



Agricultural Commission
First Floor Meeting Room, Town Hall
Tuesday, January 12, 2021
Meeting Minutes
(approved as amended 2-9-21)

7:00 Start

Members present- Ryan Karb (Chair), Chris Von Achen, Tina Smith, Jada Hass, Douglas Marshall (Planning Bd liaison)

Staff present- Stephanie Ciccarello

- December meeting minutes
 - o Not enough of quorum from December to vote on minutes, will be voted on in the next meeting
- Introductions
 - o Two new members
 - Tina Smith
 - Doug Marshall
- John Root – Pollinator resolution
 - o New report out, may be down 75% of total insect population
 - o Farmers have been growing wildflowers to help support pollinators, can be used as another income stream (flower sales)
 - o Currently non-binding pollinator resolution is great, but lack of ability to enforce it/take next steps
 - o Will be a community flower garden and orchard set up at the Old Hitchcock Center near the old common school
 - o Lots of un-used town land, could possibly utilize better
 - Growing wildflowers could have auxiliary benefits (lower mowing)
 - **Looking for help in supporting efforts to increase pollinator habitats**
 - o Grant discussion
 - Simple Gifts recent received grant (USDA NRCS UIP) to look into perennial plants and pollinator populations
 - Could be something other farms could apply for (?) or adapt
 - NRCS has lots of grants at the moment, particularly on soil health
 - Adapt grant to show support for soil health, can help to increase grant eligibility (Tina can look into specific grant programs)
 - Mass Oliver

- Can look at land types/what land is conservation, what it's being used for
 - Can towns (i.e. our conservation department) receive grant funding for similar types of projects?
 - Stephanie will talk to Erin (liaison for conservation department)
 - Farm bill could be a source of farming
 - Can ask for higher amounts of money, may receive funding at lower levels
 - Success in application and project helps to secure funding in subsequent years- town boards could help get together
 - League of women's voters also onboard with helping with resolution
 - Next steps
 - Even simple things like getting funding for casting wildflower seeds along roads (or at farms) to show scale of work
 - Could ag com help encourage farmers
 - Concerns about getting farmers on board without incentive
 - Would small scale alleviate these problems?
 - Focus on
 - Trees and shrubs can be harder logistics, but are great habitats that outcompete
 - Blooms throughout the year
 - Biodiversity
 - Shade tree committee may work well with Ag Com
 - Outreach campaign to community
 - Seeds for the community in backyards, conversations about mowing (mowing every other week is more beneficial for pollinators)
 - UMass seed library could be a potential source of seeds as well
- Ideas for 2021
 - Cost of equipment
 - High burden of cost, is there a way to do an equipment co-op?
 - Concerns about demand of tools at certain points
 - Dairy farmers
 - Local dairy co-op to keep cost of milk higher
 - Dairy farmers of America and Cabot are two
 - Soil health
 - Dual-use solar
 - UMass doing research- just received a 2 million dollar grant
 - Succession planning
 - Grant newsletter
 - Info burst once per month to increase presence
 - Tina- happy to help farmers fill out paperwork (cannot help with MDAR)
 - Hampden/Hampshire conservation district has funding for no/low-till equipment
 - COVID loans
 - Farmer classified section (?)

- Increasing awareness
 - Farm festival or tractor parade? (COVID withstanding)
 - Or tabling somewhere
 - Would need an event planner on the board, farm festival/tractor parade/farm tours would be great, but would take a lot of effort and somebody with a “go-getter” driving attitude
 - Potential to do an online event this year
 - May be easier to host, clear up some logistics
 - Could potentially loop in with Western Mass Regenerative Food System
- Home preservation classes/increase use of community kitchens (Bangs community center has kitchens)
 - Similar options happened in Grow Food Amherst
 - Jam making was very popular
 - UMass Dining did “Diet for a Cooler Planet”
 - Cooking demonstrations a panel discussion
- Fort River Farm
 - Ryan will help open up/make new beds
 - Partnering with Healthy Hampshire Collaborative
 - Could ag com advocate for funding for seasonal staff?
 - *yes*, but it may not get far
 - Will be doing increased outreach
 - Is there potential for farmers to use land?
 - It is a goal, down the road (difficult with wetlands)
 - Land use issues
 - Good land is cost prohibitive, looking for alternatives
 - Lisa Depiano from UMass looking to donate 10 chestnut trees to Fort River area
 - Need to check that works (conservation land)
- Next meeting
 - Make an agenda for a group letter
 - Tina interested in spearheading
 - Include pollinator information in the newsletter
 - Potentially set an agenda and date for event in the future
 - Maybe early March before things kick off
 - Could Amherst media help with any of this?
 - February 9th, 7pm

Respectfully submitted,
Chris Von Achen