

From: Susan Mazurski August 5, 2009 10:03:23 AM
Subject: Open Space Committee Minutes 06/03/2009 APPROVED
To: SimsburyCT_OpenMin
Cc:

MINUTES
OPEN SPACE COMMITTEE
Regular Meeting – June 3, 2009

1. Call to Order

Mary Glassman called the meeting to order at 4:03 p.m. in the Main Meeting Room at the Simsbury Town Hall. Committee members present were John Loomis, Margery Winters and Dunny Barney.

2. Public Audience

A Simsbury resident questioned the validity of the Open Space Committee. He stated that in the Charter, there is no indication of this Committee's purpose. Regarding the issue with Farmer Hall, he feels that this has been dragged out. The Board of Selectmen voted to rescind their decision. He stated that Farmer Hall has been farming land for many generations; he knows the land and he feels he is considered an expert. He stated that the 40 acre Triangle has been abused. The Hall family has sacrificed for Simsbury generation after generation. He feels that should have some bearing, especially with his expertise. He does not feel that Farmer Hall should be chosen because of his connections, but because of his expertise. He feels that the Triangle should already be tilled; this should not be dragged on any longer. This land should be used for open space; that is what the people want. The Town should not go back on what the people want; they should not hold off for one year. Regarding Tulmeadow, Rosedale and Ryan Flower, he stated that the decision regarding these farms were made in less than one week. Then the Board of Selectmen approved them and leases were signed. He feels something should be done at this meeting today.

Ms. Glassman stated that the Board of Selectmen did establish this Committee; it is appointed by the Board of Selectmen. There are representatives of various Commissions that sit on this Committee.

Susan Masino stated that she would like to address the responsibilities of the Open Space Committee. She stated that this Committee had a lengthy discussion regarding the Triangle at a recent meeting. She feels that all of the members of this Committee have certain areas of expertise. When this Committee has the opportunity to do the right thing and when they are all in agreement, she feels that it is the responsibility of this Committee

to make a recommendation to the Board of Selectmen. She feels that if this Committee had already made a recommendation on this issue, certain things could have been avoided.

Ms. Glassman questioned if Ms. Masino was aware that Mr. Hall wanted a three-year contract and that the Board of Selectmen wanted to issue a one-year contract. Ms. Masino stated that the length of the contract could have been part of the recommendation to the BOS. She stated that a one-year contract is not reasonable for farming.

Ms. Glassman stated that the Recreation Commission wanted to use this land for fields; they wanted a hearing as well. It was a balance between making sure everyone's needs were addressed. Ms. Masino stated that she thought the athletic fields needed only 10 acres; this is a 40 acre parcel. Ms. Glassman stated that they did not want to enter into any lease until all of the issues were resolved.

Ashley Lane stated that in the RFP, it indicated a multi-year contract. Ms. Glassman questioned if Mr. Hall would be interested in a one-year contract. Mr. Lane stated he would be interested only if it could be extended. Ms. Glassman stated that because there were unresolved issues, the Board of Selectmen only wanted a one-year lease. Mr. Lane stated that there is no advantage to the Town in having a one-year lease.

3. Review/Adopt minutes of May 6, 2009

Ms. Winters made a motion to approve the minutes of May 6, 2009. Mr. Loomis seconded the motion.

Several edits were made to the minutes.

Mr. Barney made a motion to table the minutes until the edits were reviewed. Mr. Loomis seconded the motion, which was unanimously approved.

4. June 6th Farm Day Update

Ms. Glassman distributed a list of events that were taking place on Saturday, June 6th. She stated that there is a celebration at Tulmeadow Woods. She stated that everyone is invited to visit all of the farms on Saturday and to go to Tulmeadow at 11:00 for a special ribbon cutting.

5. Presentation by Don Franczyk – Bay State Organic Certifiers

Ms. Glassman stated that there has been a lot of public input regarding the Triangle. The fact that there is a lot of confusion regarding fertilizers, farmers and long-term leases, this Committee felt they should develop a

policy. This Committee also wanted to look at the possibility of planting something to could improve the soils on the property.

