



TOWN OF LEDYARD

Agricultural Commission

Meeting Minutes

741 Colonel Ledyard Highway
Ledyard, Connecticut 06339

Chairman
Bruce Garstka

Regular Meeting

Tuesday, March 19, 2024

6:00 PM

Town Hall Annex-Hybrid Format

I. CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Garstka called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

II. ROLL CALL

Present Community-at-Large Representative Katie Yuhas
Alternate Member Steve Martic
Farming Community Bruce Garstka
Farming Community William Thorne
Farming Community Michael E. Marelli
Excused Farming Community Allyson Angelini
Farming Community Russell Holmberg

Bill Thorne was present via Zoom.

Steve Martic and Bill Thorne were appointed as voting members.

Also in attendance:
Karen Parkinson, Historic Commission.
Naomi Rodriguez, Town Council.
Justine Dube, MIS Director.
Doug Kelly, Historic Commission.
Tony Capon, Planning and Zoning.
Ty Lamb, Board of Education.

III. JOINT DISCUSSION WITH MEMBERS OF THE LAND USE DEPARTMENT (PLANNING & ZONING) AS WELL AS THE PLANNING & ZONING, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, INLAND WETLANDS/ WATERCOURSES, CONSERVATION COMMISSIONS AND BOARD OF EDUCATION

1. Agricultural Commission Joint Work Session.

Chairman Garstka started by saying the purpose of the joint meeting was to toss around ideas and let other Commissions know where the Agricultural Commission is heading.

Chairman Gartska asked P&Z about Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) regulations and if there were any complaints. Mr. Capon said there have been no problems or issues surrounding ADUs.

It was asked what ADUs are, Mr. Capon explained that they can be used for short-term rentals. Chairman Garstka asked if anyone has approached the Town about building ADU apartments above garages. Mr. Capon answered no, the only requests were for in-law apartments. Chairman Garstka said maybe developers don't realize that ADUs are permitted. Mr. Capon said he believes developers are familiar with the regulations but rather developers and buyers aren't interested in building ADUs.

Chairman Garstka mentioned to Mr. Dube that the AG Commission used to have a list of farms containing their description, hours of operation and visiting hours on the Town website but none of this information is on the website now. Mr. Dube said it can be added back. Ms. Parkison commented that she liked the new video on the Town's Website. Naomi Rodriguez, Town Council said the video was made free of charge for the Town. Ms. Rodriguez said that she attended the Library Commission's meeting and it was said that the Town website wasn't very user friendly. It was also said that the Town website was going to be updated. Councilor Rodriguez asked Mr. Dube if he knew anything about the update. Mr. Dube answered that there will be a re-design. He added that there is duplicate information on the website, for example with P&Z that will need to be cleaned up. The Library Commission was inquiring about moving their website to the Town's. Mr. Dube asked if they would want it merged with the Town's website or to have the Town re-design their existing one? Mr. Dube said no one had approached him about it but that he could look into it down the line. He added that the Library may be better off with the IT company they are currently using as far as cost savings.

Mr. Lamb asked Chairman Garstka what his definition of farmland is as far as the list that used to be on the Town website. He answered 490 land as well as land that is not under 490 but land that has agricultural activities taking place, such as owning cows or horses. Mr. Lamb said it would be good to have a list of farms for schools to refer to when planning school trips.

Councilor Rodriguez said that the Ledyard Beautification Committee was very interested in tonight's meeting but were unable to attend, they plan to watch the video. She said that most Liaisons attend their Commission's meetings but not all do. She will speak to the Liaison for the Agricultural Commission. Chairman Garstka said he thinks the introduction of ideas from all the departments is critical for the cohesiveness of the Town. Councilor Rodriguez said on April 23 the Ledyard Beautification Committee is holding an Earth Day event and was planning on inviting a few groups such as Conservation and Public works to participate. Ideally the LBC would like to include other groups in their events not just themselves.

Ms. Parkison said that in 12 years it will be the 200th year anniversary for the Town and maybe in five years an event planning Committee can be formed.

Mr. Thorne said the Farmer's Market would be a good place to get the word out of various Commission's events and projects. Mr. Dube volunteered to post Committee events on the Town website if he is given the information.

