

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
FARMLAND PRESERVATION ADVISORY BOARD

Minutes of Meeting
September 15, 2014, 9:30am
CT Department of Agriculture
Large Conference Room
165 Capitol Avenue, Hartford

MEMBERS PRESENT: Chairman James Zeoli, John Guskowski, Joe Bonelli, Henry Talmage, George Malia, Paul Larson, and Lucy Nolan.

MEMBERS ABSENT: Terry Jones, Robin Chesmer, Jim Krissel, George Hindinger, and Ben Freund.

ALSO PRESENT: For the Department –Commissioner Reviczky, Bureau Director-Linda Piotrowicz, Director -Cameron Weimar, Chief of Staff -George Krivda, Property Agents Lance Shannon, Katherine Winslow and Denise O’Meara, Liaison Honor Lawler and Secretary-Sandra Karanian; Others – Elizabeth Moore of CT Farmland Trust, Lisa Bassani Working Lands Alliance.

I. CALL TO ORDER:

Chairman Zeoli called the meeting to order at 9:39 am.

II. REVIEW OF June 23, 2014 MINUTES

The minutes of the June 23, 2014 meeting of the Farmland Preservation Advisory Board (Board) were distributed. Malia indicated an error on page 4 under letter I “to put on file at the respective towns” should read “to put on file at the respective land records”. Guskowski indicated George Malia should be added to members present. Minutes were approved as amended (Guskowski-Nolan-Unanimous).

III. BUSINESS:

1. Commissioner’s update

- A. Department of Agriculture.** Commissioner Reviczky introduced the selection of Linda Piotrowicz as the new director of the Dept. of Agriculture’s Bureau of Agricultural Development and Resource Preservation. Reviczky stated Piotrowicz has worked for the department for numerous years and the last three (3) years in the commissioner’s office working on grants, marketing, regional market, marketing farmland preservation, and establishing the Farm-to-Chef program.

Piotrowicz spoke thanking everyone. Piotrowicz is glad to be part of such a successful and historical program. Piotrowicz welcomed the opportunity to talk with people to learn their roles and get to work in such a supportive environment.

Reviczky indicated the Farmland Preservation celebration to celebrate all preserved farms is this Saturday, September 20, 2014 from 11am to 5 pm. There will be a farmers' market, chefs to provide CT grown food, square dancing, photo exhibits, children's activities, and live music, The Governor is planning to attend at 1 pm. A great opportunity to take stock in where we are and where we are headed. Malia inquired whether farmers had been notified of celebration. Reviczky indicated preserved farm families were notified and asked to contribute photos. Some will tell their stories.

Introductions of individuals attending meeting. Chairman James Zeoli, John Guskowski, Joe Bonelli, Henry Talmage, George Malia, Paul Larson, and Lucy Nolan, Commissioner Reviczky, Director-Linda Piotrowicz, Director -Cameron Weimar, George Krivda, Property Agents Lance Shannon, Katherine Winslow and Denise O'Meara, Liaison - Honor Lawler and Secretary-Sandra Karanian, Elizabeth Moore of CT Farmland Trust, Lisa Bassani of Working Lands Alliance

- B. Governor's Council for Agricultural Development.** Reviczky stated Piotrowicz is working on the annual report. The Governor's Council had four (4) working groups, food safety modernization, wholesale markets, producer education and innovations and marketing groups. They meet in January, February and March. Recommendations will be in set forth in the report. In October, the Council will focus on working group structure and organizing for the next year of work.

Reviczky stated a major initiative with the community colleges will provide education opportunities for farmers and their employees. After an extensive outreach survey a course offering flowed from the Council. Three (3) non-credit courses will be offered this fall on Thursday evenings running for seven (7) weeks at Nonnewaug High School and Naugatuck Valley Community College (NVCC). The classes being offered are soil fertility, integrated pest management, and tractor operation, repair and maintenance. Students will be able to stack the certificates to get college credits towards an associate degree. Community college system funding for scholarships will be a reduced fee to early registrants.

- C. Legislative Update.** Reviczky stated the legislative proposals have nothing to impact the Farmland Preservation at this time.

2. State Owned Farmland.

- A. Southbury Training School.** Reviczky stated the boundary survey is completed. The task force reported issues on balance of the land. Reviczky is working with Director Weimar on infrastructure, the remediation of structures which are beyond useful life. Director Weimar, Kip Kolesinskas, Joe Bonelli went to Southbury with Tom Crider regarding the agricultural easement. Working with current tenant, Ed Platt, to help guide his existing lease. Need to look at management plan-

where do we see Southbury in five (5) years. Chairman Zeoli inquired if there is money in the budget to get rid of the golden rod and use the land. Reviczky indicated we can lease up to ten (10) years. The water situation was inquired about. Reviczky indicated there is no community water. Would need to drill wells.

- B. Lebanon Agricultural Reserve.** Reviczky stated we need more opportunity to do more permanent protection of the farm. Dealing with easement issues with DOT and DEEP. DEEP is moving forward with dam on Savin Lake. Bridge and dam are major construction projects. Need to navigate vertical easement. Chairman Zeoli inquired what the acreage is. Director Weimar indicated 575 acres.

