

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
FARMLAND PRESERVATION ADVISORY BOARD

DRAFT

**Minutes of Meeting
December 8, 2014, 1:30pm
CT Department of Agriculture
Large Conference Room
165 Capitol Avenue, Hartford**

MEMBERS PRESENT: Chairman James Zeoli, John Guskowski, Joe Bonelli, Henry Talmage, Paul Larson, Robin Chesmer and Ben Freund.

MEMBERS ABSENT: Terry Jones, Lucy Nolan, Jim Krissel, George Hindinger, and George Malia.

ALSO PRESENT: For the Department –Commissioner Reviczky, Bureau Director-Linda Piotrowicz, Director -Cameron Weimar, Property Agents Lance Shannon, Katherine Winslow, Liaison Honor Lawler and Secretary-Sandra Karanian; Others – Lisa Bassani Working Lands Alliance, and Kip Kolesinskas.

I. CALL TO ORDER:

Chairman Zeoli called the meeting to order at 1:37 pm.

II. REVIEW OF September 15, 2014 MINUTES

The minutes of the September 15, 2014 meeting of the Farmland Preservation Advisory Board (Board) were distributed. Guskowski requested the minutes be improved. Last paragraph under Other Business, second and third sentences need clarification. Commissioner Reviczky provided the following clarification “Farm Bill streamlining wetlands reserve program did not have basis in Farm Bill. We are now competing for existing money.” Minutes were approved as amended (**Guskowski-Freund-Unanimous**).

III. BUSINESS:

1. Commissioner’s update

- A. Department of Agriculture.** Commissioner Reviczky stated since last meeting an election took place. Governor Malloy was re-elected. Reviczky to serve another term. In regards to state’s fiscal situation, Department of Agriculture did fairly well, no loss of funds. Commissioner Reviczky indicated hiring freeze. We are still allowed to back fill Bureau Director Piotrowicz’s position and a durational position in marketing. Not as hopeful in regards to growing certain aspects of the agency.
- B. Governor’s Council for Agricultural Development.** Governor’s Council will meet in February instead of January. Endeavoring how to write the next report considering Bureau Director Piotrowicz’s responsibilities. Guskowski questioned are the subcommittees meeting continually. Bureau Director Piotrowicz indicated

they have wrapped up, they drafted a report and are putting it together. Commissioner Reviczky stated working group was looking at state owned inventory of land, make available an additional 4000 acres by end of 2015. Commissioner Reviczky does not believe we will make a lot of progress in this regards. Guskowski asked about establishing a model. Freund asked how do we do it right. Freund understands there is a need, cost to getting land is a barrier. Every state wants this, but how we get there? Talmage stated it is infrastructure driven. It is a challenge, how do you make it so someone can be successful in their segment. Other agencies are bound by the rules how the land is protected. How you make it all fit together, open space grants, how do you want it to be used. Can DEEP pull together a list of where the 4000 acres comes from. Commissioner Reviczky indicated Graham Stevens can make a lot of gains, have a lot of criteria and stewardship issues. Guskowski stated the layers, prime farm soils, make inroads at DEEP. Freund stated getting contracts someone can sign and feel comfortable doing so. Chairman Zeoli stated young people want to enter farming and unless have mentor that can give them a kick start it is difficult to get the equity. Director Weimar stated an event geared to new farmers organized by Department of Agriculture, UCONN Extension, Farm Bureau is being held tomorrow. Eighty-five to ninety attendees are expected. Director Weimar, marketing, FAS to be there to get information out. Commissioner Reviczky stated recommendations to deal with more education and training. Board of Regents of Higher Education established a pilot program at Nonnewaug High in Woodbury and Naugatuck Valley Community College. Nonnewaug to host courses. There are a total three courses being offered, Integrated Pest Management, Soils and Fertilization and Tractors for Beginners. Bureau Director Piotrowicz indicated they repeatedly heard a need for these types of courses. A survey conducted indicated what topics, and these were among the top five. Has been difficult getting the word out. Commissioner Reviczky indicated hope is to partner with agriculture centers throughout the state. This is not for only new farmers; current farmers or employees that want to expand their knowledge. The curriculum was approved by Board of Regents for Higher Education. These are certificate courses in hopes of being stacked to earn an Associate's degree. Bassani asked if there is a deadline to register. Bureau Director Piotrowicz stated registration will be taken through the start of class. Guskowski asked the information be distributed electronically.