Ms. Glassman stated that this Committee has invited several speakers in order to education them regarding certain policies prior to issuing another RFP on any Town owned land. She stated that she has also been in contact with CRCOG; they directed this Committee to a report regarding regulating farms. She distributed this information to the Committee members.

Mr. Beach stated that Bay State Organic Certifiers certifies farms as organic. Mr. Franczyk will be speaking about what is involved in this process.

Ms. Glassman stated that there is an issue regarding farmers using Town owned land. She stated that the Town has not been the filer of the organic applications and this information pertaining to the land is confidential to the farmer. Ms. Glassman stated that the Town is trying to get the applications now filed through them. Mr. Lane stated that all but 4 acres of Mr. Hall's farm is certified organic under Bay State Organic Certifiers. Mr. Barney asked that Mr. Hall provide a copy of the certification to the Town.

Mr. Franczyk stated that every organic certification is a Federal license; it needs to be either surrendered, suspended or revoked. If Mr. Hall does not renew his certification, action will need to be taken. Ms. Glassman questioned how the Town would know if he renews his certification. Mr. Franczyk stated that the Town would not be notified; that is one problem with a lease arrangement. Most leases don't specify organic certification requirements. It could be put in a lease that if a farmer holds the certification, they must notify the Town if they decide not to renew the certification.

Mr. Barney questioned if Mr. Franczyk has any model leases for their review. Mr. Franczyk stated that he does not, although he would be happy to look over a document if this Committee wanted to write something up.

Ms. Glassman stated that the Town owns a lot of land that is not in farm production. The goal of this Committee is to get good fertile farmland back into production. She stated that they are anxious to get the Triangle into production. They are unsure what requirements farmers should meet for conventional farming. She stated that they would also like to identify some parcels that will be required to be organic, although they first need to understand the differences between convention and organic farming. Mr. Barney stated that a conventional farmer can farm any piece of land using organic practices and in three years get that land certified.

Regarding the difference between conventional and organic farming, Mr. Franczyk stated that conventional farmers are very prescriptive; they follow a list. The State Agriculture Department mandates when certain pesticides and products can be used and when things are planted. Organic farmers are more holistic. Over a long period of time, they are trying to build up the soil. They are trying to increase the soil organic matter and increase the soil health. By doing this, they will hopefully rely less and less on any of the organic pesticides and disease control products. The idea behind organic agriculture is to have healthy soil and healthy plants and to limit the number of inputs into the soil.

Mr. Franczyk stated that the Triangle has probably been abused over a long period of time; it will have low nutrients. This will need to be addressed. The land will also have pests because they have developed a resistance, over time, to all of the chemicals that have been used. He stated that organic farming is long-term. Good results will come in the 3rd to 5th year. This is the time it takes to bring the soil back into production.

Ms. Glassman questioned what is allowable on organic and conventional parcels. Mr. Franczyk stated that there are two groups of organic. One is certified and the other is people who follow these practices, although they are not certified. These people are claiming to use these practices, although there is no legal basis to it.

Mr. Barney stated that if the public is looking for certified produce, unless they have a certification, they cannot sell the produce as organic. The buyer needs to be aware of this.

Ms. Glassman questioned how the Town would go out for an RFP to require certified organic on land that is not certified organic. Mr. Franczyk stated that the Town could require the farmer to transition to organic; this is a three-year process. Ms. Glassman questioned what standard should conventional farmers be held to that are leasing Town land. Mr. Franczyk stated that the Department of Agriculture in Connecticut has products that can and cannot be used. Ms. Glassman stated that there are some people who think that some of these products are not acceptable even though they are approved by the State.

Mr. Barney stated that if a farmer states that they will follow organic practices, this automatically precludes certain chemicals. He questioned what code or regulation could be used if the Town wants the farmer to apply organic practices. Mr. Franczyk stated that there are USDA National Organic Standards; there is a CFR number for this that could be used. He stated that this would rule out the conventional farmer to do conventional farming; it does not preclude the conventional farmer in transition.

Ms. Winters stated that if the Town decides not to go organic, the next step would be for the farmers to use Integrated Pest Management. Mr. Franczyk stated IPM is a nebulous invented concept that allows people to say that they are not using as many pesticides as they had in the past. The problem is that there is no one to oversee this.

