

CONNECTICUT DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
FARMLAND PRESERVATION ADVISORY BOARD
CRITERIA SUBCOMMITTEE

Draft Minutes – July 29, 2015 Meeting

Members Present: John Guskowski, Henry Talmage

Others present: Commissioner Reviczky, Linda Piotrowicz, Lisa Bassani, Cameron Weimar, Sandra Karanian

- I. Call to Order: The meeting was called to order at 10:15 a.m. at State of Connecticut Office Building, 165 Capitol Avenue, Hartford, CT 06106 Commissioner Reviczky's conference room.
- II. John Guskowski explained meeting today to follow up on rough charge the Farmland Preservation Advisory Board gave us to help department and preservation program succeed. Guskowski would like to find out more about process of program, anyway as outside entity to help accelerate program. Lisa Bassani asked if there is something we might be able to advocate for, we have more freedom, legislative fixes we need to make. Henry Talmage explained what impact CIA will have on program. Commissioner Reviczky waiting to see how diversity of revenue to the general fund will roll out, thank you for advocating. We landed in a better place than zero. Talmage stated we all want same thing – program to be effective.

Commissioner explained state has grant programs. Jaime Smith has done grants for a long time, very good at it. Talmage mentioned within CIA coalition there were significant balances, everybody involved in CIA has to focus on that issue, if you are not spending you will not receive. Talmage explained everybody recognizes we cannot go forward with balances.

Talmage suggested conversation with Commissioners to not hold money. Commissioner stated a possibility. Commissioner asked Cameron Weimar to revisit where we are and challenges we have had. Guskowski stated upside of working with NRCS is cost share. Downside of working NRCS, it causes delays. Commissioner stated families, businesses are involved where time is of the essence, diversification, modernization, sale of the rights is integral to it all, people need to be aware of real life aspect of it. Guskowski asked what is process for an application to be put on NRCS track? Commissioner explained if it qualifies we will try to put on NRCS list. Weimar stated NRCS challenge is spending old money, DC NRCS issue, currently do not have an NRCS leader who is knowledgeable of Connecticut. Application comes in, applicant is told they may get federal money. We try to partner with NRCS on as many farms as possible. The New Farm Bill did not allow for a large substitution list. Weimar recommended we do 2 or 4 projects with big money, in different parts of the state. We currently have 8 or 9 on track for this fall. Weimar explained we have learned what surveyors, closing attorneys work well. Weimar is optimistic with Connecticut NRCS. Talmage explained rules have changed for

everybody, good strategy making sure we spend as much as we can applies to bonding money as well. Commissioner stated NRCS has slowed down the process, other states no longer want to deal with NRCS. Weimar stated Connecticut is fortunate with the legislature. Weimar explained if an application is on NRCS list, the process would take the traditional program timeframe plus 3 months for NRCS review. Weimar has suggested to NRCS to truncate it at the end. Weimar explained we have streamlined process of contracting closing attorney; when SPRB has been approved we request attorney from AG's office.

Bassini asked if appraisers are bid out. Weimar explained we have a list of 13 or 14 appraisers, these appraisers have to be general appraisers not residential. Guskowski asked what is bid turn around. Weimar explained appraisers have 3 weeks to return bid, depending on availability & price Weimar will recommend to Commissioner, towns will do appraisal for us, saves us money. Denise O'Meara performs initial review, comments back to appraiser, meets with Weimar on every project, prepare offer memo to Commissioner. Commissioner sees appraisals himself.

It was posed to have initial title work started earlier in the process. Guskowski explained assigning attorney would avoid later complications. Talmage explained it would uncover issues. Weimar explained there are no statutes that would prevent him requesting an assignment of attorney from AG's office earlier in process.

Talmage explained we are still enjoying lack of development pressure there was. Talmage stated if there are things you cannot do with restrictions, we might be able to advocate for change. Weimar explained staff is committed to closing on as many farms as possible, he will look into initiating title work earlier in process. He is optimistic with NRCS. CFT and Towns want to help. Weimar mentioned website is up for Farm Link, www.ctfarmlink.org, press release forthcoming.

Bassini asked if there is a provision for affirmative farming to require active farming. Weimar stated he believes you would need a statute for that.

Talmage stated he believed data points how much protected land is in agricultural use on annual basis is important, there is a benchmark for a healthy program. Weimar explained if we had greater staff capacity there would be an individual dedicated to Stewardship, right now it is spread throughout staff. Commissioner explained we are limited to SEBAC agreement as far as contracting out. Guskowski asked what the procedures were for survey. Weimar explained surveys take the most time, depending on time of year, bids are sent out geographically to surveyors, 35 surveyors on list. Bassini questioned about CFT doing appraisal, survey - could they take over preliminary title work. Weimar explained trying to work with E. Moore and J. Weedon, they hold easement jointly. Commissioner stated there are currently 8 or 9 projects with CFT. Guskowski asked if CFT partner without holding easement. Commissioner explained this has been done by a review of files. Commissioner explained requiring farms be farmable, topic of conversation for a long time. Bassini explained people have approached her about this topic. Commissioner explained he has been in two scenarios both farmland preservation and a farmer, there is balance keeping it in a condition to be farmed.

Bassini stated in the statute it allows to buy, protect, and sell, has it be utilized or any thoughts?
Commissioner did not recall any instance where we have done buy, protect and sell.

III. Schedule Next Meeting: The next meeting was not set.

IV. Adjournment: The meeting was adjourned at 11:53p.m.

Minutes respectfully submitted by:
Sandra Karanian on July 29, 2015