

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
FARMLAND PRESERVATION ADVISORY BOARD

DRAFT Minutes of Meeting

June 10, 2013, 9:30am

Connecticut Department of Agriculture
HARTFORD REGIONAL MARKET, Board Room
101 Reserve Road - Hartford

MEMBERS PRESENT: Chairman George Hindinger, Terry Jones, John Guskowski, Robin Chesmer, Jim Zeoli, Lucy Nolan, Jim Krissel, and Ben Freund.

MEMBERS ABSENT: Joseph Bonelli, Henry Talmage, and Paul Larson.

ALSO PRESENT: For the Department –Commissioner Reviczky, Bureau Director J. Dippel, Property Agents Lance Shannon, Katherine Winslow and Denise O’Meara; Others – Lisa Bassani of Working Lands Alliance, Elisabeth Moore of Connecticut Farmland Trust.

I. Call to Order:

Chairman Hindinger called the meeting to order at 9:35 am.

II. Review of March 4, 2013 minutes:

The minutes of the March 4, 2013 meeting of the Farmland Preservation Advisory Board (Board), were distributed and approved (Guskowski – Zeoli, Unanimous).

III. Business:

1. Commissioner’s update

A. Governor’s proposed budget. Commissioner Reviczky indicated that the Governor’s Budget was adopted. Reviczky stated that although the Department of Agriculture has maintained funding. Reviczky added that due to the hard work of the Stakeholders in Agriculture, the Department has maintained its source of Community Investment Act (“CIA”) funding, and prevented a proposed sweep of CIA funds, which are directly related to funding salaries of the Farmland Preservation Staff. Bureau Director Dippel indicated that the Farmland Preservation Program has been allocated 10 million for fiscal year 2012/2013 and 10 million for fiscal year 2013/2014 in Bond Funds. Dippel added that \$500,000 has also been allocated to the Farmland Reinvestment Program.

B. Legislative updates. Reviczky stated that the Department of Agriculture has proposed a robust package of meaningful proposals, relating to continued allocation of bond funding for Farmland Preservation, Farmland Reinvestment, and the House bill passed to preserve Southbury Training School.

C. State Owned Farmland-Southbury Training School. Reviczky stated the Legislation approved the permanent protection of farmland at the Southbury Training School. Reviczky indicated that the State would not waive sovereign immunity for the conservation restriction in favor of a third party. The fee interest will remain held by the State of Connecticut, with custody and control of the farmland managed by the Department of Agriculture. Reviczky added that it was a great accomplishment to preserve Southbury Training School, after years of discord and disagreements as to how to protect the state owned land. Reviczky indicated that primarily due to the positive relationship between Governor Malloy and the Department of Developmental Services, Public Act 13-90 passed unanimously in both chambers. Reviczky added that they are moving forward with conducting an A-2 survey of the land, and identifying farmland, as well as areas to be taken out of the transfer.

D. Governor's Council on Agriculture Development (GCAD). Reviczky distributed and discussed the report created from the Governor's Council, comprised of 12 diverse working groups, with the vast majority of members being producers. Reviczky stated that the focus of the Governor's Council for Agriculture Development is to grow Connecticut farms, and get State policy to be in line with Agriculture. Reviczky indicated the working groups have submitted ideas and recommendations to go before the Legislature. Reviczky added that Henry Talmage was an important factor, working to promote two main recommendations; one relating to farm energy, regarding virtual Agriculture net metering on farm projects; and the second, a trucking issue, regarding increasing CT truck weight limits from 80,000 lbs to 100,000 lbs, to be in line with other states.

2. **Farmland Preservation updates & summary.**

A. Farmland Preservation Program (FLP). Director Dippel discussed the summary sheet of pending and closed farms to date. Dippel indicated that there are currently 56 farms in the pipeline for a total of 6,140 acres, with three closed farms, 14 farms pending closing, 7 farms with offers extended, 3 farms being appraised, and 22 farms under negotiation/configuration.

B. Federal Farm and Ranchlands Protection Program (FFRPP). Dippel indicated that the changes to the federal program, which is now being administered from Washington, rather than the State level, continues to be very burdensome and time consuming. The program has gone from being streamlined to a cumbersome process. Dippel added that requirements of numerous forms, numerous cooperative agreements required to represent separate "Entities" involved in various transactions (instead of one approved cooperative agreement and one approved deed template) has created gridlock, severely impacting the Farmland Preservation Program's ability to close on farms.

