

Harvard Agricultural Advisory Commission (HAAC)

Town of Harvard, MA

Minutes of Meeting 26 June 2019

Approved August 28, 2019

Present: Kerri Green (chair), Laura McGovern, Nicole Schmidt, Christiane Turnheim, Rob Traver (arrived at 7:24pm), Matthew Varrell

Green called meeting to order at 7:05PM.

Minutes of April 24, 2019 meeting were read and approved.

Minutes of June 5, 2019 meeting were read and approval was tabled to the next meeting.

Green announced that Christiane Turnheim and Matthew Varrell were voted as Commission Alternate Members at the June 25th meeting of the Board of Selectmen. John Reitman is no longer on the Commission.

The MVP Program is now complete and has been submitted to the state. Green spoke to the BOS on June 25 and expressed concerns on the final product prepared by the consultant. Climate Action Plan is to be developed by the Sustainability Committee (under the Planning Board). The Sustainability Commission is yet to be formed but will include one HAAC member. Schmidt encouraged the need for community involvement in the Sustainability Committee (a need for new voices to be heard).

There was a discussion of benefits of tax reductions to properties in agricultural use. Currently, tax incentives for agricultural properties are not common in Massachusetts. However, there may be a movement in the legislature to mimic a system in New York state that has been successful. Harvard could create a system on the local level.

There was a discussion on the Chapter 61 Program. Varrell and Turnheim gave a description of their Chapter 61 application experiences, which were challenging. Traver suggested HAAC should promote our expertise in Chapter 61 issues on the website. Varrell suggested that a copy of all Chapter 61 applications be submitted to HAAC for review. There was general agreement by those in attendance. Schmidt made a motion (seconded by Traver) for HAAC to ask the Assessor's Office to provide copies of all Chapter 61A applications annually. The motion passed 4-0-0. There was further discussion to invite the town's Assessor's consultant to attend a future HAAC meeting to discuss the Chapter 61A laws and Harvard's interpretation. There was general agreement to extend such an invitation. It is believed the name of the consultant is Harald Scheid of Regional Resource Group, Inc. of Leominster.

There was discussion of Goals and Priorities for the HAAC:

- Rescheduling of the HAAC Business Meeting. Discussion as to where it could be held (at a farm, at the General Store); discussion of the previous agenda drafted by Green; discussion of possible dates (November seemed to be the preferred month, ideally on a weekday evening); November 20th 7-8PM was agreed as a likely date as there would be a regular HAAC meeting on December

4th where further discussion of the results of the meeting could be discussed; discussion of possibly distributing a survey prior to the meeting to potential attendees to make the meeting more productive – members to think about possible questions to include in such a survey; invitees to the meeting should include all Chapter 61A property owners (53 currently) and Chapter 61B (forestry) property owners (25 currently); publicity should be through a notice in the newspaper/letter to the editor

- Development of a “Buy Local” brochure (with possible funding from the MVP grant). Such a brochure would need annual updates with the goal of promoting local farms and the “buy local” initiative. Such a brochure could evolve out of the HAAC Business Meeting event.
- Purchase new “Right-to-Farm Community” signage for installation at town borders. Members to obtain examples from surrounding towns.

The next HAAC Meeting is scheduled for August 28, 2019. There will be no meeting in July.

Meeting adjourned at 8:29PM.

Submitted: Matthew Varrell