

DRAFT
CT DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
FARMLAND PRESERVATION ADVISORY BOARD

Draft Minutes of Meeting

March 9, 2009

CT Department of Agriculture, Hartford – 9:30 a.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT: Terry Jones, Susan Rose, George Hindinger, Steven Reviczky,
John Guskowski, Norma O’Leary, James Zeoli, Lucy Nolan, Ben Freund

MEMBERS ABSENT: Robin Chesmer, Jim Krissel

ALSO PRESENT: J. Dippel, Lance Shannon, Katherine Winslow, Commissioner Prelli, Jiff
Martin

I. **Call to Order:** Chairman George Hindinger called the meeting to order at 9:35 a.m.

II. **Review of September 8, 2008 minutes, tabled from December 8, 2008 meeting and review of December 8, 2008 minutes:** The minutes of the September 8, 2008 meeting of the Farmland Preservation Advisory Board (FPAB) were approved (Steve Reviczky/Susan Rose – Unanimous). The minutes of the September 8, 2008 meeting were approved (John Guskowski/Steve Reviczky – Unanimous).

Address resignation of Steve Broderick effective October 1, 2008. Chairman Hindinger indicated that Steve Broderick has retired from UConn Cooperative Extension and has resigned from the FPAB. Accepted with regret, the Board discussed the need for a replacement in the area of forestry and the process of filling this position.

III. **Any Old Business:**

Community Farms application comments from previous meeting? Comments discussed by Chairman Hindinger and Director Dippel include to (1) request if the farm has Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) conservation plan, and (2) request if stone removal or other activities to upgrade soil classification have occurred on the farm.

IV. **Farmland Preservation – Agency Report:**

1. **Program update summary** – Director Dippel handed out a summary of the status of closings and pending projects as of March 2, 2009 and a pipeline list of projects that are in various stages of the process of selling development rights to the State through the Farmland Preservation Program (Program). Highlights include, (1) seven farms have closed in 2008 and five farms have closed in calendar year 2009 with 12 additional farms pending closure in the near future. An additional 30 farms are in the pipeline, of which five are pending approval by the State Properties Review Board and eight have offers

If Community Investment Act funds are diverted to the General Fund, several farms, including some joint state municipal projects, may not receive funding unless state bond monies are available. The Governor has proposed five million in state bond funding for fiscal year 2009 and zero for fiscal year 2010, the total of which would help preserve about 10 farms at approximately 1,100 acres. Some discussion followed about the status of federal funds from the Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program (FRPP) and NRCS seeking comments on the Interim Final Rule (IFR) for changes to the FRPP. The American Farmland Trust is preparing comments on the IFR and would welcome comments from the FPAB. The following resolutions were motions passed:

The Farmland Preservation Advisory Board recommends to the U.S. Department of Agriculture - Natural Resources Conservation Service and to whom it may concern, that any farm using best management practices generally accepted at the time of implementation, which inadvertently resulted in soil or water contamination by current standards, should not be precluded from participating in the federal Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program on this basis. (Ben Freund/Jim Zeoli – Unanimous)

The Farmland Preservation Advisory Board recommends to the U.S. Department of Agriculture - Natural Resources Conservation Service and to whom it may concern, that farmers with a minimum of 25 acres of forest on the farm should be advised, but not mandated, to obtain a forest management plan within five years of participating in the federal Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program. (Ben Freund/Terry Jones – Unanimous)

The Board noted that the 25 acre minimum, rather than 10 acres, is the minimum acreage by State Statute for the use value taxation program.

V. **Subcommittee Reports:**

1. **Stewardship and Policy Report** – Director Dippel handed out minutes from the February 6, 2009 meeting of the subcommittee and a draft policy statement on the protection of soils. Dippel explained that based on a study by Harvey Luce of UConn, an estimated 1-1.5 inches of topsoil is removed per year on average as a result of typical ball and burlap nursery operations. Discussion followed regarding erodible lands, conservation plans, and PDR farms (those

The Farmland Preservation Advisory Board shall table discussion of the proposed *Policy Statement – Protection of Soils* pending further consideration and submittal of comments from its members to the Stewardship and Policy Subcommittee. (Ben Freund/Lucy Nolan – Unanimous)

The next meeting of the subcommittee to be determined.

2. **Community Farms Program Criteria Report** – Director Dippel and John Guskowski handed out minutes from the January 27, 2009 meeting of the subcommittee and draft application for the Community Farms Preservation Program. Discussion followed regarding scoring of potential community farm applications, NRCS scoring using Land Evaluation Site Assessment comparable to relative scores made, and the February 20, 2009 site visit to PDR farms made with Steve Reviczky, Elisabeth Moore of Connecticut Farmland Trust, Director Dippel and Property Agent Winslow. The subcommittee will schedule another site visit to view potential community farms and continue preparing this new program despite struggle to keep funds for the existing Program in this economic climate. The next meeting of the subcommittee to be determined.

VI. **New Business:**

1. **Review of proposed legislation impacting Farmland Preservation** – Commissioner Prelli handed out a summary of 2009 Proposed Legislation Impacting Farmland Preservation and discussed the nature of each item and the Department's support or concerns. The Commissioner explained he opposed the two Small Town Economic Assistance Program bills as he is confident that the Department of Economic and Community Development and the Department of Agriculture are working well together on a process to mitigate impacts to farmland soils; he provided a Hartford Courant article entitled, "Cromwell Embarks on Farmland Preservation Program" as a case in point. The Commissioner explained that a plan is required to protect farmland soils if a PDR farm is put into nursery use. The Commissioner touched on bills involving the Face of Connecticut, bonding and municipalities and the dairy industry. General concern was expressed by members for the Connecticut dairy business and protecting farmland when local dairies compete with industrial mid-west farms aided by a nationally set milk price.
2. **Community Investment Act Funding – Budget update** – The Commissioner explained that the Department is doing an analysis of the effect of removing Community Investment Act funding which would reduce staff and projects funded in the existing Program, as well as eliminate effort on the Community Farms Program. With existing funding kept in place, but no new funding,

The Farmland Preservation Advisory Board shall accept a position statement for public dissemination to be drafted by its member, Terry Jones, to prevent the diversion of Community Investment Act funding to the General Fund and to preserve Community Investment Act funding for its intended purpose in order to prevent irreparable damage to the Connecticut Farmland Preservation Program and agricultural business enterprises in Connecticut. (Ben Freund/John Guskowski – Unanimous)

Guskowski volunteered to contact town officials with pending joint state municipal PDR projects to let them know funding may be in jeopardy.

3. **Any other items.** Chairman Hindinger handed out a proposed bill regarding the preservation of state-owned agricultural land for FPAB information. Dippel handed out and discussed a maintenance, repair and improvement account FY 2008 for the 575-acre dairy known as Savin Farm in Lebanon and the demolition work being put out to bid.

VII. **Next meeting – Monday, June 1st, 9:30 at:** The next meeting shall be held at the Department of Agriculture in the large conference room.

VIII. **Adjournment:** The meeting was adjourned at 12:20pm (Zeoli/O’Leary – unanimous).

Respectfully prepared by Katherine Winslow.
Date 3/13/2009.