MINUTES
AGRICULTURE COMMISSION
MONDAY, MAY 8, 2023
MUNICIPAL OFFICE COMPLEX
MEETING ROOM 3
VIA YOUTUBE LIVE
7:00 P.M.
REGULAR MEETING

The meeting was called to order at 19:05 by AGC Chair Ron Gross.

Commission members present: Ron Gross, Aaron Taylor, Ron Distefano, Bonnie Buongiorne (vis phone), Mark Henderson (AGC Alternate). Mark Henderson elevated to voting status for meeting, 1st Aaron Taylor, 2nd Ron Distefano.

Business from the Chair, Ron Gross

Motion to approve:
Agenda, 1st Bonnie Buongiorne, 2nd Ron Distefano.
Minutes, 1st Bonnie Buongiorne, 2nd Ron Distefano.

In light of recent article in the local newspaper, it is important that we all adhere to facts not innuendos or unverified person opinions when addressing potential policy suggestions for presentation to other town agencies/commissions.

Communications to Committee from the Chair, Ron Gross

- Received email from J. Ventres, P&Z, with regards to previous discussions by P&Z regarding recent article in the town newspaper that references potential policy changes that would negatively affect local farmers. J. Ventres was not able to attend AGC meeting to discuss and in turn dropped off a prepared document to be reviewed and addressed during new business.
- Question of role of Commission and individual members. East Haddam is a right to farm town, commission is to only advise not mandate rules or regulations that might affect farmers.
- Aaron Taylor added that the Commission needs to educate Town Government on farmers' concerns and act as a sounding board, to be as active as possible. To do such, there needs to be better communication with other commissions.
- Chairman Gross added that the Commission should not be hearing about significant farming issues in the local newspaper or receiving correspondence from other commissions after the fact and in an untimely manner. The job of the Commission is to advocate for farmers as a whole, not for select individuals. We are not a complaint department.

New Business

- Attempt to review P&Z communication/proposal from J. Ventres that included references to who is allowed to sell at farm stands, what can be sold, what are the distinctions between farm stand and farm stores, building sizes, property size necessary, etc.
- Investigative process only, nothing concrete.
    - Comments from audience members in attendance:
    - Jess Stone, Cold Springs Farms, strong concerns about how the town government is attempting to regulate farm stands. AGC members should be attending the next P&Z meeting scheduled for 5/23/23. P&Z is reaching out to surrounding towns as to what regulations they have in place.
    - Gina Westee, BOHO Farms, can't understand why the town is suddenly finding the urgency to regulate farmers.
    - Irene Haines, First Selectperson, now in attendance, gave a brief review of previously discussed communication issues between town commissions as well as necessary processes for formulating concise recommendations for other commissions to review prior to finalizing a set standard of regulations for the farming community.
    - Chairman Gross suggests that due to the lack of time needed to effectively review all the correspondence from P&Z on the above, a special meeting should be held on 5/16/23 at 18:00. Motion to table discussion until special meeting. 1st Bonnie Buongiorne, 2nd Ron Distefano.

Old Business

- With reference to the Town Street property (corner of Daniels and Town Streets) and the establishment of a Farmers Market by Jim Curtin, per Irene Haines, she has looked into establishing a bill (HB48) in the State Legislature for allowing the State property in question to be deeded to the Town of East Haddam for the said project.

Motion to adjourn meeting, 1st Bonnie Buongiorne, 2nd Ron Distefano.