Cam Weimar commenced the meeting 9:04am and welcomed board members and public participants to the meeting. He went over general housekeeping rules and introduced himself, and Holly Lalime who will serve as Connecticut Department of Agriculture (CT DAg) liaisons and will provide administrative support for the board. He then invited Commissioner Hurlburt to provide remarks.

Commissioner Hurlburt welcomed everyone to the meeting and expressed his excitement over the reconvening of this working group. Commissioner Hurlburt explained that this kick-off meeting has been a year in the making and he thanked Chelsea Gazillo and Kayleigh Royston for their assistance in getting appointments. He then thanked the board members for their time and valuable assistance in advising the Department as it relates to the Farmland Preservation and Community Farms Preservation Programs. He relayed to the board that the Department has been holding off on a couple of important pieces of work until this board was able to reconvene and provide guidance. One of those items is reviewing the regulations for its farmland preservation programs. He noted that it is the role and responsibility of the board to review regulations and to provide suggested changes to the program. He also noted that the Department would like the board’s assistance as it relates to OPAV (Option to Purchase at Agricultural Value). Commissioner Hurlburt stressed to the board members that this is their board and that he does not have a role on this board. It is a board of its members and not a board of CT DAg. Commissioner
Hurlburt stressed that board members were chosen based on their experience and expertise as it relates to farmland preservation. If members have ideas and thoughts, the Commissioner welcomes them to submit them to CT DAg staff. Commissioner Hurlburt then brought up his final point which is the Department’s relationship with the State Property Review Board (SPRB). He noted that there have been some challenges over the last two plus years regarding their review and advisory role in the Farmland Preservation Program. Commissioner Hurlburt noted that the relationship is beginning to improve and that we’re seeing better attention and activity to the applications CT DAg puts before them. Commissioner Hurlburt said that this improvement is not an accident and is due to the work of project partners, legislators, and CT DAg staff. He stated that the Department has gone to great measures to improve the relationship and let the board know where our sticking points are. Commissioner Hurlburt gave the example of asking the SPRB to give us advance notice when they see project flaws or concerns in order to save time in the review of projects. Commissioner Hurlburt noted that the SPRB is very proud of this program and the Commissioner thinks that we’re on the right path. He hopes that the SPRB sees that the work that of CT DAg and its partners has created a very strong program and that it puts forward the best quality projects. The Commissioner noted that the Department protected 1,000 acres over 13 farms in 2020. Commissioner Hurlburt thanked Cam Weimar for his leadership with limited staff and while working from home and commented that CT DAg protected more farms in 2020 than it did in 2018 or 2019. The Commissioner noted that Holly Lalime and Simon Levesque have been hired on as additional staff to join Cam Weimer, Denise O’Meara, and Lance Shannon and that with more staff and a better relationship with the SPRB, he foresees 2021 as CT DAg’s best year yet. He noted that protecting land in perpetuity is the best means to make land more affordable in the state. He thanked everyone again for being in attendance and passed things on to Cam Weimar.

Cam Weimar introduced the Farmland Preservation Advisory Board members. Cam Weimar then did a quick role call of all members. Cam Weimar noted after the roll call that there is one more space to fill and the appointment needs to be a member from a farm lending organization. He welcomed any suggestions for that appointment from board members. Cam Weimar then provided attendees with a brief overview of the Statutory Mission of the Farmland Preservation Advisory Board. He welcomed board members to reach out to himself or Holly Lalime and noted that they are here to prove support to the advisory board. He noted that the board was created in 2007 and 2008 to advise and provide assistance to the Commissioner and CT DAg staff on the provision of the Farmland Preservation Program as well as other programs that compliment it. He noted that the other program that supports the Farmland Preservation Program is the Community Farms Preservation Program which the advisory board was instrumental in establishing. Cam Weimar noted that many of CT DAg’s projects are now entered into the Community Farms Preservation Program. Cam Weimar stated that among the statutory provisions of the program is the option to use Buy Protect Sell as a conservation option. He stated that the USDA is now providing funding to support Buy Protect Sell through the ALE program. Cam Weimar stated that the board consists of 12 members. He stated that the statute dictates that the chairperson of the board needs to be the owner and operator of a farm. Cam Weimar stated that the legislature wants the advisory board to meet at least 4 times a year (quarterly). Cam Weimar noted that the advisory board should support CT DAg in securing funding for the Farmland Preservation Program. He stated that historically the program has relied on bond funding, but the program also gets funds through the Community Investment Act.

