. Regulations should reflect the complaints that have been documented
 - ii. Based on conversations with towns folk the biggest concerns are permitting, fines, and zoning
 - iii. Regulations should focus on dense neighborhoods/small lots (<0.5 acre) as these properties are involved in most complaints
 - b. Discussion of draft regulations
 - i. The AgCom is an advisory body only, unlike the BOH which has the ability to create regulations
 - ii. AgCom does have the power to actively take part in conflict resolution in situations involving farms and backyard animal keepers
 - iii. The AgCom feels that we should meet with the town's animal control officer to better understand what assistance he would like from us.
 - iv. A community member, Dominic Scalera, noted that the BOH's proposed regulations will affect the whole town, although there are only a few addresses

which have created issues; he questioned why the AgCom has not pushed to prevent any regulations from taking effect.

1. Complaints, especially those involving chickens, have been problematic for many years, the BOH wants to enact regulations to help prevent them
 2. The AgCom can help ensure proposed regulations are fair and informed
 3. A citizen's petition could be initiated to alter or create town by-laws, however, regulations created by the BOH cannot be overwritten by such a petition. Any resident can petition, regardless of final outcome, significant costs will be incurred by the Town
 - v. Permits and regulations will not change behaviors; but they will allow violations to be addressed
 1. It may be difficult to create hard and fast rules about the number of animals (especially chickens) that can be kept at a given property
 2. "Registration" of animals might be better accepted than issuing "permits"
 3. Regulations could be reviewed during the registration/permitting process
 4. AgCom can offer advice to townsfolk planning the purchase of animals (where to place coop, how to manage manure, etc.)
 - c. Dan noted the possibility of creating Minimum Management Practices for keeping animals; all animal keepers would have to attest that they have read and understand them
5. Amy Discussed her correspondence with Massachusetts Association of Agricultural Commissions (MAAC)
- a. The individual contacts on the website may be out of date; the site has not been updated recently
 - b. No response had been received from the organization's email
 - c. The website does have links to useful information, but not information that would be helpful in our current situation with the BOH
 - d. West Boylston's AgCom is already a MAAC member
6. Additional Links to the webpage on the town website
- a. Links were distributed and reviewed
 - b. Sighle moved to accept, James seconded
 - c. Unanimous vote to add links to web page
7. Discussed an AgCom Facebook and other social media page(s)
- a. Town administrator cautioned strongly about the use of social media
 - b. Social media accounts would need to be heavily controlled by account administrators
 - c. Would be a good way to stay visible for those who need advice on agricultural matters
 - d. Discussion tabled at this time

7:53pm Sighle moved to adjourn, Kate seconded; meeting adjourned