



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, February 15, 2024

9:00 – 10:30am

BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT:

- Will O'Meara (Chairperson), Jiff Martin (Vice-Chairperson), Benjamin Freund, Joan Nichols, Robin Chesmer, Elizabeth Moore, Terry Jones

DOAG STAFF PRESENT:

- Holly Lalime, Cam Weimar, Glenda Ramirez, Kayleigh Royston

PUBLIC PRESENT:

- Eliza Paterson, Chelsea Gazillo

Meeting Called to Order at 9:06 AM by Chairperson Will O'Meara

Approve Meeting Minutes:

- **Motion:** Joan Nichols made a motion to approve the November 2023 meeting minutes. Benjamin Freund seconded the motion. All voted in favor, motion carried.

Farmland Preservation and Community Farms Program Update:

- Cam sent the report out to everyone. DOAG preserved 23 farms, close to 1600 acres, in 2023. \$10 million was spent with, half of the funds coming from partners including USDA ALE, local land trusts and municipalities. DOAG closed on 20 projects with NRCS last year.
- Over the last 10 years the average size of a farm decreased from 122 acres to 67 acres.
- With the new regulations, DOAG's program is able to accommodate a more diverse array of farm sizes and farm types. DOAG is closing in on its 50,000 acre milestone, expected by late spring, early summer.
- DOAG submitted 15 applications to the USDA ALE program for FY2024. Total ask of \$3.2 million. Apparently, DC has only allocated 2.7million, so we're hoping to hear back from Tom, if we could get that additional \$500,000.
- Stewardship is continuing to take up a significant amount of staff time. DOAG is receiving a high volume of applications to construct, and issues/potential violations continue to come up during stewardship monitoring.

DOAG Legislative Updates:

- It is a pretty light legislative package this year because we were in a short session. Anything with a fiscal note that the agency proposed was removed.
- There are two bills that have been raised in the Environment Committee already. One of them is currently titled Minor Revisions to the Department of Agriculture Statutes. Revisions include:
 - Removing the DEEP commissioner from the Farmland Preservation and Community Farms programs as a consulting authority as they are not currently consulted for acquisitions.
 - There is some repealed language on the Seafood Advisory Council and the Aquaculture Resource Assessment Permits, and a couple of duplicative language issues.
 - DOAG is seeking to establish a harvest season in Connecticut to allow transporters to take advantage of the agricultural exemption to the hours of service and the electronic logging device restrictions that came at the request of the greenhouse growers association.
- The second bill is mostly technical and seeks to amend the definition of animal again to address the purview of our agency versus DEEP.
 - Pet licensing allowing municipalities to issue spay/neuter vouchers for our animal population control program.
 - A couple of technical changes and removing the legislative confirmation requirement from members of the milk regulation board.
- There is also legislation being worked on now that would approve of the eviction of farmers operating on certain state-owned property. We believe this has to do with an issue out in the Northwest corner on a DEEP owned property. DOAG will keep an eye on the language related to how farmers are allowed to operate on state owned property.
- The use of rodenticides has been brought up with farmers in the past. DOAG doesn't know if the language is going to look the same as last year but is anticipating it being pretty similar.
- DOAG did have OPAV language in the legislative package but because of the fiscal note associated with it, it was taken out before it was approved to go to the Environment Committee. DOAG has had conversations with the Environment Committee leadership surrounding OPAV and it looks as if Joe Gresko has interest in raising the concept.
- **Motion:** Benjamin Freund made a motion to advise the Commissioner to support the OPAV easement legislation using existing funding mechanisms. Jiff Martin seconded the motion. All voted in favor, motion carried.

Vice Chairperson Update:

- Jiff Martin has graciously fulfilled the role of Vice-Chairperson for one year alongside Will O'Meara; however, she will be stepping down from this role effective January 2024.
- The Vice-Chairperson can be any member of the board but the Chairperson has to be a farmer.
- No one has volunteered to serve as Vice-Chairperson so Will is going to continue to serve as Chairperson with no Vice-Chairperson.

OLD BUSINESS

Vacancies and Term Updates (Jamie Smith was unavailable to attend the meeting):

- A list of recommendations for the current vacant seat was previously sent to Kayleigh Royston back in March 2023, with the information to be forwarded to individuals who make the appointment. Jaime Smith will follow-up with Kayleigh Royston and the Commissioner regarding an update on status.
- Green Village Initiative (GVI) is changing its status. Ellie Angerame has been a wonderful addition to the board but will need to step down. Discussion ensued regarding potential nominations for the seat. Will O'Meara will reach out to potential nominees to gauge interest.
- Re-filling the seat for a Representative from the Connecticut Conference of Municipalities was discussed.

DOAG PDR Stewardship Staffing Discussion:

- Joan Nichols will contact Jaime Smith and the Commissioner to inquire about stewardship staffing needs. The Farm Bureau can then advocate to the legislature for additional staff positions.

NEW BUSINESS

PDR Appraisal Report Availability to Applicants:

- Elizabeth Moore recommends sharing appraisal reports with farmers so that they feel comfortable with the value that they are being offered. Cameron Weimar will reach out to appraisers to see how they feel about sharing the report with farmers.

Update on Buy-Protect Sell Work by CLCC

- This item was tabled until the next meeting.

PUBLIC COMMENT

- No public comment

Will O'Meara made a motion to adjourn the meeting, meeting adjourned at 10:35 a.m.

**** The next meeting is scheduled to occur on May 16, 2024, from 9:00-10:30AM ****