Cam Weimar then pivoted to introduce new business. Cam Weimar addressed the importance of the board to decide who the chairperson of the board should be. He stressed that Cam Weimar and Holly Lalime are here to provide support but that the board should take the lead in deciding new business. Cam Weimar then asked the board when they would like to meet.
Joan Nichols asked that the board select set dates for the year ahead of time in order to maintain quorum.

Jiff Martin asked if Cam Weimar or Commissioner Hurlburt could provide the board with more detail regarding the role of board leadership to create an agenda. Jiff Martin asked for clarification that the agenda is not driven by CT DAg staff but rather by members of the board. Jiff Martin asked Cam Weimar and Commissioner Hurlburt what process they envisions for creating the agenda.

Commissioner Hurlburt responded and said that he envisions it being the same as our other boards and commissions where members have the final say in what’s going on the agenda and CT DAg will take notes and track new business and old business but the board has say in what gets placed on the agenda. CT DAg staff work on behalf of the board and are not the main drivers of the agenda.

Jiff Martin thanked Commissioner Hurlburt for this explanation and stated that the chair and co-chair should keep in mind that they would be responsible for funneling ideas into an agenda. CT DAg staff will be responsible for housing documents and taking meeting minutes.

Cam Weimar then suggested that the board discuss meeting frequency and dates.

Elisabeth Moore suggested that a doodle poll and subsequent e-mails would be the best strategy to schedule meetings for the year.

Cam Weimar stated that a doodle poll can be put together with suggested dates and times. Cam Weimar asked how often the board wished to meet.

Elisabeth Moore stated that meeting every month may be too much but since the board has not meet in a couple of years, it may be best to meet every other month with the option to switch to meeting quarterly in the future.

Cam Weimar suggested that the board may want to think about forming subcommittees that could meet separately from the full board and to keep that in mind when deciding how frequently to meet.

Will O’Meara and Joan Nichols stated that they feel comfortable with meeting 6 times per year with subcommittee meetings scheduled in between as needed.

Cam Weimar suggested putting this to a vote.

Will O’Meara made a motion to vote.

Ellie Angerame seconded Will O’Meara’s motion.

All members voted in favor of the motion.

Cam Weimar confirmed that CT DAg staff will send out a doodle poll with the knowledge that the board will meet once every two months and that subcommittee meetings may take place in between those meetings.
Cam Weimar re-stated that the board member should elect a farmer as a chairperson. Cam Weimar asked if members were ready to vote on that this morning or otherwise, they should get back to Cam Weimar and Holly Lalime about who they would like to nominate as that chair.

Commissioner Hurlburt suggested that electing a chairperson be added to new business for the next meeting so that board members have time to give it some thought. Commissioner Hurlburt mentioned that while the responsibilities of the chairperson aren’t great, they are also not zero and that board members should put that into consideration before electing someone.

Elisabeth Moore stated that she has a candidate in mind but would like to speak to that person beforehand.

Jiff Martin stated that the board should consider a chair and vice chair structure and stated that the board should make sure that diversity is incorporated into the selection of leadership.

Will O’Meara expressed his agreement with Jiff Martin’s statement.

Cam Weimar stated that the statue does not compel that vice chair to be a farmer.

Commissioner Hurlburt confirmed that the statute only provides guidance on a chairperson and that the board has flexibility when electing a vice chairperson.

Cam Weimar stated that in order to give board members time to think about nominating a chair and vice-chair, he will add this to the top of the agenda for April’s meeting.

Terry Jones stated that he likes the idea of having a vice-chair and that he would also like to see meeting dates/times stay consistent. Terry Jones said that he would like one meeting in the summer time to be held at a farm.

Cam Weimar responded by confirming that this has been done in the past and that we can push to make this happen this year in July or August or perhaps in early fall. Cam Weimar suggested that Terry host a meeting at his farm.

Terry Jones stated that there are advantages to hosting some of the meetings online to reduce members having to travel to every meeting. Terry Jones stated that it’s important for all members to have a voice in every meeting.

Cam Weimar stated the CT DAg staff will do their best to accommodate all members whether remotely or in person.

Cam Weimar stated that he will now take time to review the PDR process. Cam Weimar stated that this process is similar for both the Farmland Preservation Program and the Community Farms Preservation Program. Cam Weimer explained that the USDA ALE funding deadline for 2021 is on Monday and that CT DAg staff do their best to submit as many applications to the NRCS each year as possible. Cam Weimar explained the color-coding system of the chart:

- Blue coding = timeframe in which CT DAg does not have control over
- Orange coding = timeframe in which CT DAg staff does have control over
- Blue boxes = steps related to USDA ALE funding.
Cam Weimar explained that once an offer agreement is executed and the State Property Review Board has approved, the farm is now under contract. Cam Weimar stated that there is a significant amount of due diligence with the NRCS at this stage. Cam Weimar explained that the USDA always limits the number of impervious surfaces on farmland to 2% however, CT DAg automatically requested a 5% impervious surface limitation. It takes time for the USDA to grant these requests. Cam Weimar stated that the closing of a permanent easement is just the beginning and that CT DAg provides perpetual stewardship on the farms. Cam Weimar then welcomed feedback from the board on this process.

