

Agricultural Commission Meeting 10 FEB 2020

In Commission Members in Attendance: Daniel Mercurio, Amy Malo, Molly McArthur, Kate Simmarano, Don Varney

Members Absent: James Amaral, Sighle Philbin

Community Members: Bob Barrell (BOH), Tom Dillon (BOH), Eric Enhus, Diana Englebart, Patricia Monk, Marya DeSanti, Kimberly Davis

Motion to open 6:30 Daniel Mercurio, second Kate Simmarano, Don Varney

- 1) Review and approve 13 JAN 2020 minutes
 - a) Accept minutes Amy Malo, second Don Varney, passed unanimously
- 2) Continue draft of Agricultural Commission (AgCom) non-commercial farm animal regulations, with appeal for input from community members
 - a) Recap of the current situation, by Don Varney
 - i) Most people are good neighbors
 - ii) Board of Health (BOH) has previously tried to resolve conflicts. The process has often not been easy
 - iii) AgCom and BOH are looking for input and ideas
 - b) Diana Englebart of Bowen Street :
 - i) BOH is tasked with protecting human health, other agencies protect animal health. Perhaps procedure should change and complaints should go through AgCom first to help mediate disputes and educate animal owners.
 - ii) Don Varney responded that AgCom has discussed this and is willing to assist with neighborhood mediation.
 - iii) Can a social media platform help educate owners? Amy Malo and Dan Mercurio responded that we have increased the links on our page on the town website
 - iv) AgCom has discussed social media page previously, but are not currently seeking to develop one
 - c) Eric Enhus, 17 Temple Street:
 - i) Will permitting be required for rabbits? Dan Mercurio clarified rabbits are excluded
 - ii) Worried that people will be discouraged from keeping backyard animals; animal ownership is a valuable hobby. Perhaps the permit/license should be limited to owners of a certain number of animals. Don Varney and Amy Malo noted that we have been discussing this issue, we are specifically trying not to discourage animal keeping
 - iii) What have surrounding towns done?
 - (1) Comment by community member Kim Davis - Hudson regulates by lot size, noted that most people will follow regulations if they know them. There are regulations in Hudson, but there is no permitting/license
 - (2) Dan Mercurio noted we have looked at other town's regulations; the town needs to submit animal keeping information to the state, we have proposed a survey/registration system to count animals
 - d) Don Varney addressed room asking "who would use an on-line page to enter animals being kept on your property?" (For the purpose of the town keeping an accurate animal census.)
 - (1) Could be done by mail, just like dog ownership
 - (2) Kim noted Hudson never collected that information; Amy Malo clarified that currently, West Boylston is not cataloging the information but the state regulation is there. There

is no information on how many non-commercial animal owners there are currently in West Boylston.

- e) Eric Enhus: what regulations are proposed for non-chickens? (horses, etc.) Amy Malo clarified that the regulations will not be chicken specific and will apply to all farm animals; state law dictates how many large animals (horses, cows) can be kept in a certain space.
 - f) BOH noted they based their regulations on the regulations on other nearby towns, including Hudson.
 - g) Dan Mercurio noted that the smaller lots (under 0.5 acre) are the source of most complaints; it may be that permitting will be required for keeping on small lots, or for keeping roosters.
 - h) BOH noted that there are ways to reduce rooster noises. Manure/odor can also be successfully managed on small lots.
 - i) BOH does not want to prevent animal keeping, but wants animals kept properly.
 - ii) License fee proposed is \$10, BOH is funded by fees and keeping records on animals increases work load.
 - iii) Amy Malo noted that AgCom is willing to take over the work load to mitigate the need for a permit fee.
 - iv) Kate Simmarano asked what additional work would be required?
 - v) BOH noted that inspection, census and conflict mediation require a paid BOH member to complete. (Fee the alliance asks us for is based on the amount of work WB has for the inspectors. If we ask them to do more, WB has to pay more).
 - vi) There will never be 100% participation in a voluntary census, but the fewer obstacles in the way the better the participation will be.
 - i) Don Varney noted that the AgCom could even send notices to new home owners in town
 - j) Mariah DeSanti (horse owner, currently within regulations) if regulations, change will there be grandfathering in of current animals?
 - i) Dan Mercurio, Amy Malo noted that ideally, yes.
 - k) BOH has looked at AgCom suggestions and have incorporated many of them.
 - i) Importantly, BOH added requirement that minimum management practices form be signed,
 - ii) Added that AgCom will aid in dispute mediation
 - iii) Will have to discuss having a census instead of a fee with the board.
 - iv) BOH doesn't want to control people's lives and create zoning laws, but needs to be able to act when there are disputes or unhealthy conditions.
 - v) Animal to human disease transmission can be highly problematic, we need to know what animals are in town.
 - l) Diana Englebart noted that she had been given incorrect information about animal keeping in the town when she first moved in- people just want the correct information about the rules.
 - m) Eric Enhus noted that having animals on public records might help prevent people from moving in next to animal owners if they would prefer not to.
- 3) Discuss AgCom attendance/reservations for MAAC meeting on 02/22/2020
- a) Held in Marlborough at the Holiday Inn
 - b) Will confirm acquisition of tickets via e-mail
- 4) AgCom budget request
- a) Asking for \$750 for budget line item previously discussed
 - b) Town admin did not currently support that
 - i) Will replace the RTF signs if we get estimates
 - ii) Will let us put events we schedule on the town sign in the town center
 - iii) We can print handouts on town hall printers, etc.

- 5) Town admin needs a report from us by March 1st, SP and DM will get it together, distribute, and add submit.
- 6) Unforeseen business:
 - a) Amy Malo suggested an open house for the Ag Com
 - i) Can invite speakers to talk to town residents about chicken keeping, rodent control, etc.
 - ii) Would need promotion
 - iii) Will give us face-to-face time with current/potential animal owners
 - iv) Could use the senior center possibly
 - v) Amy Malo moved to plan such an event, date TBA; second by Don Varney; passed unanimously
 - b) Kate Simmarano noted that having a highly regulated FB account might be useful for promoting what we do (in light of BOH stuff, seminars...)
 - i) Amy Malo noted that attendees of the conference can network with other AgComs and find out what if or how they use social media
 - ii) Kate Simmarano is willing to moderate a page, should one be created
- 7) Move to adjourn Don Varney, second Amy Malo, passed unanimously
 - a) Adjourn 8:010pm