

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
FARMLAND PRESERVATION ADVISORY BOARD

April 10, 2014, 9:30am
Hartford Regional Market
2nd Floor - Conference Room
101 Reserve Road, Hartford

MEMBERS PRESENT: Chairman George Hindinger, John Guskowski, Henry Talmage, Joe Bonelli, Robin Chemser, Ben Freund, Terry Jones, Jim Krissel, James Zeoli.

MEMBERS ABSENT: George Malia, Lucy Nolan, and Paul Larson.

ALSO PRESENT: For the Department –Commissioner Reviczky, Bureau Director J. Dippel, Public Relations Officer, Steve Jensen, Property Agents Lance Shannon and Denise O’Meara; Others – Lisa Bassani of Working Lands Alliance, Elizabeth Moore of CT Farmland Trust, and Kevin Sullivan.

I. CALL TO ORDER:

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

II. REVIEW OF December 2, 2013 MINUTES

The minutes of the December 2, 2013 meeting of the Farmland Preservation Advisory Board (Board) were distributed and approved (Guskowski-Bonelli-Unanimous).

III. BUSINESS:

1. Commissioner’s update

- A. Department of Agricultural.** Commissioner Reviczky discussed The Governor’s announcement between the State of Connecticut and USDA, which will allow Connecticut to leverage CT tax dollars, by partnering with USDA to receive more than eight million in Federal Funds, to utilize towards keeping farmland in agricultural production. Reviczky indicated that the purpose of the meeting was to work towards resolving past irreconcilable differences relating to Deed Language, acceptable to the CT Attorney General’s Office and CT statutes regarding preservation of farmland, a rolling list allowing for substitutions, verses a past static list, and issues regarding appraisal and A-2 survey requirements. Reviczky stated the meeting was a great success towards moving forward with CT being able to continue to partner with USDA towards preserving CT farmland.

Reviczky added that Lisa Coverdale, USDA State Conservationist, was extremely helpful towards actively participating in ways to reconcile past

differences, for Connecticut to be able to continue a working relationship with USDA, which was done so successfully over the past years.

Reviczky stated the Agency has fared well, and has been able to fill seven prior vacant positions, and is currently requesting to fill a vacant Secretary 2 position, critical to Farmland Preservation. Reviczky noted the positions filled for the Agency are as follows: two administrative assistants (one-animal control, one-Aquaculture), one Inspections and Regulations Inspector, microbiologist for Aquaculture, public relations officer, agricultural marketing representative, animal control officer, director for Farmland Preservation, and is seeking to fill a Secretary-2 vacant position for farmland preservation.

- B. Governor's Council for Agricultural Development.** Reviczky stated that the Governor's Council, comprised of fifteen members, is working together to put for recommendations towards developing a strategic plan for the next report. Reviczky indicated that the Council has been very successful with bringing together stakeholders across a broad array of interests to promote agricultural development.
- C. Legislative.** Henry Talmage indicated that there are approximately 80± Legislative Bills that are being tracked, with the focus of concentration relating to farmland preservation. Talmage indicated that April 30, 2014, at the Capitol is CIA Day, where various segments of CIA will be highlighted. Talmage added that Don Williams, a champion for CIA, is not running for reelection. Discussion ensued regarding Act #69: Farmland Restoration and Vacant Lands Program and modifications relating to working with municipalities, and wildlife.

2. State Owned Farmland.

- A. Southbury Training School.** Bureau Director stated the property is currently being surveyed, to include an additional 125± acres of woods which abuts the school and an adjacent farm. Dippel indicated that all programs with the residents will continue, until ended, which will then transfer to the easement. Dippel indicated that the Attorney General's office continues to work on the details of the easement deed language. Dippel discussed the condition of current existing buildings, some of which will need to be demolished, and some which will be able to be rehabbed. Dippel indicated that due to Southbury Training School being on the national Historic Register, any work done on the property must be in compliance with their regulations.

Lebanon Agricultural Reserve. Reviczky discussed the arrangement between the Department of Agriculture and DEEP, which allows for boat launch fishing, and hunting and trapping allowed on the opposite side of cropland, and added that DEEP is replacing the dam on Savin Lake, which will allow for better access to fish.

Dippel indicated that the Agency is working with NRCS with EQUIP grants regarding rotational grazing, and improving drainage to the farm. Lisa Bassani of Working Lands Alliance indicated that Savin Farm provides momentum to target other state-owned lands to preserve as

agricultural farmland. Discussion ensued on Bill 5419, relating to permissible activities on state-owned preserved jointly owned agricultural land.

3. Farmland Preservation Programs updates & summaries.

- A. Farmland Preservation.** Bureau Director Dippel discussed the pending and closed farms to date. Dippel indicated that there are currently 48 farms in the pipeline for a total of 5,120 acres, with two farms already closed this year, 15 farms pending closing, 10 farms with offers extended, 5 farms being appraised, and 12 farms under negotiation and configuration. Dippel discussed the Farmland Preservation Brochure presented at Ag Day at the Capitol, which was well received.
- B. Federal Farm and Ranchlands Protection Program.** Dippel referred to the Governor Press release, previously discussed by Commissioner Reviczky. Dippel discussed CIA funding, indicating that 18 million has been received cumulatively, two million expended, leaving a balance of six million.
- C. Community Farms.** Dippel indicated that a web page is being created for the Small Community Farms Program, and stated that Agent Winslow has been working with municipalities to give presentations relating to the Program. Dippel indicated that a PSA contract was awarded to Phil Chester to help out with the CFPP Program, and to Ken Geisler, to help out with GIS mapping.
- D. Farmland Restoration.** Dippel indicated that a PSA contract was awarded to Kip Kolenskis, and North central Conservation District to help run the program with conservation plans. Discussion ensued regarding the grant limit, and possibility of increasing the limit of the matching fund to fund a costly project. Reviczky stated that the mission is to have more projects, and not spend a significant amount of money on one particular project. Dippel added that a farmer can apply for other projects in a separate calendar year.

IV. OTHER BUSINESS:

- 1. Discussion of solar panels on prime farmland soils.** Dippel discussed photos taken of solar panels constructed on a few preserved farms that provide power to the infrastructure of the farm, permissible within parameters of the deed covenant.
- 2. Discussion of officer positions & terms.** Chair Hindinger indicated there is no term limit written into Legislation, and expressed thanks to all members who have served and continue to serve on the Farmland Advisory Board. Hindinger added that he will not seek re-election as Chair to the Board, and indicated it is important for another to have the opportunity to serve as Chair to the Board. Hindinger indicated that this will allow him to have the opportunity to serve as a Member to the Board, and be of service in a different capacity.

3. **Any other business.** Kevin Sullivan formally requested letter from the Board which will provide parameters for science research to conduct soil loss, regarding ball & burlap nursery farming.

V. **ADJOURNMENT:**

Next meeting, Monday, June 2, 2014, 9:30am, Hartford Regional Market, Conference Room, Hartford. The meeting was adjourned at 1:00 pm.
(Zeoli/Krissel-Unanimous).

Respectfully submitted by Denise O'Meara. Date: April 17, 2014.