Robin Chesmer asked what the minimum amount of time to get a projected approved was.

Cam Weimar answered that the timeline varies depending on multiple factors. Cam Weimar stated that the process goes much more quickly when the applicant is prepared to sell the development rights. Cam Weimar stated that when federal and local money is involved, projects take longer but working with federal partners is worthwhile in order to leverage state funds.

Robin Chesmer stated that the time factor is the biggest challenge for farmland preservation in Connecticut.

Will O’Meara asked which steps are the most appropriate to work on to speed things up. Will O’Meara provided the example of the lack a qualified appraisers.

Cam Weimar stated that the hurdles are always changing. He gave an example that is 2012 and 2013, the biggest hurdle was procuring ALE funding and in 2018 and 2019 the biggest hurdle was the State Property Review Board. Cam Weimar stated that partners can help by procuring leads and performing outreach. Cam Weimar emphasized outreach to town planners and agricultural commissions. Cam Weimar stated that the CT DAg has to adapt to changes in the USDA ALE program and explained that the program changes every five years with the Farm Bill. Cam Weimar explained that partners have helped smooth the ALE process over the years. Cam Weimar stated that CT DAg is excited to utilize the Buy Protect Sell model. Cam Weimar stated that appraisals are an area of difficulty for the program because there aren’t enough qualified ones in the state. Cam Weimar stated that partnering with towns and partners saves time because they don’t have to go through the RFP process like CT DAg. Cam Weimar stated the CT DAg can reimburse project partners for those expenses. Cam Weimar stated that he’s happy that things are improving with the State Properties Review Board.

Terry Jones stated that the State Properties Review Board is the most exasperating hold up and that he’s hoping collaboratives efforts and subtle influences will help resolve the delays related to project approvals.

Cam Weimar clarified that Community Farms Preservation projects do not need the approval of the State Properties Review Board and that CT DAg has been utilizing this program more for that reason. Cam Weimar stated that there are farms that do not qualify for the Community Farms Preservation Program. Cam Weimar explained the Farmland Preservation Advisory Board helped draft the requirements for the Community Farms Preservation Program and that he hopes this will continue perhaps through a sub-committee.

Terry Jones commented that he never would have dreamed with the Community Farms Preservation Program would become our workhorse.
Elisabeth Moore stated that she understands why the program has gone that route, but she believes the problem with the Community Farms Preservation Program is that it requires a local match. Elisabeth Moore explained that towns and partners often don’t have the money for that match requirement.

Cam Weimar explained that changes have been made to the program to allow due diligence to count as the local match. Cam Weimar provided the example that the Connecticut Farmland Trust’s assistance to procure a survey and appraisal more quickly can count towards the local match.

Elisabeth Moore asked if the project partner had to pay for the appraisal and survey in order for it to qualify as the local match.

Cam Weimar stated that CT DAg can reimburse the project partners and that it would still count as the match.

Jiff Martin stated that she is hearing the potential for a lot of buckets of work. Jiff Martin explained that Chelsea Gazillo made a comment in the chat about forming an OPAV committee.

Cam Weimar reminded the board that this is their board and CT DAg is here to provide administrative support. It is up to the board to decide which buckets of work they want to pursue.

Jiff Martin named the buckets she has been hearing so far including, OPAV, Community Farms Preservation Regulations, Buy-Protect-Sell, and licensed appraisers. Jiff Martin recognized that there are probably a lot more buckets. Jiff Martin expressed that she’s not comfortable dividing up now with 15 minutes left of the meeting but she suggested putting time on the next meeting’s agenda to name buckets and devise a plan on how to tackle and prioritize these items.

Cam Weimar asked Jiff Martin if it would be helpful if he and Holly Lalime sent an e-mail to the board with a list of suggestions in order to give members the chance to tell us what they’re interested in. Cam Weimar stated that he and Holly Lalime can populate that list for the next meeting.

Jiff Martin stated that there is a lot of activity in the chat about folks being ready to dig in and approving of the idea to form smaller subcommittees.

Cam Weimar stated that if folks are ready to talk about subcommittees now it doesn’t have to wait until the next meeting.