3. Farmland Preservation Programs updates & summaries.

- A. Handout & Review of the list of 300 Farms – with year protected, town and acreage.** Director Weimar distributed a handout showing the 300 farms preserved by county which will be distributed on an annual basis. Director Weimar indicated we just reached 301. Board would like to see farms alphabetically by county then chronologically. Missing pages will be distributed to recipients via email. Bassani inquired are these in GIS layers, are they mapped. Director Weimar indicated we are getting there, A-2 survey required in digital format. Interns created GIS layer with aerial view, soil contours and wet lands, they took from state then clipped to town. We need to make sure parcel boundary is accurate, we now bring scale to farmer. Talmage inquired if we are using the Clear Program. Director Weimar indicated UCONN is using Clear and getting their information from DEEP. Bassani stated working on report showing farms that are still farmed, who the properties are being sold to whether new farmers, rural estate buyers, all important aspects of Stewardship. Lawler is doing check of PDR properties, then goes on Vision or town hall property card.

Reviczky asked Bassani to explain her project. Bassani stated she had been working with Dippel previously and Director Weimar regarding the status of PDR farms, are they being sold and to whom. Whether they have access and affordability. Interns had difficulty getting comprehensive data – 43 sales- vast majority are still farming; some sold to estate buyers, or parcel broken off into two (2) or three (3) easements. Will provide Reviczky with copy of report.

- B. The status and future of the Community Farms Preservation Program (John Guzkowski, Chair of Community Farms Preservation Program sub-committee).** Guzkowski distributed handout on Community Farms Preservation Program (CFPP) showing nine (9) eligible farms and seven (7) active. Over twenty-six (26) applications were received. Total estimated cost PDR \$2.3 million – state share \$1.3, not including incidental costs (appraisals, surveys,

attorneys). Three (3) are moving toward closing, significant interest in program. Guzkowski requesting Farmland Preservation Advisory Board remove pilot from the program. Guzkowski indicated making departments, partners, and municipalities aware of this program's availability to smaller farms. Malia inquired if the restrictions are the same as PDR. Director Weimar indicated the scoring criteria is different, easement language, joint ones have State restrictions in there. Partner with Landtrust and work closely on state deeds. Reviczky stated referring to the handout - generally we don't have names until the deal is completed. Releasing the names should not have occurred. Guzkowski will be working with the subcommittee to modify the criteria. The specifics of the score will be tabled at the December meeting. Guzkowski stated a subcommittee meeting was held last week, he was the only member attending, strongly encourages participation from the Farmland Preservation Advisory Board. Guzkowski made a motion to recommend to the Department of Agriculture to remove pilot designation to permanent for the CFPP (Community Farms Preservation Program). (Guzkowski-Nolan-Unanimous)

- C. Allowable uses on CT PDR protected farms (Lisa Bassani, Working Lands Alliance).** Invites board to consider the need to balance protection of the resource and how agriculture is changing, i.e. economic viability. What is the procedure for proposed use for land, what is allowed and not allowed on PDR farms, what is incidental use? Work with subcommittee of this board to draft some policy recommendations, agricultural tourism came up. Talmage added to have a document providing guidance to land owners, in favor of starting dialogue on what might be appropriate strategies. Malia stated part of restriction is based on statutes. Reviczky would invite Working Land Alliance (WAL) to come to discuss. Nolan inquired if it is farm to table dinner without permanent structure. Reviczky stated would be incidental. Bassani asked to not focus on the one farm in Woodstock, not here to loosen restrictions, asking for guidance from this board to commissioners, bigger issue than one farm. Reviczky stated we have been working on this. Malia stated Connecticut is a voluntary program, start to change easement need to have Assistant General assisting.
- D. Discussion of Farmland Preservation Advisory Board Subcommittee involvement and additional meetings for specific issues (i.e. the Uses of Restricted Farmland Sub-Committee).** Malia stated with value of land we need to be mindful if the number of uses increases so will the value. Talmage stated complexity of this issue. Owners don't know who to ask-what is a structure? What requires a determination? Director Weimar stated during negotiations we stress the requirement of notification and approval Reviczky added. Director Weimar indicated getting stewardship going out every twelve (12) months.

IV. OTHER BUSINESS:

1. **Election of officer positions & terms.** Director Weimar stated at last meeting the terms of officers was discussed. Malia suggested holding the next election during the first meeting of 2015 and then annually thereafter.
2. **Any other business.** Status of NRCS & matching funds. Director Weimar went to D.C. Lisa Coverdale worked with us to make recommendations in D.C. The issues effect participating states, serious impact on how we do business, cooperative agreement, state programs as certified entities, land easement programs. Meeting will be in October. Chairman Zeoli inquired where we are with losing funding. Reviczky stated extending agreement with NRSC until March 31, 2015, approval deed templates, \$9.2 million **estimated** on the table. Director Weimar stated we are still obligated to protect farms on state only deed with state only money. Chairman Zeoli asked when financial breakdown is given provide not reimbursed funds USDA has set aside for Department of Agriculture but not received yet, indicated what is committed out of each group.

Reviczky stated outstanding issue with farm bill streamlined agriculture easement programs. Farm bill streamlining wetlands reserve program did not have basis in farm bill. We are now competing for existing money.

V. ADJOURNMENT:

Next meeting, Monday, December 1, 2014, 9:30am, Department of Agriculture Conference Room, State Office Building, Hartford. The meeting was adjourned at 11:51 pm. (Nolan-Guzkowski-Unanimous).

Respectfully submitted by Sandra Karanian. Date: September 16, 2014.