

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
FARMLAND PRESERVATION ADVISORY BOARD

June 23, 2014, 9:30am
CT Department of Agriculture
Large Conference Room
165 Capitol Avenue, Hartford

MEMBERS PRESENT: Chairman George Hindinger, John Guskowski, Joe Bonelli, Robin Chemser, Ben Freund, Terry Jones, Jim Krissel, James Zeoli, Lucy Nolan, and George Malia.

MEMBERS ABSENT: Paul Larson, Henry Talmage, and Ben Freund.

ALSO PRESENT: For the Department –Commissioner Reviczky, Director Cameron Weimar, Property Agents Lance Shannon and Denise O’Meara; Others – Elizabeth Moore of CT Farmland Trust.

I. CALL TO ORDER:

Chairman Hindinger called the meeting to order at 9:40 am.

II. REVIEW OF December 2, 2013 MINUTES

The minutes of the April 10, 2014 meeting of the Farmland Preservation Advisory Board (Board) were distributed. Guskowski indicated a typo error, and indicated Kevin Sullivan should be noted as affiliated with CT Nursery and Landscaping. Minutes were approved **(Guskowski-Bonelli-Unanimous)**.

III. BUSINESS:

1. Commissioner’s update

- A. Department of Agriculture.** Commissioner Reviczky had roundtable introduction of Board Members, and Summer Interns for the Farmland Preservation Program.

Reviczky stated that Joseph Dippel, former Bureau Director and former Director of the Farmland Preservation Program, had retired June 1, 2014. Reviczky indicated that for the past four months, the Agency has been in the process of obtaining approvals to hire a new Bureau Director, and added that it is in the final stages of approvals, before announcing the open position to the public.

Reviczky indicated that a Farmland Preservation Celebration is planned for Saturday, September 20, 2014, on the Lebanon Green, with events being planned for an entire day to celebrate Agriculture and Farmland Preservation.

- B. Governor’s Council for Agricultural Development.** Reviczky stated that the Governor’s Council, is close to making final recommendations

from the past three years of work, towards developing a strategic plan for the next report.

- C. **Legislative Update.** Reviczky stated that the Agriculture Bills for Farmland Preservation and Farmland Restoration have been directly affected, and have suffered this year, due to problems between the House and Senate caught up in the correct labeling of GMO grass seed.

2. State Owned Farmland.

- A. **Southbury Training School.** Reviczky stated the A-2 survey has been completed on the property, resulting in 944.725 total acres of preserved land. Reviczky added the intent to put together an advisory team of planners to address plans for an incubator farm, lease options with usable acreage and potential uses, and potential use of current existing infrastructure buildings.
- B. **Lebanon Agricultural Reserve.** Reviczky stated that due to the Agriculture Bills lost in Legislation, plans for the preservation of Savin Farm Agricultural Reserve will have to wait until next year, when the Bill can be re-submitted to Legislation.
- C. **Regional Market.** Reviczky stated that the Master Plan for the 32-acre Regional Market, consists of revitalizing and rebuilding the existing infrastructure, to create a retail, farmers market, and agricultural distribution wholesale center, to serve as an Agricultural Hub for the State of Connecticut, and the city of Hartford. Reviczky stated that the Plan separates the truck traffic from retail use, which consists of a mixed use facility, comprised of a restaurant, retail, administrative office, and education space. Reviczky added that the rail has been maintained for future use to incorporate the use of shared docks, to allow for any tenant receive produces by rail.

3. Farmland Preservation Programs updates & summaries.

- A. **Introduction of Joint CT Ag-NRCS Preservation Assistant.** Farmland Preservation Director Weimar, introduced Honor Lawler, hired jointly by the Department of Agriculture and NRCS, to act as liaison between NRCS and the Farmland Preservation Program to assist with potential farms submitted to NRCS, our Federal Funding Partner, for federal reimbursement.
- B. **Introduction of Coop Education Interns.** Director Weimar, introduced the College Education Interns to assist with the Farmland Preservation Program. Weimar stated that Kathleen Doherty, Kellie Fenton, and Emily Aryzeski, attend UMASS; and Rebecca Talamini, attends Westfield State, Massachusetts. Weimar indicated all the interns are Connecticut residents, with the exception of Kathleen Doherty, a resident of Massachusetts.
- C. **New Goal.** Director Weimar, stated that the new goal for Farmland Preservation is 400 farms by year 2020. Weimar indicated that the

Program still maintains the overall goal and objective of preserving 130,000 acres; but indicated it is important to have short term goals and plans, which are realistic and measurable. Chairman Hindinger made a motion to approve the Goal of 400 farms by year 2020, and approved (Hindinger-Nolan-Unanimous).