Jiff Martin stated she appreciated Chelsea Gazillo’s sense of urgency and that she would really like the group to gel a little bit and establish leadership before choosing what to focus on.

Terry Jones expressed his agreement with Jiff Martin’s statement and suggested that subcommittees reach out to members of the public for their knowledge and experience once they’re formed.

Cam Weimar stated that when the meeting ends, he and Holly Lalime will review the chat and answer questions.

Jaime Smith stated that the chat can be added as an appendix to the meeting minutes.
Cam Weimar stated that he and Holly Lalime will provide a list of buckets based on what’s been talked about during the meeting and then the board can decide how they want to prioritize these buckets and whether or not to form subcommittees.

Will O’Meara stated that the Farmland Access Working Group strongly suggested that this group provide guidance on OPAV. Will O’Meara asked if it would be helpful to schedule a meeting and put together a quick presentation to get members up to speed on OPAV.

Jiff Martin asked if Chelsea Gazillo and other members of the public would like to speak up.

Cam Weimar suggested that the board open up the meeting to public comment.

Jiff Martin made a motion to open the last 10 minutes of the meeting to public comment.

Ellie Angerame seconded that motion.

Chelsea Gazillo stated that the Farmland Access Working Group agreed that the Farmland Preservation Advisory Board would address OPAV. Chelsea Gazillo stated that she will help Will O’Meara put together a presentation. Chelsea Gazillo stated that new and beginning farmers would like us to address OPAV sooner rather than later.

Terry Jones asked Chelsea Gazillo to define OPAV.

Chelsea Gazillo stated that OPAV stands for Option to Purchase at Agricultural Value.

Cam Weimar stated that the board should think about the next legislative session because it takes a while for legislation to be brought forth. Cam Weimar explained that the Governor’s Office invites CT DAg to bring forth legislation in September or October for the January session. Cam Weimar stated that because we’re already in session, it would be difficult to bring up legislation now. Cam Weimar stated that the Farmland Preservation Advisory Board will be instrumental in drafting these legislative proposals.

Chelsea Gazillo stated that she was pushing the OPAV subcommittee to meet before May because if OPAV is to be brought up in the January session, a proposal would need to be finalized in August. Chelsea stated that 2022 is an election year so the board could change.

Cam Weimar stated that appointments to are Farmland Preservation Advisor Board have a term of three years. Cam Weimar stated than an election won’t change who’s appointed.

Terry Jones stated that the board might want to think about staggered terms so that the entire board isn’t wiped out in 3 years.

Cam Weimar stated that the statute allows for re-appointments.

Chelsea Gazillo asked if this group is going to discuss the subdivision of PDRs. Chelsea Gazillo stated that this was brought up during this legislative session.
Cam Weimar stated that it wasn’t proposed this legislative session.

Kip Kolesinskas asked if Cam could discuss the draft PDR regulations.

Cam Weimar stated that he would have to ask Commissioner Hurlburt and Carole what CT DAg can share. Cam Weimar stated that he would like to be able to submit something in writing to the board. Cam Weimar stated that our unit provided recommendations to Commissioner Hurlburt and Carole and that they focused on the Community Farms Preservation Program and clarifying what criteria are regulations. CT DAg would like to see the criteria codified as regulations.

Jaime Smith stated that she is seeking feedback from CT DAg’s attorney to follow up and provide information to the advisory board.

Cam Weimar stated that if we can’t provide something in writing we can hopefully provide a verbal summary.

Jiff Martin stated that based on today’s meetings, the next agenda should have the following items:

- Electing a chair and vice-chair
- A presentation about OPAV from Will O’Meara and Chelsea Gazillo
- A presentation (if allowed) about draft PDR regulations
- A brainstorm session and discussion about buckets of work and where the board sees the need for subcommittees.

Andrew Peterna asked if Chelsea Gazillo could send her OPAV presentation to the group and asked if the board could call a subcommittee meeting because the next official board meeting isn’t until April.

Will O’Meara stated that he’s happy to set up a meeting before April.

Chelsea Gazillo stated that she will send out her presentation to the board as well as information from other states.

Jaime Smith asked the board to let Holly Lalime and Cam Weimar know about this meeting so it can be posted to the public. Jaime Smith reminded everyone that a formal meeting with an agenda will need to be posted per statute.

Cam Weimar stated that the public needs to be notified of board and subcommittee meetings. Cam Weimar stated that subcommittees do not need to be exclusively board members and can be members of the public.

Jiff Martin asked if the board was officially forming a subcommittee at this time.

Will O’Meara stated that he was suggesting something more informal but if that isn’t possible than yes, he is suggesting that a subcommittee be formed.

