

Minutes
Regular Meeting of the Easton Agricultural Commission
Wednesday, December 9, 2020 – 7:45PM Virtual Zoom Meeting
<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/85161052917?pwd=VjF3c1hnR0JFZEtSbDNLVlplZWk1Zz09>
Meeting ID: 851 6105 2917

In attendance Jean Stetz-Puchalski, Denise Hebner, Matt Oricchio, Victor Alfandre, Lori Cochran Dougall
Absent: Sage Rega, Irv Silverman

1. **Call to Order:** Meeting called to order at 7:45 p.m.
2. **Approval of Minutes:** Matt Oricchio made a motion, and Victor Alfandre 2nd. Motion passed.
3. **Updates & Reports**
 - Discussed on going Ag Com Covid-19 advisory activities helping Town, farms, and farm stands to adapt to changing conditions. Denise Hebner and Jean Stetz-Puchalski visited Christmas Tree Farms to provide information on operating safely, which included the distribution of COVID-19 rules, access to COVID-19 resources, map of all Christmas Tree Farms, and information to receive an “Easton is the Christmas Tree Capital of Connecticut” sign from the Chamber of Commerce.
 - Discussed Farmland Preservation and status of current project. The agreement to preserve 37.29 acres from development was signed and sent to the State. Closing expected early 2021.
 - Discussed succession of farmer participating in Farming Project on Town Land: SSES. Jean Stetz-Puchalski met with Board of Selectman regarding process for succession. Under item #10 in the lease (Assignment and Subletting) allows for reassignment with the permission of the Town. The BOS requests a letter from both Speckled Rooster and farmer interested in taking over the remained of the lease – April 15, 2024. No new RFP needed. Jean Stetz-Puchalski to provide the lease terms to interested farm for review and follow up with BOS.
 - Action taken to review, edit, and approve copy for Annual Report. Victor Alfandre made a motion to approve the annual report and Matt Oricchio 2nd. Motion passed.
 - Action taken to approve Ag Com 2021 Meeting schedule. Ag Com will continue to meet on the 2nd Wednesday of each month at 7:45 p.m. in the Library Community Room with virtual meeting held via Zoom as the solution for the interim unless otherwise noted.
 - Governor Lamont was scheduled to visit Easton to recognize Easton -The Christmas Tree Capital of Connecticut. Given the COVID-19 quarantine the visit was postponed until further notice.
 - Recognized efforts in Town to promote Easton Ag: Christmas Tree Capital of CT initiative, Easton Garden Club’s 2020 Holiday Version of the Easton Farm Map, CFE cookbook, Easton 175 Virtual Tours. The discussion led to question about the feasibility of adding a ‘donate today’ button to the website to encourage donations to build the Farmland preservation fund. This topic will be researched and further explored in January 2021 with attention to Town rules & restrictions.
4. **Correspondence.** None.
5. **New Business:** Discussed BOS feedback regarding increasing the size of the Ag Commission from 5 to 7 members with 4 required to reach a quorum. Town ordinance would need to review said change. Discussed the suggested by BOS to review the appointment of members and alternates to help with responsibility allocation in the meantime. Further discussion on the development of an orientation manual to help onboard Ag Commission members/alternates. A need identified to have more volunteer effort to support administrative and research activity. Discussed offering students from the Trumbull Agriculture High School and opportunity to participate. Victor Alfandre to contact the school. Jean Stetz-Puchalski will follow up with BOS to determine any restrictions.

Adjournment: Motion made to adjourn meeting at 8:49 p.m. by Lori Cochran Dougall and 2nd by Matt Oricchio.

Minutes submitted by Denise Hebner, Acting Recording Secretary *Denise Hebner*

INSTR # M2021000015 REC'D 01/11/2021 09:54:27 AM
CHRISTINE HALLORAN TOWN CLERK EASTON CT

Agricultural Commission

The purpose of the Agricultural Commission is to act in an advisory capacity to the Board of Selectmen and other town boards and commissions on agricultural matters.

The Commission consists of five members and two alternates who are electors of the town of Easton. Serving during this reporting period are members Jean Stetz-Puchalski (Chair), Victor Alfandre (Secretary), Lori Cochran Dougall, Matt Oricchio, Irv Silverman and alternates Denise Hebner and Sage Rega.

The Commission is charged with supporting and promoting agriculture and agricultural pursuits in the town of Easton. It serves as a conduit between non-profit agencies, civic organizations, municipal boards and commissions, elected and appointed government officials, businesses, farmers, and persons engaged in agricultural pursuits at the local, state, and federal level. The Commission advises the Board of Selectmen, the land use boards, commissions and officials on issues relating to agriculture and planning for agriculture in Easton.

During this reporting period we emphasized educational, preservation and economic development. We:

- Worked to understand the needs of local farmers in order to support success, increase economic viability, and promote a future for agriculture in Easton.
- Provided Covid-19 guidelines to help Town, farms, and farm stands adapt and comply to changing conditions during the pandemic. Conducted site visits and provided access to print and online resources.
- Kept current with agricultural grant opportunities and educational programming/vocational/business training available to Easton farmers and communicated these offerings through word of mouth and the enhanced, self-serve portal on the Agricultural Commission page of our Town of Easton website.
- Collaborated with other Connecticut Ag Commissions, federal and state level agricultural organizations, our Easton Planning and Zoning commission (P&Z), and other Easton Town commissions and committees, to help identify issues and concerns relating to planning for and supporting agriculture in Easton.
- Partnered with federal, state, and local agencies to preserve 37.29 acres of Easton farmland.
- Continued collaboration with the Town assessor's office to help farms understand how to obtain and file for Farm Classification to qualify for agricultural tax exemptions. Maintained Farm Classification link on the Ag Commission website encouraging farms to prepare for filing with the Town Assessor's office.
- Continued promoting Easton as a destination for local agriculture and agritourism.
- Communicated the important role agriculture plays in attracting residents and maintaining open space.

Current farming projects on town land include the leasing of two sections of the property located at Morehouse and Banks Road in front of Samuel Staples Elementary School (SSES). The plots are being farmed organically. The project provides an educational opportunity for the students at the school as well as an historical lesson in Easton's agrarian roots.

Regular meetings of the Agricultural Commission are scheduled for the 2nd Wednesday of each month at 7:45PM at the Easton Public Library Community Room unless otherwise noted.

Submitted by,
Jean Stetz-Puchalski, Chair