

Harvard Agricultural Advisory Commission (HAAC)

Town of Harvard, MA

Minutes of Meeting 5 June 2019

Approved August 28, 2019

Present: Kerri Green (chair), Frank Carlson, Rob Traver, Christiane Turnheim (applicant), Matt Varrell (applicant)

Guest: Don Ritchie, Chair, Harvard Conservation Commission

Green called meeting to order at 6:50 pm.

Commission revisited the meeting of 27 March to fulfill an obligation to post-notice of the meeting as part of the rules for open-meeting laws. See Minutes of 27 March.

Commission revisited the minutes of the meeting of 30 January. The minutes as printed were accepted 2-0-1 (approved, disapproved, abstained). The minutes of the meeting were approved 3-0.

The Commission discussed the content of its Ag Commission page on the Town of Harvard website. It asked “what should be featured?” Best management practices for various agricultural operations as needed by those who farm in town, especially small operations such as livestock management and beekeeping. Turnheim offered several examples. Commission suggested a photo gallery of town farms to represent the range of farms in Harvard. Green requested that items be sent to her.

Green reported that the Ag Commission joined the MA Farm Bureau, the \$25 membership expense invoice was re-approved.

The Commission then began agenda items designated for the 5 June meeting.

Commission turned its attention to two candidates for alternate membership—Christiane Turnheim of Good Spirits Farm and Matt Varrell of the Harvard Alpaca Ranch.

Good Spirits Farm located on East Bare Hill Road in a space of eight-plus acres. Specialties are bee-keeping, and fruit trees such as apricots, plums and peaches. The latter provide the basis for the distillation of various liquors, hence Good Spirits. There are also flowers, medicinal herbs and salves. Turnheim teaches university level psychology and is well on her way to earning a certificate in sustainable agriculture with the Stockbridge School of Agriculture. She is a permaculture practitioner and hopes to offer on-farm agricultural focused education classes in her retirement.

Matt Varrell’s Harvard Alpaca Ranch can be found on 58 Old Mill Road. Twenty alpacas and little ones on the way bring agro-tourists to Harvard, especially on weekends, where as many as

50-60 people visit these South American members of the camel family. Activities include educational tours, yoga, animal therapy and a gift shop with products made from alpaca fiber. Varrell also shows the animals at various fairs and markets, and recently a wedding with a Peruvian bride. Varrell's background features work as a wetlands biologist, and serves as a consultant on conservation.

Currently there is one alternate member position available for the Ag Commission but Green contacted Rich Maorie and asked whether two position might be opened up, since not all current full-members of the Commission appear to be active. An alternate member of the Commission does not vote at Commission meetings unless s/he is needed to fulfill a quorum.

Commission tabled its review of its 24 April minutes because members in attendance were not present at the 24 April meeting. The minutes will be reviewed at the next meeting on June 25, 2019.

Green noted that the Ag Commission was well represented at the 30 May meeting of the Municipal Vulnerability Program Listening Session, including Green, Laura McGovern, Nicki Schmidt, Frank Carlson, Rob Traver, and Rob Duzan.

Green reported that she expressed dissatisfaction with the Agricultural Report provided by Town hired consultant firm, Harriman, at a recent MVP sub-committee meeting on May 28, 2019. Her principal complaint is that the report does not, in spite of the stated emphasis by the MVP grant to consider the future of agriculture in Harvard in relation to climate change, provide any suggestions for what to do. For example, what varieties of apples or what protections against extreme weather events in Harvard might best mitigate or even capitalize on climate induced weather changes? The MVP subcommittee members include Kerri Green, Eric Broadbent, Sharon McCarthy, Kara Minar, Jarrett Rushmore, Liz Allard, and Chris Ryan.

Don Ritchie, Chair, Harvard Conservation Commission, presented to the Ag Commission a proposal to establish an Open-Space Commission in the Town of Harvard. He sought feedback and support. Two parts to the proposal. First, it is clear that Harvard supports the review and acquisition of open-space. So, this work should be continued. Second, the Town's review and acquisition of open-space (there is also the Harvard Conservation Trust but it operates privately) falls to the Conservation Commission, and the CC finds that it can no longer adequately fulfill this role in addition to its many other conservation related duties. This too-many-other-things-to-do is especially problematic in relation to land acquisition because land purchase opportunities can be extremely time-sensitive. Choice properties have been lost. Following discussion, the Ag Commission voted 3-0 to support the Conservation Commission proposal to establish an Open Space Committee to the Town Select Board. Green will write a letter of support in time for the next Select Board's meeting.

Commission discussed its upcoming Ag Business “gathering” to be held Wednesday, 12 June, 7-8:30 pm, Hildreth House. The list of prospective attendees who were contacted include Larry Doe, Pam Lawson, Matt Varrell, René and Christiane Turnheim, Frank Carlson, Kerri Green, Dave Durrant, Paul and Kendall Willard, and Linda Hoffman, Mary Helan Vasenka, Jim Burns and Vicki Cochiatto. Names can be added to the Ag Com google doc. The meeting was announced in the Calendar of Events in the Harvard Press. The “gathering” seeks to assemble prominent farm business people in town to better link a) the Ag Commission to Harvard farmers, b) promote a Harvard farmers network, and c) to think of ways to increase farm appreciation and support throughout the community. Participants should be encouraged to distribute business cards, and talk about their efforts to farm in Harvard, what their farming efforts need, and what they might do to help promote other farms and farm support in the Harvard community. If possible, the Ag Commission will try to establish an email directory by starting, perhaps, with an email list it thinks exists for all 61a and 61b holdings in town.

The meeting returned to an item that has been raised recently in regard to the Planning Board’s concern for erosion control in town, especially in relation to land development. Commission members Schmidt and Reitman reported via Green the existence of the “Think Blue Massachusetts” initiative, a statewide project to help MA citizens understand storm-water runoff and how they can help manage it. This is the kind of erosion education, rather than erosion policing, they think will work best for “small” property owners in Harvard.

Meeting adjourned at 9:18 pm.

Submitted; Rob Traver