Andrew Peterna stated that he would like this to be a more informal meeting.
Cam Weimar stated that this sounds more informal and if so, it can be an information meeting so long as no action is taken. Cam Weimar asked Jaime Smith if this is okay.

Jaime Smith stated that this is information that the whole board should hear so that they can be informed of OPAV.

Cam Weimar stated that a motion should be made to hold an informational meeting.

Will O’Meara made a motion to hold an informational meeting about OPAV.

Terry Jones seconded the meeting.

Jaime Smith stated that Holly Lalime will make arrangements for the meeting and coordinate with Working Lands Alliance on a presentation. Jaime Smith asked the board call for a vote on the motion.

All members voted in favor to hold an informational meeting.

Cam Weimar suggested that a board member make a motion to adjourn the meeting.

Jason White made a motion to adjourn the meeting.

Joan Nichols seconded that motion.

Cam Weimar adjourned the meeting at approximately 10:36am.
Chat Record:
Legislation was introduced to rectify the issue with SPRB this year
https://www.cga.ct.gov/asp/cgabillstatus/cgabillstatus.asp?selBillType=Bill&bill_num=SB-
388&uid=cgazillo@farmland.org&which_year=2021

For everyone's reference, the statute creating the FBAP

[2/25 9:39 AM] Joan Nichols CT Farm Bureau (Guest)
Could a list of the board members and their representative positions be provided?

Farmland Preservation Advisory Board (ct.gov)
Farmland Preservation Advisory Boardportal.ct.gov
[2/25 9:40 AM] Smith, Jaime
Joan Nichols CT Farm Bureau (Guest), yes we can easily provide that and include it with the meeting
follow up.

Can you put the members on the website for the public?

[2/25 9:41 AM] Joan Nichols CT Farm Bureau (Guest)
Thank you

[2/25 9:42 AM] Smith, Jaime
I believe we do for other boards Chelsea Gazillo and if that's the case, we can for this one as well.

[2/25 9:42 AM] Chelsea Gazillo
Thank you!

[2/25 9:43 AM] Joan Nichols CT Farm Bureau (Guest)
I agree with Terry.

[2/25 9:46 AM] Chelsea Gazillo
The process is also in the Conservation Options for CT Farmland Guide

Will all mtg materials like this presentation also be posted on the webpage for the FPAB?

[2/25 9:52 AM] Chelsea Gazillo
Yeah, it would be great if the agency would start posting the monthly FPP reports on the website too
(smile)
Well, if the Board were to ask for FPP reports to always be part of the FPAB meeting materials, and all meeting materials are automatically posted, then yes that could work too Chelsea

Also NRCS capacity, staff knowledge, and policy at the State and DC level impact the timing and response timeframe

It is great to see everyone and have the board up and running again. I have to leave for another commitment. Thank you all again for lending your knowledge and time to this board.

Thanks, commissioner! Helpful comments.

Maybe an OPAV sub-committee?

Definitely ready to dig into OPAVs - I like the idea of dividing into interest subcommittees by email or in a Google sheet

I would encourage those interested in nominating either someone or themselves for chair or vice chair to email Cam and/or Holly over the next two months for discussion at the next meeting.

I would like to have a subcommittee on reviewing the PDR deed/easement doc for possible revisions.

can I suggest that when you send out the email, ask members to rank issues in order of personal importance and interest in joining subcommittee on topic?

I will add this chat to the meeting minutes and Cam and I will respond to the comments and questions in an e-mail to all board members.

would also be helpful to know if any of these topics require legislation so that maybe we can make that a priority for this legislative session

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I know I am not a board member but we agreed as a farmland access working group we would discuss OPAV in this group and if you wait 2 months that brings us into May...and I would love to see it move forward with OPAV soon. I understand wanting to let this group gel but also would love to see us start the conversation before May?

[2/25 10:18 AM] Ellie Angerame she/her (Guest)
Seconding both of Robert's suggestions!

[2/25 10:19 AM] Chelsea Gazillo
I have a powerpoint will and am happy to help with that!

[2/25 10:20 AM] kip kolesinskas (Guest)
Would love to hear about the draft PDR regulations before we go...

[2/25 10:26 AM] Robin Chesmer (Guest)
I agree with Kip - a quick review of proposed draft regulations

[2/25 10:30 AM] Robert Chang (Guest)
agree with Andy

[2/25 10:32 AM] Andrew Paterna (Guest)
Thank you Chelsea and Will.

Could it be a task force?

[2/25 10:38 AM] Chelsea Gazillo
Working Lands alliance - a project of AFT

jason moved we adjourn

thank you everyone