

Harvard Agricultural Advisory Commission (HAAC)

Town of Harvard, MA

Minutes of Meeting March 2, 2022
Approved August 31, 2022

Meeting was called to order 7:02pm

Members Present: Kerri Green - Chair, Rob Traver, Christiane Turnheim, Franklyn Carlson

Others in Attendance: Liz Allard

Final Ag. Commission Staffing Study Report by MRPC

Liz Allard was in attendance to review with the Commission the Final Ag. Staffing Study Report. Commission reviewed the presented report as a group.

- Roles & Responsibility Section didn't prompt any comments or discussion.
- Climate Action Plan Goals
 - Traver asked if the wording of "Regenerative" practices was something we wanted to commit ourselves to because it implies a certain set of agricultural practices. Traver suggested the word sustainable vs regenerative. Turnheim said that the new word being used is regenerative. Green read the definition found on a quick google search. Based on the definition provided Green said she was comfortable, Carlson as well as it doesn't totally corner one into one way of doing things.
- Agricultural Communities in MA didn't prompt any comments or discussion.
- Future Development & Strategies
 - Traver feels the "Work Plan Development" section is demeaning to those that actually volunteer on a board/commission. While it's not meant to be demeaning it comes across as if those volunteering aren't intelligent. Turnheim agreed and felt as if this section was included to give the report length. Traver pointed out he just doesn't find it helpful, whereas the other sections even if they are general/basic are helpful. At this level it's demeaning to the Commission and to the Town. Traver made a motion to delete "Work Plan Development" from the report. Carlson seconded. All voted in favor.
- Marketing Methods: Green pointed out it's worthwhile having but potentially could become obsolete at some point. Turnheim suggested more regional & National organizations vs. pinterest, craigslist, etc. A stronger focus should be on regional advocacy groups over National. Turnheim suggested adding a Advocacy & Initiatives section. Traver suggested potentially breaking it up into two sections - one list for farms/farmers and one for ag. commissions.

- Appendix B: Add question that Chris Ryan posted on the Mass Planners List Serve to supplement the answers provided in Appendix B.
- Appendix C: Funding Opportunities listed are from past opportunities, and some cited are not offered on an annual basis. There should be general locations in which funding opportunities are typically posted that way it's not pinpointing specific grants. MDAR and NRCS have general funding pages on their websites. General information pages cited would also avoid dead links within the report.
- Remove the Maps & Connected Communities and it doesn't actually apply to the report. It appears as filler. It should be removed.

Traver addressed that the point that the purpose of this report was not addressed. Green agreed with that the intended scope of the report as stated in the contract with MRPC was not addressed/achieved in this report. Traver said there is nothing wrong with saying what was supposed to be achieved in this report was not able to be found.

Vote to designate Open Space Committee Representative

Green said Open Space Committee (OSC) needs a representative from Ag. Comm. as there is a reformat of OSC and they were attempting to remove Ag. from the OSC. Allard feels it is important for Ag. to be represented on this committee. Carlson agreed to represent Ag. Comm. for a while and if he has any issues fulfilling he will let Green or Allard know.

Traver made a motion to appoint Carlson as the Ag. Comm. representative on the OSC. Turnheim seconded. All were in favor.

Chapter 61A List

Turnheim reviewed the current 61A property owner list and condensed property owners with multiple parcels into one line. She asked if members could review the list and email her any additional contact info that members might have for other property owners. At the next meeting she will draft a letter to send to 61A property owners. Adding a link to a google form to collect the information. Additionally 2-3 questions could also be added to the google form, to see if there is anything we could do as a Commission.

In addition to checking the list also propose a few questions to add to the google form.

HCIC Climate Action Plan for Agriculture

Turnheim explained that Ag Comm could come up with their own goals rather than use the ones drafted as potential placeholders by HCIC. Commission discussed the two “Goals” and come up with actions items. After Ag. Comm. creates a list of action items for the two goals other stakeholders (HCT & ConCOmm) will be asked for input. Commission drafted action items below:

Proposal by AAC (First Draft – feel free to add/change/revise and/or delete. Several bullets are copied and/or adapted from KLA Climate Plan for Agriculture. Other bullets are added)

Municipal goal: Invest in the necessary shared infrastructure and support the economic sustainability of the agricultural community in Harvard, regardless of farm size, to secure local food supply, particularly in case of supply chain disruptions due to climate events and encourage the use of regenerative farm practices.

- Strengthen the viability of Harvard’s farms by reducing the tax burden on farmers for their land, buildings, and equipment.
- Revise Harvard's zoning bylaw to allow greater flexibility for farm-related uses and ensure that bylaws protect farming activities during climate-related difficult times, e.g. that farm crops can get irrigated even if water use restrictions due to drought.
- Commit to “Buy Local” and thus support Harvard’s farms for town events and in Harvard’s schools.
- Pilot a collaborative purchasing initiative to take advantage of volume discounts which can enable wider use of organic fertilizer, other farm supplies, and electric equipment. Over time, the initiative could get formalized to develop into a Coop or Grange model, which offers storage solutions for perishable farm produce, a commercial kitchen, organizes CSAs, a farmer market and/or manages a co-op store for local farms.
- Offer financial support to farmers for investments that make their farm practices more environmentally friendly, e.g., install drip irrigation to conserve water, or switch to electric equipment and install solar panels for those.
- Map land that is suitable for farming but not currently in production. Use the information to expand participation in farmland connection programs. Create an application system for land leases (e.g. conservation land) that sets clear criteria for the conditions of the lease, and is open for public review.

Anything to add here for farms that focus on animal husbandry? Anything for hay makers?

Residential goal: Through outreach and community building, strengthen community support for Harvard’s agriculture and encourage innovative approaches to farming by taking into consideration the mostly small scale of local farms.

- Establish a forum for the sharing of best practices, results, and challenges with the implementation of regenerative farm practices in Harvard.
- Explore options how to compensate farmers if the change to regenerative farm practices results in loss of income, e.g. if use of more environmentally friendly but less effective pesticides negatively impacts the harvest.

- Encourage farmers and homesteaders to adopt soil, pest and disease management practices that will enhance resilience to climate change impacts.
 - Create a community food/farm project that supports new farmers, hobby farmers, gardeners, provides trainings and resources, educational programs, business incubation support, etc.
 - Support “Buy Local” programs with the goal to establish a secure local food network .
- Anything to add here for farms that focus on animal husbandry? Anything for hay makers?*

Chair & Member Updates

Green reminded members about creating content postings for harvardgrown.org that can be posted and scheduled in advance in order to alleviate trying to do so within the busy season.

Traver is up for reappointment and we will make a vote at the next meeting to recommend him for reappointment to the Select Board in June.

Carlson asked before adjourn if the Commission should alert the residents of the town about the Avian Flu. Carlson will ask Julie at Town Hall to do a mass email to residents of the town. Green will make a post to Nextdoor on behalf of the Commission.

Traver made a motion for the Commission to alert the residents of the town about the Avian Influenza that has been detected in MA. Carlson seconded. All were in favor.

Adjourn

Traver made a motion to adjourn. Carlson seconded. All were in favor. Adjourn 9:27pm

Submitted: K. Green