Mr. Kelly said that the Nathan Lester House is a Historic Farm and would like to present as a Historic Farm however they do not have the personnel or administrative capability to take care of animals but maybe in partnership with appropriate groups it could work. Ms. Kelly said as of

now the NLH partners with the Garden Club and the Historical Society. One idea that Mr. Kelly has is to have sheep on the property which would tie in well with the work the caretakers do with wool. Mr. Martic presented the idea of asking the high School Vo-Ag department for help. Mr. Thorne commented that his experience working with the Vo-Ag program while on the Farmer's market is that they have limited "band with". This is especially true during the summer when school is out and teacher and student assistance is limited. This may be an issue with agriculture at the NLH.

It was asked if there are any sheep farms in Ledyard. Mr. Marelli asked Mr. Dube if he would be able to recover the farm list which would show which farms had sheep. Mr. Dube answered he would try, if not the Tax Assessors should be able to create a list.

Chairman Garstka asked Mr. Capon if there are Farm Zones in Ledyard. Mr. Capon answered no and was not sure if there is an equivalent to a conservation easement for farms.

Mr. Marelli gave an update on the Conservation Commission. Burton Property behind the High School and adjacent to Pike Marshall has been surveyed and he would like to have a professionally written management plan for the property. He has been speaking with the High School and Avalonia and it was agreed to begin to develop programs that will incorporate all three properties for things such as continuing trail programs and natural science programs. Mr. Marelli is in the process of learning how to apply for funding and grants. He is also working on lists of open spaces which will include private, Town and State properties as well as a list of properties with conservation easements on them. Mr. Marelli has also been working with the Mystic Watershed Alliance.

Chairman Garstka asked if the Town has a grant writer and Councilor Rodriguez said there is not. She added that it was put into the budget but at one point, however it was cut. It is not in the Mayor's proposed budget this year. The Police and the Board of Education write their own grants.

Chairman Garstka said that the AG Commission will hold the next joint meeting in October. In the meantime, members from the AG Commission will attend other Boards and Commissions meetings.

Chairman Garstka thanked everyone for attending the joint meeting.

RESULT: DISCUSSED

IV. CITIZENS COMMENTS

None.

V. COMMENTS OF COMMISSION MEMBERS

None.

1. Comments of Commission Members.

None.

VI. INFORMATIONAL ITEMS

1. Informational items.
None.

VII. REVIEW AND APPROVAL OF MINUTES

1. Motion to APPROVE Regular Meeting Minutes from February 20, 2023, as written.

RESULT: APPROVED AND SO DECLARED

MOVER: Bruce Garstka

SECONDER: Michael E. Marelli

AYE 5 Yuhas Martic Garstka Thorne Marelli

EXCUSED 2 Angelini Holmberg

VIII. CORRESPONDENCE

1. Correspondence.
None.

IX. OLD BUSINESS

1. Any other Old Business to come before the Commission.
None.

X. NEW BUSINESS

1. Discussion on future meeting schedule.

Chairman Garstka said at this point the Commission has achieved its initial task set forth by the Town Council of having a mechanism in place if a farm wanted to sell its development rights. At this point the goal will be to reach out to various Boards and Commissions to keep the Commission in the forefront. Mr. Martic volunteered to go to the next Historic District Commission's meeting. Chairman Garstka will continue to visit Ledyard farms to speak with farmers.

Councilor Rodriguez asked if a member could attend the next Ledyard Beautification Meeting on April 2, 2024. Ms. Yuhas volunteered to attend the meeting.

Motion to CANCEL the April 16, 2024, Regular Meeting.

RESULT: APPROVED AND SO DECLARED

MOVER: Bruce Garstka

SECONDER: Katie Yuhas

AYE 5 Yuhas Martic Garstka Thorne Marelli

EXCUSED 2 Angelini Holmberg

2. Any other New Business to come before the Commission.

None.

XI. ADJOURNMENT

Motion to ADJOURN the Joint/Regular Meeting at 7:29 p.m.

DISCLAIMER: Although we try to be timely and accurate these are not official records of the Town.