

Pomfret Agricultural Commission Thursday, January 21 2016 Pomfret Senior Center

Meeting Opened 7:00

In Attendance

James Rowley Chairman

James Labbe Vice Chairman

Adam Squire Secretary

Bill Wood

Tina Kelly

John Wolchesky

Citizens and Guests

Daniel Nagy

Lance Sistare

First Selectman Craig Baldwin

Selectman Donna Smith

Joan Baldwin

Bill Dubois

Matt Snarkowski and a colleague from Conservation District

Regular Meeting

A. Open Regular Meeting/Roll Call

B. Approval of Minutes from Dec 17 2015

Motion was made by John Wolchesky for approval of the minutes. Bill Wood suggested an edit. Both the edit and the minutes were accepted

C. Citizen Participation and Conversation

Participation from citizens and guest occurred throughout the meeting

Note; During this section of the meeting correspondence from Ag Commission Member Ellsworth Chase was shared with the group. Ellsworth Chase had notified the First Selectman of his desire to resign his position on the commission allowing for a new member to join. It was at this time that it was confirmed that Lance Sistare as well as Daniel Nagy have interest in membership on the commission.

II Current Business

Note; Though not a formal agenda item Matt Snarkowski and his colleague both from the North East Conservation District spoke briefly about their partnership with both the NRCS and local Townships throughout the NE Conservation district to incentivize conservation practices such as diversified cover crops on town held lands.

A. Pomfret Farmer's Market 2016 proposed dates(July 17 Aug. 14 Sept 11) Town Calendar Dates Approved. Paperwork Filled out for the town.

Chairman Rowley provided a brief update letting the group know that all the preliminary diligence with the town was complete to secure the dates for the summer 2016 Pomfret Farmers series. It was noted by First Selectman Baldwin that one of the dates is Sept. 11 and that some tribute or acknowledgment should be considered by the commission for the market day.

B. Pomfret Grown Brochure info Update

Both James Rowley and James Labbe are working to solicit farm descriptions from farmers that are currently not represented in the Pomfret Grown brochure. Once all contacts have been made and responses received the group will work with Joan Baldwin on layout and formalizing the copy.

C. Plan of Conservation and Development Still Waiting!

No movement or update

D. May 7th Town wide tag sale (Farmers Mkt @ Rec field with tag sale)

This proposed date was revisited and the view was reasserted that given the time of year many vendors would not have the product levels to support a successful market. John Wolchesky wanted to table the date for later discussion.

III. New Business

A. Dan Mullins will talk to the Commission about lease agreement language of town properties. Selectman will be present!

This contribution from Dan Mullins did not occur however a spirited conversation occurred at the end of the meeting surrounding this matter.

B. Education and Outreach (Pomfret Community School)

Tabled for future discussion

C. Don Dubois/Grant Writing Discussion

Don Dubois spoke about the many grant opportunities available through the government. His focus was on grant opportunities available through the NRCS specifically through the EQUIP program. As a professional in Forest Land Management he has worked with the NRCS on his continued education so he can help facilitate contracts between land owners and the NRCS. His area of expertise is focused specifically on forest land though he is well versed in all the conservation practices that are encouraged by the NRCS. He works with land owners to develop and implement conservation plans which are the cornerstone facilitator for funds distribution from the NRCS. His compensation is based on a commission type model and there are government subsidies for his conservation plan development work. Once contracts are signed he works with landowners on implementation by providing resources and connections to service providers.

D. Pomfret Grown Market Update

Tabled for future discussion

IV. Other Business

A. Future Agenda Items (Ag night open house, The History of farms in Pomfret)

Tabled for future discussion

B. Meeting Date - Feb 18th

Meeting date was noted and accepted

C. General Discussion

It was at this juncture that a discussion ensued surrounding the distribution of town held lands to local farmers. John Wolchesky expressed concern over Mr. Miller's loss of a 36 acre tract that he had held for decades. At the center of the concern was that Mr. Miller was not proactively extended the right of first refusal by the town when the lease expired in December even though he had amended the tract for next seasons use. Also central to Johns concern was the level of fairness in the process.

Additional concerns were expressed

-Who is eligible as a Pomfret farmer and what is the criteria for eligibility?(Schedule F)

-How does the review and bid process work? Is it a highest bidder model or are there other considerations?

-Will there be management stipulations once contracts are awarded to ensure conservation practices are in place to protect the land for the future?

-Is a 2 year lease an appropriate term or would a 4 year lease be more productive for a lessee?

-Does the discretion for awarding the lease stay within the power of our Selectmen or is there another town body such as the Agricultural Commission that would be better suited for that roll?

-What are the institutional mechanism for transparency and fair distribution of lands?

First Selectman Baldwin spoke to the many questions that were generated as a result of Mr. Miller losing the lease and the lease being transferred to Pomfret farmer Lance Sistare. Mr. Baldwin stated clearly that there was no impropriety or negative intent in the transference of the lease from one farmer to another. Mr. Baldwin expressed that the spirit behind his decision was to live his commitment to prioritize Pomfrets farmers in terms of their access to opportunity. Mr. Baldwin also stated that some burden of responsibility should be placed on Mr. Miller and his land manager as it is their responsibility to ensure that their leases are maintained. But most importantly Mr. Baldwin stated that in his diligence during the lease transfer process he discovered that there exists no institutional controls or process in place to ensure a fluid, fair, and transparent awarding of town held lands. It was this very discovery that prompted Mr. Baldwin to begin the process of creating an institutional mechanism with the input of several parties including the Agricultural Commission. This will undoubtedly be an ongoing conversation.

V. Citizen Comments

There was participation throughout the meeting

VI. Adjournment 9:35pm

Meeting Minutes Accepted Feb. 18, 2016

Respectfully Submitted

Adam Roy Squire

Secretary Pomfret Agricultural Commission