Agent Shannon stated that NRCS is asking for a title commitment, with costs to be incurred by the Department, prior to hiring an appraiser, and before an agreement has been received. Reviczky added that NRCS requiring estimates of value, before an appraisal has been performed, violates State Law. Shannon stated that instead of one cooperative agreement every three years, seven to eight cooperative agreements will be needed annually, with a separate cooperative

agreement required for any “Entity” change. Reviczky added that cooperative agreements have gone from 8 pages in 1996, to 15 pages in 2011, to 60 pages at present. Shannon indicated that a lot of the work, which used to be performed by USDA in house, is now being required of our Department.

Reviczky indicated that the changes by NRCS are a result of a federal audit. Reviczky added that although the 2008 Farm Bill allowed Washington to designate Certified Entities; this has only occurred with one known certified Entity with the state of Virginia becoming a certified entity, since the passing of the Farm Bill in 2008. Reviczky indicated that Governor Malloy has written to the Secretary in Washington, requesting more flexibility to use funds and eliminate duplication of work being done at the state level.

C. Community Farms Program (CFP). Agent Winslow discussed the status summary of existing cooperative agreements with Municipalities, and farm applications received for the Pilot Community Farms Program. Winslow added that the Department estimates receiving approximately \$1 million in reimbursement from NRCS.

D. Joint State-Town Preservation Program. Winslow indicated there are 25 joint-state applications with the Preservation Program, and 21 out of 25 joint state-town cooperative agreements are eligible for the Community Farms Pilot Program. Dippel added that due to the efforts of Agent Winslow working with the Community Farms Program and educating Municipalities, the town of Rocky Hill has recently approved \$10 million towards the preservation of open space and farmland preservation.

E. Farmland Preservation Stewardship update. Dippel indicated that Agent O’Meara has been working to maintain a formal Data Base Stewardship Monitoring system of preserved farms, to streamline the tracking of site inspections, and to note existing and new improvements, as well as any potential violations on preserved farms. Dippel indicated that a PSA has been approved. The North Central Conservation District (NCDD) will be working with us to help with the Stewardship Monitoring of NRCS Federally funded projects.

F. Farmland Preservation Statewide Plan and Goal discussion. Dippel stated Phil Chester, Town Planner of Lebanon, was contracted with a PSA, to perform a farmland census project, to research where the farms and cropland are located in Connecticut. Dippel indicated that the census data will be utilized to define a State goal and plan for farmland preservation. Dippel added that the State’s goal is to preserve 130,000 acres with 65%, or 85,000 acres in cropland.

G. Farmland Preservation 300th farm/40,000th acre celebration. Dippel discussed past farms celebrated as historic milestones in preserving farmland, and opened discussion for a public celebration for the 300th farm to be preserved.

H. Farmland Restoration Program. Dippel indicated that of the \$5 million bond funds, approximately just over \$1 million has been allocated for projects. Dippel stated that currently there are 80 farm projects in the pipeline, which has an open application process, with a rolling deadline.

Dippel added that with current funding and an average total estimated cost of \$42,000 per project, there is an estimated projection of being able to fund 350 to 400 farmland restoration projects.

IV. Subcommittee Reports: No reports presented.

V. Other Business:

- 1. Hartford Regional Market.** Dippel discussed the Hartford Regional Market, indicating it is the largest wholesale fresh fruit and vegetable market between Boston and New York. Dippel indicated the market is comprised of 87 wholesale stalls and 22 tenants, being leased to produce, packaging, processing, and distribution companies. Dippel stated that in April 2013, Governor Malloy and the Bond Commission approved \$650K to replace the roofs on Buildings A & B. Dippel added the roofing project was expedited quickly and efficiently by the Department of Construction Services, which obtained bids and awarded the contracts, resulting with the roofing project being completed in a very timely manner. Discussion ensued regarding Connecticut Grown Products, consumer expectation, and the concerted effort to crack down, utilizing spot inspections, to ensure farmers are in compliance by providing CT grown products.

- 2. Lang Shellfish.** Reviczky stated a major project is underway with the Governor's Initiative to preserve 900± acres of shellfish beds, located off the costal shore of Branford. Reviczky indicated that NRCS is going to map the underwater farmland to designate prime and important farming soils. Reviczky added that the shellfish project is going to be fashioned as a Farmland Preservation Project, which the State will purchase rights to the 900± acres of shellfish beds, and then lease the beds to individual farmers. Reviczky stated that this project is a major undertaking with the Governor's initiative to promote this sector of the Agriculture economy, and create jobs.

VI. Adjournment:

Next meeting, Monday, September 9, 2013, at 9:30am, at the Hartford Regional Market, Board Room, 101 reserve Road, Hartford, CT. The meeting was adjourned at 12:05 p.m. (Chesmer/Zeoli- Unanimous).

Respectfully submitted by Denise O'Meara. Date: June 17, 2013