2. State Owned Farmland.

- A. Southbury Training School.** Commissioner Reviczky stated the Department of Administrative Services has been asked to help with the triage of infrastructure. The immediate needs are collapsed buildings, structures that may be beyond repurposing, plan for repurposing structures. Department of Developmental Services forward control to Department of Agriculture. Documents are needed from Department of Developmental Services to Attorney General to make this occur. Commissioner Reviczky to meet with Commissioner Macy and discuss issues on the transfer. Commissioner Reviczky stated the task force is looking at additional resources not located on the farm. Rehabbing greenhouse. Chairman Zeoli stated there are still customers working in the greenhouses. Commissioner Reviczky indicated people living there have the opportunity to live there or move to a group home setting, it is their decision. Department of Agriculture will get

control of homes on the farm unit then give back to Department of Developmental Services, approximately 15 acres, through a Memorandum of Understanding. Director Weimar working to do resource assessment with the help of Kip Kolesinkas. Director Weimar indicated there have been a couple meetings held at Southbury Training School since last FPAB meeting. Director Weimar indicated working with Department of Developmental Services and Southbury Land Trust to work on easement, transfer, custody control. Easement is held by Southbury Land Trust. Commissioner Reviczky stated during a meeting at Southbury, in terms of planning we felt doing restorative work is in best interest. Next growing season plan for remediation work. Can draw funds from the restoration grant. We do have current tenant, Platt family. In fall 2015, they may not have the same management control of the fields. Mr. Platt is very knowledgeable of the land. Commissioner Reviczky stated we would like to bring in other interested farmers. It is a great project, but will take some time to get it where we want it to go.

Talmage asked in discussion with Construction Services, is there a solution to water issue? Commissioner Reviczky indicated we are on our own in regards to water. Commissioner Reviczky indicate there is an underground water system, but capacity is limited. Guskowski asked if we can use restoration monies to drill a well. The answer was yes.

- B. Lebanon Agricultural Reserve.** Commissioner Reviczky indicated there are two active leases, Abells and Cushmans. Chairman Zeoli indicated Abells want to sustain their operation. They intend to expand; we need to keep this in mind, as long as the Abells continue to abide by the regulations. Commissioner Reviczky indicated we have relayed this to the Abells through conversations. The Abells have done a tremendous amount of restoration work making it more useful. Rotational grazing plan has allowed them to better manage their herd. Chairman Zeoli indicated a lot of demand for product.

3. Farmland Preservation Programs update

- A. Community Farms Preservation Program Sub-Committee: Recommendations for the program's scoring criteria.** Guskowski spoke on behalf of sub-committee. A handout was passed out. Meeting with staff to discuss PSA municipal outreach and identify the difficulties in the current criteria. We need to outreach to municipalities. Guskowski thanked Commissioner Reviczky for making the program no longer a pilot program. Based on discussions, Director Weimar has provided a summary on the Recommended Revisions. A fifth eligibility requirement was added. It was not explicitly spelled out previously. Now 4 of the 5 requirements need to be met. One challenge is the schedule of contributions it was capped at 50% by state – on smaller farms state needs to be more flexible up to 90%. Consolidate the scoring and ranking criteria. After we made these recommendation re-ranked some of the farms in the programs. Director Weimar indicated Kip Kolesinkas and Phil Chester consulted on the work to the scoring. Chester looked at current applications. Guskowski recommended these changes be made and that the

advisory board approve. Chairman Zeoli indicated clarification on downtown and adding fiber to eligibility need to be done.

Chairman Zeoli indicated Commissioner Reviczky to find out a few things, adjust it and will be presented at next meeting.

Chesmer asked why is the town landtrust 50/50, what is the reason behind. Director Weimar indicated partner would need to be landtrust or town. Chairman Zeoli indicated it gives incentive to other communities to save something, it is a better deal. Bassani agreed with Chesmer that 50% for land trust is a lot, it is a hardship for them to meet this goal. Guskowski indicated town would have some contribution. Chesmer indicated adding qualifiers that are not needed, he believes it should be 25/75 across the board. Talmage asked how many rural towns would not have participated in the 50/50 contribution – is there enough data to draw conclusions. Guskowski stated other components have to demonstrate it is important to the community, not just good soils, but a critical element to the community fabric. Commissioner Reviczky indicated 75/25 split is appropriate. Talks from beginning indicated municipalities are committed to program and farmland overall. Director Weimar stated the sub-committee will revisit this. The sub-committee will try to get together before next FPAB meeting. Guskowski would like to have a revised set that can be acted upon at next FPAB meeting. Chairman Zeoli indicated once revised to send out 4 days prior to meeting, enabling individuals to work in advance to FPAB meeting. Freund asked if we want to broaden not just food but add fiber. Guskowski indicated emphasis statutorily on food. Kolesinkas indicated we need more defined definitions, Guskowski indicated if not food producing farm can still meet eligibility hitting other four.

- B. Discussion of Farmland Preservation Advisory Board Sub-Committees involvement and additional meetings for specific issues (i.e. the allowable uses on restricted farmland) –** At the FPAB September meeting it was discussed on allowable uses on restricted farmland. Sub-committee board members would like to see if the Advisory Board would be interested in reinitiating a sub-committee and then report back to Board. Chairman Zeoli stated Commissioner Reviczky cited what is allowed on a preserved farm in regards to agritourism. One side promoting but how far do you promote. Some are doing minimal, others in high gear. What are the allowances? Each preservation act for each property is different. Are there basic guidelines to start with when you enter an agreement? Commissioner Reviczky indicated 1-1Q is it agriculture use? Chairman Zeoli indicated special action by the owners if it is after the fact. Guskowski asked if you are building a large barn not to be used for agriculture use. Chairman Zeoli indicated it is a problem, questionable reach. What is allowable in the municipality? Look at farm to chef program. Guskowski asked is there a general problem with the system, what happens if they want to push the limits is there a problem with the process or getting judgments from the state. Chairman Zeoli indicated he didn't think there were problems with the process. Chairman Zeoli indicated have to go to Department of Agriculture and local municipality to get approval. Guskowski indicated it was his inclination this is not a wide spread problem. Talmage indicated the bigger question is if this issue is going to be more complex overtime. It would

