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**Agriculture Committee Regular Meeting**

**May 23, 2023, 7:00pm**

**Members Present:** S. Stearns, M. Tindall, R. Fricano, M. Desch

**Members Absent:** J. Emenheiser, E. Hall, L. Trovato, C. Keuffner, D. Dorfer, A. Eitland

**Guests Present:** none

**Staff Present:** M. Stankov, Environmental Planner and J. Kaufman, Director of Planning and Development/Senior Planner

**1. Call to Order and Roll Call**

- Stacey Stearns called the meeting to order at 7:06pm. Attendees: Michael Stankov, Melissa Tindall, Ray Fricano, Melanie Desch, Stacey Stearns

**2. Approval of Minutes**

- Meeting minutes from last week – Melissa moved to approve, Ray seconded, approval of the March 14<sup>th</sup> meeting minutes as presented.
- Motion Passed Unanimously

**3. Opportunity For Public Comment**

**4. Old Business**

- Farmers Forum
  - The committee thanked A. Eitland and his brother for the incredible work they put into the Farmers Forum
  - M. Stankov expressed he thought we had great conversation, permitting was brought up quite a bit during the forum so there will be future discussions about how to make permitting process more clear.
  - S. Stearns said there was good discussion and liked having a looser agenda. It used to be more structured at on-site visits. Zoning was heard loud and clear. Explanations for what cant be changed.
  - M. Desch suggested that next year we ask during registration if there are topics of interest from attendees prior to the event.
- Beekeeping Workshop
  - Thanks to M Tindall for making fliers and helping. DJ Shooks presentation was a great success. Talked about getting bees and how to start – keeping expectations of honey at bay.
- Communication and Events Initiative:
  - “Celebrate Mansfield” is an upcoming event in September. It can be difficult for farmers to attend at that time, but we would like to be present and set up a booth with activities for attendees.
  - How can we partner with regional ag committees? How to get more people out?

- Dennis Pierce was at the Farmer Forum and talked to A. Eitland and set up an interview for the Neighbors paper. They ended up publishing an article about Fern Hill Farm – check it out!
- Taste of Mansfield Update
  - There will be formal recognition at the next town council meeting for the awards .
  - Taste of Mansfield Steering Committee at Spring Valley Student Farm 3:30-5:30– Tuesday June 15<sup>th</sup> we need a volunteer from the Ag Committee to go. R. Fricano offered to attend.
- Sustainable CT
  - 2025 is our next certification year – going after gold level cert at that time.
  - We had a discussion about the Sustainable CT certification program, which is voluntary to join and assigns towns ratings based on initiatives to make the town sustainable culturally, environmentally, equitable, and more. While we have a silver rating, the highest rating thus far, they unveiled the gold level recently, and we are aiming to reach it. Will bring this up in future meetings.

## 5. New Business

- Agricultural Lease RFP's
  - Town Planner J. Kaufman joined us to discuss the leasing process of town lands. The 9 leases are for 5 years, with an automatic renewal after 5 years. The leases are free and keep agricultural land in operation, mainly as pasture. Many are expiring at the end of 2023, which gives new farmers the opportunity to apply for leases. M. Stankov put together the proposal and lease applications that will be shared, and it is the responsibility of the Town Council to review the land use agreement and review proposals.
  - Revisions discussed: Include language that residents of Mansfield are priority, change wording from “citizens” to “residents”, make sure we have physical applications for folks that do not have internet access, and revise the submission deadline - will be determined by town staff.
  - Must be brought to the town council at future date discussing the following: Why is it important to lease town land? Why is it important to keep land in working agriculture?
  - Do we approve the RFP lease application land use agreement and authorize staff to bring forth to town council and Planning and Zoning Commission for review, comment and approval? Melanie motioned to approve, Melissa seconded, and the motion carried.
- 20<sup>th</sup> Annual Celebrate Mansfield Festival
  - The event is scheduled Saturday September 30<sup>th</sup> from 2-8pm. We would like to set up a table to support local agriculture. In the past we have had pictures, a trifold display, and demonstrations. We will revisit the discussion July 11<sup>th</sup> at the next Committee meeting.
- Farm Viability Grant

- Mansfield Center is looking to submit two applications for the Farm viability grant; one from the town and one from the schools. The town is looking to construct an addition to one of their buildings to help increase distribution capacity of Mansfield Farms to Families.
- PZC - Ag Com Cooperation
  - The chair of the planning and zoning commission was at the farming forum. Revisions are being discussed in the committee phase right now, and there will be opportunity for public comment. The process for revisions was discussed, along with the note that zoning regulations are different in every town in Connecticut since there is no County government.

## **6. Reports**

- S. Stearns shared information about the Regional Ag Committee, which met for the first time last week and included reps from Coventry, Mansfield, Bolton, and Tolland. The next meeting is in August. There is interest in a 4-town agritourism initiative. It should be driven by individual farmers and what works well for them.
  - Can we incorporate “trails”? The adventure park, Mansfield hollow, breweries, vineyards, and farms could all be included on themed trips surrounding agriculture, culture, and outdoor recreation.
  - At the next meeting, Mansfield will be represented, but Stacey may not be able to go.

## **7. Communications**

## **8. Future Meetings**

- Unresolved events and discussions are being moved to old business for the next Ag Committee meeting.

## **9. Adjournment**

- R. Fricano moved, M. Tindall seconded, and the meeting was adjourned at 8:40pm