



CONNECTICUT DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

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Bureau of Agricultural Development & Resource Conservation

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FARMLAND PRESERVATION ADVISORY BOARD

MEETING MINUTES

Thursday, September 15, 2022

9:00 – 10:50am

BOARD MEEMBERS PRESENT:

- Robin Chesmer (Chairperson), Jiff Martin (Chairperson), Benjamin Freund, Will O'Meara, Joan Nichols, Ellie Angerame, Terry Jones, Elisabeth Moore, Robert Chang

DOAG STAFF PRESENT:

- Holly Lalime, Martine Kunzika, Jaime Smith, Cam Weimar

PUBLIC PRESENT:

- None

Meeting Called to Order at 9:03AM by Chairperson Robin Chesmer

Approve July meeting minutes (Robin Chesmer):

- Motion to table minutes made by Ellie Angerame, motion seconded by Terry Jones. Motion passed. The July, August, and September minutes will be approved at the next meeting in November.

PDR Programs Report (Cam Weimar):

- Yearly NRCS stewardship reports have been completed by DoAg RPU staff
- Another round of the Farmland Restoration Grant Program will be released this fall with applications being due in December.
- NRCS is very short staffed right now which makes closing on a number of properties delayed.
- For the next meeting, Jaime Smith is requesting to put time on the agenda to cover what is going on at DOAG on the structural/programmatic side. Specifically – when should ALE funding be utilized for an incoming PDR project?
- Jaime Smith to forward to the board the latest FPP Research RFP. The deadline has been extended for proposals. Only one proposal has been received thus far.

Brainstorm- what are the pros and cons of OPAV?

- Pro of OPAV – reduces the pool of potential buys and creates a deeper reassurance to farmland owners that their land will remain in agriculture after it is protected.
- Commissioner isn't saying that OPAV doesn't work. He's saying that the amount of input in staff time and effort doesn't match up with the level of utilization.
- Pro of OPAV - the lack of utilization means that it's actually working – the land is being passed through to a family member or to a buyer who is a qualified farmer.
- Pro of OPAV – Federal dollars could be used to purchase the option and it's money well spent to ensure that a future ag buyer can purchase the property.
- Pro of OPAV – The option doesn't need to be invoked in order to have value.
- Con of OPAV – it costs more money. More state and federal money needs to be utilized to purchase that option.
- How much more on average would a project cost (a rough percentage) if it were to have OPAV? – Will O'Meara – an OPAV project in Vermont, typically costs an average of \$1,500 to \$2,000 more per acre with OPAV.
- Case in Preston CT where a PDR farm was sold to a golf course. The diligence of DOAG and AG staff prevented that from happening. Had OPAV been in place, that scenario would never have happened.
- Protected land is being threatened now across the state. We are in a moment now that requires action. Why is the Department not interested in having as many tools as possible to ensure future farmland access.
- Pro of OPAV – There is a wellspring of political support and beginning farmer support for this farmland access tool. Two biggest issues facing new and beginning farmers – land access and the economics of farming.
- Would OPAV be an optional tool or a mandated tool? Some states are mandated some are optional. In optional states, it sounds like it's a popular option for landowners.
- Need data and proof that OPAV in other states is working – important to show this to the Commissioner.

Revisiting Buy-Protect-Sell – thoughts/reflections on some of the concepts presented by guests from NJ and RI earlier this year.

- DOAG has the statutory authority for BPS but the utility/workflow is currently too cumbersome. Is it the board or the Department's responsibility to come up with a plan to utilize it?
- Challenges to BPS – AG's office didn't want to allow DOAG to use partner money to protect a parcel the Department purchased. The statute was changed to address that. The 2019 Farm Bill added BPS, but NRCS funds cannot be used to assist a town of state government with

protecting a purchased property. We haven't received interest from parties that want to sell their property to the State. Do landowners know that they have this opportunity?

- What are the real bottlenecks for BPS and how can the board help work around/solve them?
- Land trusts should be the ones buying the property and then getting reimbursed or payed up front for the cost. Land trusts can do the due diligence much faster than the state.
- Interest in seeing the Department's plan/structure for BPS and where the potential bottlenecks are.

Next meeting:

- Will O'Meara made a motion to have a special meeting with the Commissioner with a couple of members to review OPAV and BPS. A larger meeting with the entire board is tentatively scheduled for October 20th is an earlier meeting with the Commissioner occurs. Jiff Martin seconded the motion. Motion passed.

Any other updates from DOAG (e.g. RFP for strategic plan, efficacy of working with SPRB):

- No additional updates from DoAg staff.

Volunteer for Inspirational message at the next regular meeting in November.

- No volunteers

Public Comment:

- No public comment.

Jiff Martin made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 10:55pm.