

Woodstock Agricultural Commission

Regular Meeting, Town Hall, Room A, 1 pm, Monday, October 15, 2018

Members Present: Stewart Morse, Richard Norman, Paul Miller, Linda Auger, Rebecca Hyde, Lynn Weaver. **Absent:** Jon Hermonot, Doug Young

Public Present: Grace Jacobsen, Ed Larson

1. Call to order: Meeting called to order at 1 pm.

2. Seat alternates Richard Norman moved to seat Paul Miller as a full members, Lynn Weaver seconded, **All in favor.**

3. Review of September 2018 minutes: Lynn Weaver motioned to approve the March minutes as presented, Richard Norman seconded, **all in favor.**

4. Public participation. None.

5. Old business

a. WOLSLAFP report. Public recognition plaque going up in Town Hall for everyone with PDR land. First contractor failed to supply the product, so a second is going to do it. Then there will be a public dedication. 3 other parcels are under consideration. Perhaps a 4th. The current fund may cover the 3 projects but not a fourth.

b. P&Z subcommittee report. Oct 18th will be the public meeting on the subdivision regulation revision draft. The 1-4 subdivision option would be a great help to agricultural families.

c. Celebrating Ag. Very well attended, perfect weather, 4,600 in attendance. Grounds were almost to capacity, with plenty coming and going. Over 1,200 people rode the hayride through Millers farm. Plenty of volunteers kept it all running. The mission is to educate the public about agriculture.

d. 2018 Program Agro-tourism. Good turnout, good presentations. Farm Bureau staff were pleased. Planning and Zoning members, First Selectman, Conservation Commission members, and Pat Boyd all showed up. People traveled from other counties, and a new farmer in town was there.

e. Other. There've been ongoing visits and meetings with state candidates. Trying to get to everyone to promote ag concerns. One meeting was at Oak Ridge Farm, which is in the middle of Ellington. They're working up to having 2,700 cows and have a 72 cow milking rotary rotating every 10 minutes. They're surrounded by suburbia, with a young group working there, and some outside investors.

6. New business

a. Selectmen August 2018 Presentation. The Selectmen charged the Ag Commission with reviewing the town's ordinances related to farming, since they haven't been looked at in some years. The most useful result would be to improve the eligibility for tax exemptions. Right now there's a large exemption for agricultural machinery and buildings, but the assessor has questioned whether that exemption ends when the building is used for other purposes, such as selling marketing items like T-shirts or holding a gathering to eat food or drink produced on the farm. How would an amendment be worded? Perhaps based on percentage of usage for which activity?

The exemption states "actually and exclusively" for farming, as defined by state statute. Did "actually and exclusively" come from a state statute? Tax exemptions and rebates are governed by state statute.

The tax abatement ordinance is restricted to dairy farming and fruit orchards. Can this be extended to other types of farming? The cost of machinery has risen — could the exemption amounts be increased?

At our next meeting we'll focus on the farm buildings exemption to explore amendment options.

b. Woodstock Land Map Grid Review. Map 5779. This month's map section runs along the Thompson border, roughly even with Roseland Park down to 171, and West to 171/ South Woodstock. It includes a good bit of prime farmland, more than a few developments, and portions of the Little River, Muddy Brook, Mill Brook, Shepherds Pond, Roseland Lake, and swamps. There are 213 lots, and a bit over 800 acres. It covers the Fair grounds, the Putnam Fish and Game Club, Fairvue Farm, Cornfield Pt, Wyndham Land Trust acreage, some of Valleyside South and Pinecroft Farm lands. 102 acres are owned by Charles Rosenfield or relatives. About 130 acres are protected from development.

7. Announcements / Other

Fairvue Farm had a visit from a woman with a vegan T shirt and Florida plates, who refused to identify herself, but started taking videos while recording accusations of cow abuse. She walked into the barn without asking permission. They photographed her and politely escorted her away.

8. Adjourn. Meeting adjourned at 2:25 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Rebecca Hyde, Secretary

(These minutes are subject to approval at the next meeting of the full Commission.)