

**Town of Chester
Agricultural Commission
Approved Minutes
May 23, 2017**

Attendance

Members Present

Gary Van Geyte, Chairman
Chuck Myette, Treasurer
Steve Boeske
Jodi Boeske
Cindy LeBlanc
Jeff Geary
Richard Trask, Selectman Liaison

Members of the Public Present at Various Times

None

Call to Order

Chairman Van Geyte called the meeting of the Chester Agricultural Commission to order at 7:08 pm on Tuesday, May 23, 2017.

Members

Chairman Van Geyte recognized and welcomed Selectman Richard Trask who was present, as the Commission's new Selectman Liaison, and introduced him to the Agricultural Commission members.

Approval of Last Meeting's Minutes

March 28, 2017: Chairman Van Geyte motioned to approve the minutes as written. Mr. Boeske seconded the motion, with Mr. Myette, Mr. Geary & Selectman Trask abstaining, due to absence, 3 in favor, so moved.

Treasurer's Report (Chuck)

Treasurer, Chuck Myette, reported an Annual Budget of \$900.00 of which \$160.88 has been spent, with a balance of \$739.12 remaining.

Treasurer Myette reported a balance in the savings account at TD Bank of \$303.26 which has earned .05 cents in interest.

Chairman Van Geyte reported \$50.00 in gifts from Town Fair. Chairman Van Geyte handed out copies of the town's cash receipt policy to the other members.

Selectman Trask motioned to accept the Treasurer's Report as stated. Mr. Boeske seconded his motion, all in favor, so moved.

Mr. Myette suggested getting the tent for the town fair prior to the next meeting. Mr. Trask added that Deb Doda could order that for them on-line. Mr. Myette will contact Deb. Mr. Boeske offered to store the tent and tables. Chairman Van Geyte stated that he has the banner.

Mr. Geary motioned to authorize up to \$250.00 for Deb Doda to purchase (2) 6' tables and a 10x10 pop-up tent on Amazon.com. Mrs. LeBlanc seconded his motion, all in favor, so moved.

Old Business

Classes

Chairman Van Geyte asked where they were at with scheduling classes and advised that the speaker who had done the bees was too busy.

Foodscaping

Mrs. LeBlanc was asked about Foodscaping. Mrs. LeBlanc advised that Foodscaping is about incorporating the edible garden into your landscaping and passed around some pictures. Mrs. LeBlanc, who has acquired most of the information on her own, continued that "instead of the basic square or rectangular garden plot, the garden becomes part of the landscape, with flowers in between."

Veteran Farmer Coalition

Mr. Geary was asked about the Veteran Farmer Coalition. Mr. Geary responded that he continues to work with 2-3 veterans at his farm, including Julian, who is a guy from Lowell, who didn't know anything about agriculture, helped out and decided he wanted to grow hops. Mr. Geary lent him ½ acre to use out back, he put up trellises and is growing hops. Mr. Myette asked if he had a market for that yet and Mr. Geary replied that they were all sold. Selectman Trask inquired as to the growing process. Mr. Geary explained that hops are grown on a trellis, grow 18' tall from a t-pole with strings run off a ring at the top going down to the plant, which looks like a pea plant and the hops themselves look like miniature pine-cones. It takes three years to get a fully mature rise on them, so year one and two are growing years. A lot of hops used to be grown in NH. UVM has been doing trials up there. Mr. Geary explained that hops consume 30 lbs. of nitrogen per acre with 300 plants per acre. "That's a minimal nitrogen uptake." Chairman Van Geyte asked how it was harvested. Mr. Geary continued that "it's called a bine, a brass ring strings are tied to, so when you unlatch the ring, that drops the plant, you cut it off and pick the berries (which look like pine-cones), pull them off, air-dry them, send them to a pelletizer, although some breweries grow with green hops. Big breweries, like 603 use pelletized. They are perennials, dormant in winter, and have a 120 day growing period. The price is variable, like corn, and that's why breweries buy in three-year contracts. Budweiser recently bought every hop in Chile.

Mr. Myette asked how the coalition assisted with that. Mr. Geary responded that the Coalition identifies mentor farms in the region and sends out veterans who are interested and then they help with

labeling. The veteran provides proof of his status, his DD-214, and identifies the products being made and the Coalition certifies the products as Homegrown by Heroes. Chairman Van Geyte asked how Agriculture could help. Mr. Myette asked if Julian would be interested in coming to a meeting or whether the commission could go to see his facility.

Cheese making/Cable TV filming

Chairman Van Geyte asked Mr. Geary about a cheese-making class. Mr. Geary voiced concerns about that being a multi-staged event and Chairman Van Geyte asked if that was something that could be shot on video and edited. Selectman Trask recommended reaching out to Joe Castricone at the cable station to see if they would come out, film and edit it and could even do a segment on the hops, showcasing Mr. Geary's farm. Mr. Myette added that running some of these presentations on cable would be great community outreach and Chairman Van Geyte agreed that would be a great vehicle for a lot of presentations including the tractor maintenance segment. Chairman Van Geyte will reach out to Mr. Castricone.

Reading the Forested Landscape

Chairman Van Geyte asked Mr. Geary if he could still do the Forested Landscape class in the fall. Mr. Myette asked if there were any wooded areas hit by the hurricane of '38 that could be showcased and recommended asking Dick Lewis.

New Business

Sign Regulations

Mr. Geary reported that a number of local farms had received letters from the Building Inspector, Mr. Myrick Bunker, concerning their signs not conforming to the sign ordinance, which previously was 6' and reduced to 4'. Selectman Trask added that Mr. Hadik from the Planning Board is working on new sign regulations, hoping to get all the farmers together around the table with Planning and the Building Inspector. Mr. Hadik hopes to have an ordinance put together soon (Planning puts together its own until it's voted on at the next town meeting). Mr. Geary added that we as the Agricultural Commission need to stand strong to support the farmers and the negative impact this is having on their businesses. "Signs make a difference, business drops!" Mr. Geary continued that UNH gives recommendations of a minimum, of 5" on the size of letters on farm signs, in order to be viewed by vehicles driving past at 40 mph. Mr. Myette suggested bringing that information to the Planning Board. Selectman Trask advised that there was a town, Durham he thinks, that had an elaborate sign ordinance, 25-26 pages long, some guy said this is ridiculous and took them to the US Supreme Court and they ruled that if you have to read the sign to tell if it conforms to the ordinance, then the ordinance is unconstitutional. "You can't write an exemption so that agricultural is exempt but you may be able to zone it." Mr. Myette asked why, suddenly, was this being enforced? Selectman Trask responded that it was a matter of you can't enforce one, without enforcing all of them. Selectman Trask continued "request a permit, tell them what you want, be specific." "If the permit is denied, go to zoning to request a variance." ZBA gets their input. Selectman Trask continued that in the meantime, temporary signs, portable signs or the use of a sign such as they used at the Legion Hall might be helpful, with removable lettering, which could be illuminated at night, provided it was accompanied by an American Flag, (which is required to be lit up at night).

Adjournment

Mr. Myette motioned to adjourn the meeting. Chairman Van Geyte seconded his motion, all in favor, so moved. The meeting of the Chester Agricultural Commission was adjourned at 8:10 pm on Tuesday, May 23, 2017.

Respectfully submitted,

Nancy J. Hoijer, Recording Secretary