- D. Farmland Preservation Program- Budget Status.** Director Weimar, Indicated that funding for the Program has maintained stable, of approximately \$30 million (\$10 million/year) Bonding Funds approved for years 2007 thru 2011, with a slight increase to \$15,000 million of Bonding Funds approved in 2012.
- E. NRCS FRPP Obligated Funds.** Director Weimar, stated that NRCS has obligated funding consisting of four million for 2011, four million for 2012, and one million for 2013. Weimar indicated there are a number of projects submitted, which fall under the older cooperative deed agreement with NRCS, and 25 new farm projects which will fall under the new NRCS Farm Bill, requiring a new cooperative agreement between USDA/NRCS and the State of Connecticut.
- F. NRCS Agricultural Lands Easement (ALE) Program- 2014.** Director Weimar, stated that of the 62 farm projects, 25 farm applications are submitted for federal reimbursement with NRCS. Weimar indicated that NRCS has obligated nine million of federal funding under the old cooperative deed agreement; and four to six million of new federal funding to fall under the new 2014 Farm Bill, requiring a new cooperative deed agreement. Weimar stated that although the six farms which closed in 2014 have been State-Only Deeds, the Department of Agriculture continues to work in good faith to partner with NRCS, to be in compliance with submitting the necessary forms, required as part of the reimbursement process, although a cooperative agreement has not yet been signed between USDA/NRCS and the State of Connecticut.

Reviczky stated that positive relations are maintained between NRCS and the State of CT. Reviczky indicated that it is important for USDA to recognize State Sovereignty for Connecticut, whose deed provisions must abide by CT Attorney General's Office; and also allow more flexibility with NRCS's current regulations of a static substitution list.

Jones inquired to make a motion to write a letter to the Congregational Delegation. Chair Hindinger revised the motion, and made a motion for the Chairman to work with Director Weimar to write a letter to present to the Board Members at the next Farmland Advisory Board Meeting, and was approved (Hindinger-Zeoli-Unanimous).

- G. Community Farms.** Director Weimar, stated that four of the eight farm applications submitted under the Pilot Program, are in the closing stages.
- H. Farmland Restoration.** Agent Shannon stated that the Farmland Restoration is doing very well, with 112 applications, reclaiming

approximately 1,200 acres, utilizing to date 1.5 million of the allocated five million for the Program.

- I. **Stewardship.** Agent O'Meara stated that the Department continues to receive applications to construct on preserved farmland. O'Meara indicated the applications are reviewed to ensure that the proposed construction, as well as existing improvements, are in compliance within the parameters of the deed covenant, and impacts to prime farming soils. Hindinger requested input from the Board for ways to strengthen Stewardship compliance. Malia suggested a motion for the Department to write a letter to all Municipalities documenting all PDR farms; which then would make the Applicant accountable and require a letter to be submitted by the Applicant to the Department of Agriculture of any proposed construction.

Jones made a motion to temporarily table the motion from Malia, and for the Board to draft a letter of notice or affidavit of fact, to put on file at the respective land records, to review at next meeting.
(Jones-Chesmer-Unanimous).

IV. OTHER BUSINESS:

1. **Election of officer positions & terms.** Chairman Hindinger expressed thanks to the Farmland Advisory Board, and indicated that since he is not seeking re-election, opened up the floor for nominations of officer positions for Chairman, and Vice Chairman for the Farmland Advisory Board. Jones made a two-part motion, nominating Jim Zeoli as Chairman, and John Guszowski as Vice Chairman.
(Jones-Krissel- Unanimous)
2. **Any other business.** Jones indicated that it is important for UCONN, Storrs, to have respect for Agriculture other than looking to develop the land in other ways.

V. ADJOURNMENT:

Next meeting, Monday, September 15, 2014, 9:30am, Department of Agriculture Conference Room, State Office Building, Hartford. The meeting was adjourned at 1:00 pm.
(Krissel-Zeoli-Unanimous).

Respectfully submitted by Denise O'Meara. Date: June 30, 2014.