MINUTES
AGRICULTURE COMMISSION
MONDAY, MAY 16, 2023
MUNICIPAL OFFICE COMPLEX
MEETING ROOM 3
VIA YOUTUBE LIVE
6:00 P.M.
SPECIAL MEETING

The meeting was called to order at 1806 by Ronald Gross, Chair of the Agriculture Commission. Present were Ron Gross, Carleen Quinn, Bonnie Buongiorne, Aaron Taylor, Ron Distefano, and Mark Henderson

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited and a motion was made to approve the agenda by Mr. Distefano, seconded by Ms. Quinn, and the motion was approved unanimously.

Dr. Gross's Comments from the Chair stated that the Agriculture Commission needs to be involved in the discussions from all other Commissions and Boards that involve issues that the Agriculture Commission should be dealing with. Furthermore, it was stated that the Commission must focus on the facts that are presented; when reading articles and items on the internet, we must all verify the information presented, and determine what is factual and what is not. Lastly, we are all allowed to comment on the issues, we must all have discussions in a civil manner, and we will all work together. This Commission is here to make recommendations to the Town in the best interest of the Town.

A recent article in the East Haddam News has prompted concerns from several people. Comments from citizens (Jess Stone and Lauren Pszczolkowska), in the form of emails, were read verbatim. The Chair cited Ms. Stone's comments regarding an article that was written in the East Haddam News; in fact, no one from Planning & Zoning ever talked to the individual who wrote a story about proposed regulations for farm stands and farm stores. Ms. Stone's comments regarding the article and her perceptions regarding proposed increased regulations of this issue were discussed. The Chair reminded the members that this Commission cannot regulate, but can only make recommendations, and reminded the Commission about the obligations of the Town P&Z. Ms. Pszczolkowska also cited the East Haddam News article, and gave her thoughts regarding farm stands. She is a member of the EDC and is working on developing a "Farm Stand Map". She also stated that she was upset that the P&Z "went straight to the newspaper". The Chair corrected her misstatement. Mr. Henderson discussed Ms. Pszczolkowska's comments and her mission, and discussed the fact that she was selling items at her stand that she did not produce on her property.

Information provided by Mr. James Ventres regarding the current concerns and discussions about the difference between farm stands and farm stores was presented to the

Commission and discussed by Mr. Ventres. Mr. Ventres confirmed the fact that the individual who wrote the article in the East Haddam News never spoke to anyone in the P&Z Commission. Mr. Ventres stated that he is in the initial phase of putting together new applicable rules and regulations that would conform to current health codes. All of the issues that will be involved in determining the potentially proposed regulations were put out to the Commission by Mr. Ventres. The Chair said that the new information needs to be reviewed, the townspeople must stay within the current regulations, and that the next/first step is to work through the proposals and develop regulations that are beneficial for all of the citizens of the Town. Mr. Taylor agreed that the concern is not to shut people down but how do we create a regulation that works for all. Ms. Quinn cited the fact that there are some businesses and farms that have created unsafe conditions by not following current regulations, and that these actions make it unfair to those who are in fact following the rules; these issues need to be corrected and the present course is correct.

Comments from Gina (who unfortunately did not provide her last name or information about her farm stand) discussed what she does on her property. Mr. Ventres referred to the current regulations that exist regarding what Gina is doing on her property, and then discussed the goal of the process moving forward. The Chair suggested that our goal should be less specific and more general, less restrictive and more permissive; a broader approach so that more people can get involved. Ms. Quinn reminded all that the Agriculture Commission's charge is to be advisory, and we should be supporting local farms and businesses and we need to work with EDC. Mr. Taylor discussed the issue about "labeling", and labeling needs to be accurate for everything that is being sold.

A motion for adjournment was made by Ms. Quinn and seconded by Mr. Distefano. The meeting was adjourned at 1856.

Minutes respectfully submitted by Dr. Ronald Gross.