be useful to have the stewardship subcommittee meet regularly, as these things come up landowners need to understand the best they can what expectations are. This goes hand in hand with stewardship. Bassani indicated need some basic guidance, state this is the procedure you have to go through, provide that education. Chesmer indicated Department of Agriculture has been proactive. Need to address those issues upfront. Agritourism farms that want to join the program, need to have a clear understanding. Motion to reengage allowable uses subcommittee (**Chesmer –Freund Unanimous**).

C. PDR Projects and Budget Summary.

Allocated bond funding & recent bond fund requests – Director Weimar developed a sheet adding more budget numbers per the Board’s request. There are 303 protected farms. Two farms since last FPAB meeting. There are 25 actual offer agreements which encompass \$12.45 million. There are two sources Community Investment Act Funds and bond allotments. State fiscal year July 1, thru June 30. Bonding we have to make a request for DAS to release it for OPM. \$1.4 million has been released from OPM to DAS. Five or six farms will use the \$1.4 million. We are preparing allotment request for December or early January for \$8.5 million most NRCS funding. It is recommended to draw from bonding funds, we have large balance, be proactive to DAS and OPM. Chairman Zeoli asked since bonded money where does that money go back to? Director Weimar indicated money comes back to Department of Agriculture. Commissioner Reviczky indicated a specific revolving account. Talmage indicated community investment act \$5million still there bond asking for \$8.5 million out of \$30 million worried when budget talks start. Commissioner Reviczky greater exposure that the money is sitting there, the more we talk and we report the better. Talmage indicated of the \$12.5 million have agreed contracts, in theory \$8.5 go toward the \$12.5 million. Commissioner Reviczky indicated trying to ramp up production. Indicated 73 projects total \$38 million. Chairman Zeoli indicted it is about proving the need. Director Weimar indicated his goal is show we need to exceed \$10 million in obligated in funds. Chairman Zeoli indicated to prove the case that we need more. Director Weimar indicated to include the most recent request that is \$14.5 million from OPM draw by next June. Freund indicated it is unprecedented turn around instead of accumulating money over next 3 years. Director Weimar indicated applicants are informed it can over 12 months from application. Freund indicated he wants Department of Agriculture to be aggressive. Talmage indicated we need to think about why we can argue for this program. Director Weimar indicated we are trying to streamline the process. Freund indicated to increase the size of the pipe. He is throwing his cautions on the table all in vain of supporting. Bassani indicated a lot of work. Bassani asked about ability to make use of our qualified land trust partners. Bassani attended conference in PA in October, they have impressive program a lot done at county level. Bassani indicated CFT can get appraisal. Director Weimar indicated more towns are partnering with us to do that. Director Weimar indicated we want to make sure right appraisers are used. Bassani suggested to utilize our partners with the state, push some work to land trust. Director Weimar indicated we are at capacity for applicants.

Community Investment Act Funds – Lawler provided status report with handout on annual Stewardship visits. Farms been to in last 6 months and how it compares to last 2 years. Some farms inactive production, some dairy and hay Chairman Zeoli asked what are the guidelines? Director Weimar two or three farms could have enforcement issues. If Lawler something she then took photos with permission of landowner. Shannon went out two farms that were questionable. Chairman Zeoli asked if contact was made with the designated person. Lawler explained landowner not always interested in being there for visit. She would call before and after visit. Director Weimar indicated Lawler doing great work on the database. Ramping up database work, to track down current owner can be very time consuming. Lawler visiting frequently will be helpful going forward. Bassani asked if there is there a notification requirement. Director Weimar indicated we will get notices. Chesmer asked what enforcement issues did Lawler notice. Lawler indicated soil moving around, livestock messy. Talmage asked if much non agriculture use was found, i.e, boat storage. Lawler indicated very little of that, pallet dumping no houses erected. Chairman Zeoli asked how many farms were for sale. Lawler indicated none she was aware of, few recently sold, or talk of the farm being sold. Talmage asked if Lawler goes through easement with landowner. Lawler indicated survey was brought but did not go over deed with landowner. Commissioner Reviczky asked soil being moved part of restoration project. Shannon indicated they were moving stone walls, clearing some old pasture, they weren't moving dirt, it was for agriculture use.

IV. OTHER BUSINESS:

Any other business. Please set schedule for future meetings.

V. ADJOURNMENT:

Next meeting, TBD. The meeting was adjourned at 4:08 pm. (It was not motioned)

Respectfully submitted by Sandra Karanian. Date: December 9, 2014.