MINUTES
AGRICULTURE COMMISSION
MONDAY, MARCH 2, 2026
MUNICIPAL OFFICE COMPLEX
MEETING ROOM 3
VIA YOUTUBE LIVE
7:00 P.M.
REGULAR MEETING

Attendees: Aaron Taylor, Ron Distefano, Theresa Covert, Stephanie Cobleigh

Guests: Denise Dill, Pat Capel

1. Call to order
    a. Meeting called to order at 7:02
2. Motion to Approve Minutes from February 2, 2026 meeting (circulated by email)
    a. Motion to approve - Ron
    b. Second - Aaron
3. New Business
    a. Review Applications to join Commission. Two alternate spots are available.
        i. Pat Capel – owns a farm in Maryland; leased out for corn, soybeans, etc. Forest maintenance as well. CRP conservation contract to prevent erosion into the Chesapeake bay, including management of invasive plants.
        ii. Denise Dill – in town over 40 years. Involved in farming since childhood. Noting lack of resources on the Ag Commission website; would like to help local farmers.
        iii. Motion to advance for approval by the Board of Selectmen – Aaron Second - Theresa
    b. Budget $250; has not been used since 2015. Ron suggests this may have been $500 previously; likely downgraded due to non-use. (July-June fiscal year.)
    c. Right to Farm street signs suggested by Todd Gelston. Theresa's search indicates Colchester signs appear to have been supplied through the land trust.
        i. DoAG signs $50 each – brown farm signs, available to be placed on state property
        ii. Right to Farm signs – Teresa to help source. Need to understand who would supply and how they are approved and placed on public roadways. Stephanie suggested possible community outreach for placement in areas near existing farms, particularly any that may have had issues with neighbors related to ag activities.
    d. Potential Outreach to gather information on the number and type of farms in town to understand what folks in town are doing and what we can do to support. Rochelle is running point on info gathering.
        i. Land in trust – Denise to ask Assessor if this is public information
        ii. Sales tax exempt registrations
        iii. DCP digging – Theresa
        iv. DoAG research - Aaron

v. Suggesting a Facebook group or other outreach to create a support network for local farmers – Steph to look into creating a group for outreach
vi. Farmstand inventory by EDC shows 5 farmstands; Steph will connect with Lauren from EDC to explore further outreach
vii. New: Pat Capel; Conservation Commission (CC) member: Suggesting joint consideration of agricultural activities for conservation properties. CC has suggested the Harris property may have an area for hay. Need a paragraph for the CC to consider the proposal as a pilot program. There is a property near the middle school put into conservation that is currently being used for hay; should be considered a possible model for additional land management. Steph and Pat to reach out to Jim Ventres to see what is allowed on the property and how much space is available.

e. Old business
    i. Tax relief for East Haddam farms. $100k state exemption just got raised to $250k for farm property and machinery. There is an additional tax abatement (12-91) available in nearby jurisdictions to provide an exemption for farm buildings up to $100k. Farms must have at least $15k in either expenses or income. Aaron to talk to Linda about next steps for review and presentation to the town. Would be an annual application for farmers.
    ii. East Haddam Farm Stand project – pending Jim Curtin visit to the meeting. He has suggested to donate his property across the street from Ballek's to become a permanent farm stand. There is concern regarding both the construction and ongoing maintenance of the future building.
f. Public Comments
    i. Nothing additional
g. Adjournment
    i. Motion to Adjourn – Ron
    ii. Second - Stephanie