



**MINUTES
AGRICULTURE COMMISSION
MONDAY, NOVEMBER 6, 2023
MUNICIPAL OFFICE COMPLEX
MEETING ROOM 3
7:00 P.M.
REGULAR MEETING**

- 1. The meeting was called to order by the Chair at 1906. Present were Mark Henderson, Bonnie Buongiorne, Ron Gross, Ron Distefano, and Aaron Taylor**
- 2. Pledge of Allegiance**
- 3. The motion to approve the agenda was made by Mr. Taylor and seconded by Mr. Distefano. After the addition of a review of the Agriculture Commission member appointment dates, the agenda was approved unanimously, with no abstentions or Nay votes.**
- 4. A motion to approve the draft minutes from October 2nd meeting was made by Mr. Distefano and seconded by Ms. Buongiorne. Several additions to the minutes were suggested; these were made and accepted as friendly amendments by Mr. Distefano and Ms. Buongiorne. The minutes were approved as amended unanimously, with no abstentions or Nay votes.**
- 5. Comments from the Chair**
 - a. Regarding the FOI complaint filed by Mr. Kevin Staehly, all of the missing minutes and all other necessary information is now in the hands of the town attorney, who has recently returned from his honeymoon. The information will be sent to the Ombudsman for review, and it is hoped that this will all be accepted, no further action will be necessary, and no further legal costs will be incurred by the Town as a result of Mr. Staehly's OFI complaint. We await the response from the Ombudsman. In closing, Dr. Gross reminded the Commission members of an Educational Workshop about Freedom of Information to be offered on November 29, 2023 in Meeting Rooms 1&2 in the Municipal Office Complex. This meeting is being hosted by the East Haddam, Haddam and Chester Town Clerks. It is requested that all RSVP either Deb Denette at townclerk@easthaddam.org, Rob Siegrist at townclerk@haddam.org, or Kate Hair at townclerk@chester.org. A copy of the announcement will be attached to the minutes.**
- 6. Communications**
 - a. E-mail from Aaron Taylor re: CT Examiner article (forwarded by e-mail prior to last month's meeting)**
 - b. Interoffice memorandum from Irene Haines re: Code of Ethical Conduct. This was distributed to all members present at the meeting by Linda Zemienieski, and as per her request all present returned a form to her, signed and dated, attesting to receipt of the document.**
- 7. New Business**

- a. **Mr. Taylor presented and discussed a CT Examiner article regarding property tax exemptions. Mr. Taylor handed out a document explaining the current State statute and reviewed specific comments dealing with additional exemptions that could be applied for, specifically increasing the exemption for farm machinery, horses or ponies from \$100,000 to \$200,000, and would also include buildings exclusively used for farming. (Section 12.91 b and c) Although this is a State statute, these exemptions would need to be approved by the Town legislature. The document will be attached to the minutes. The motion was made by Dr. Gross to recommend that this document, and specifically these 2 sections go to the Town for approval and implementation. Mr. Distefano seconded the motion, which was then approved unanimously without further discussion, with no abstentions or Nay votes. Dr. Gross will call the office of the First Selectwoman after election day to inform her of this recommendation, and request that the Town review and take action on the proposed farm-friendly exemptions.**
- b. **Meeting dates for 2024 were selected and recorded. A motion to accept the meeting dates was made by Ms. Buongiorne, seconded by Mr. Distefano, and accepted unanimously, with no abstentions or Nay votes. There will be no meeting of the agriculture commission in January 2024.**
- c. **The appointment terms of the members of the Agriculture Commission were reviewed. BB/AT. All voted in favor there were no abstentions or Nay votes. Ms. Buongiorne moved that Mr. Henderson's appointment for a 2- year term as an alternate be made effective 1/1/2023, as this term expiration was an oversight. This was seconded by Mr. Distefano, and approved unanimously, with no abstentions or Nay votes.**
Dr. Gross made the motion to reappoint Mr. Distefano and Dr. Gross to another 3- year term as regular members, effective 1/1/2024, and to reappoint Ms. Thody to another 2-year term as an alternate, effective 1/1/2024. The motion was seconded by Ms. Buongiorne and approved unanimously, with no abstentions or Nay votes.

8. Old Business

- a. **Status of Sub-committee meetings: Aaron Taylor and Ron Distefano**
Aaron discussed the farm stand issue: the last version was approved by the Sub-committee and sent back to the 3 bodies for discussion. There were some changes made on the equine sections regarding acreage. In addition, sale of the property will convey the equine business to the buyer as well as all exemptions approved for the property.
Mr. Distefano made the motion to accept the packet provided to the Agriculture Commission from the Sub-Committee, and recommend that it be considered for approval by the Town once the EDC and P&Z have made their recommendations. The motion was seconded by Ms. Buongiorne, and approved unanimously, with no abstentions or Nay votes

9. **Comments from the public – comments will be strictly limited to 2 minutes per person**
There was no one present.

10. **A motion to adjourn was made by Mr. Distefano and seconded by Ms. Buongiorne**
at 1955 hrs.

Respectfully submitted by Dr. Ronald Gross, substituting for Ms. Shaleen Thody, Recording Secretary.