Mr. Franczyk stated that they send an inspector out to a site in order to verify a farmer is in compliance. He stated that it is a 3-step process for a renewal or a new application. When an application is submitted, they do a technical review; they also do several site visits to verify that the operation is in compliance. While on a site visit, they go through the entire operation and the storage areas and they may take soil test and look at product labeling.

Ms. Glassman questioned if they could allow both conventional and organic farming on the Triangle. Mr. Franczyk stated that this is difficult to do; it depends on the site. Buffers are needed.

Ms. Glassman stated that the Town is anxious to get a cover crop on the Triangle. This could keep the clock running on organic certification. Mr. Franczyk stated that this would be correct as long as no synthetic fertilizers are used. She asked if the Town was to leave the land fallow for one year, if that would that count toward certification. Mr. Franczyk stated that doing nothing would be fine, although it is not fine to do nothing from a farmer's point of view.

In response to Mr. Loomis' question, Mr. Franczyk stated that the USDA Regulations are stable because they either require an act of Congress to be changed or they have to go through a bureaucratic process.

Hugh Smith questioned if the word organic had a legal definition. Mr. Franczyk stated that the law in Connecticut defines the term. It is safe to say that if it is not certified, it is not organic, although someone could be following organic practice and as long as they are not marketing anything as organic, they are not in violation of the standards.

Ms. Glassman thanked Mr. Franczyk for his presentation.

6. Presentation by Hugh Smith – CT Agricultural Experiment Station (Windsor)

Mr. Smith stated that he is a scientist and an entomologist. He has worked with both conventional and organic growers. He stated that his presentation will be on integrated pest management (IPM) and he will only be talking about insects and bugs.

He stated that IPM suppresses pests and grows marketable crops. Monitoring pests is crucial; it also involves knowing the natural enemies of pests. The key parts of IPM are: each crop has a complex of pests; crop mixes require specific pest management plans; and crops are susceptible to different pests at different stages of development.

Mr. Smith stated that throughout his presentation, he will be discussing above and below ground pests. Soil pests are most difficult to manage environmentally. IPM is just a discipline; it is not a certification or legal definition. One bug does not make a pest problem. IPM involves a lot of suppression techniques that are integrated. He stated that there are also many ways to sample pests including sticky cards, pan traps and more.

Mr. Smith stated that part of IPM is not just being able to identify the pest. Identifying good insects in all of their different stages is very important as well as identifying natural enemies that attack the pests. Pests must be managed throughout the crop's development. Different pests attack crops at different stages of development.

Mr. Smith stated that pests vary in their susceptibility to integrated control. For more valuable crops, little if any pest damage is acceptable. The public demands that insecticides not be used and they are also looking for cosmetically perfect produce.

Regarding pesticides as a non-point pollution source, Mr. Smith stated that there are different characteristics of pesticides. This is largely a ground water surface problem; they are concerned about the impacts on humans and animals primarily getting into drinking water. There are also concerns regarding what insecticides do to the environment. Pesticides can move off of a farm in water, through soil, in the air or from pesticide spills. There are many different insecticides. Mr. Smith explained the many classes of insecticides. In general, newer insecticides tend to be more specific to certain crops; they have a lower mammalian toxicity; and are safer for the environment. He stated that many people generalize that a conventional farmer is not using safe practices. He does not feel that this is a helpful generalization. Ms. Glassman stated that the Town does not want to be critical toward conventional farmers who are using good practices. She asked how the Town could get a farmer to incorporate IPM without requiring it. Mr. Smith stated that no one can mandate what a farmer's practices are.

Mr. Smith stated that the pests that a farmer gets depends on what is sprayed and what he is growing.

Julie Meyer stated that even though DEP approves certain chemicals, the

majority of the pesticides that a farmer will come in with will be on this list. When there are no farmers that are reviewing this list of applicable pesticides that could potentially be placed on a property, she questioned if this was truly integrated pest management. Ms. Glassman stated that the Town does not want to get into farm management. Mr. Smith stated that pesticides are toxic, although they are legal. They all have a label, and the label is the law.

Ms. Winters questioned if the CT Agricultural Experiment Station holds any kind of classes regarding IPM for farmers. Mr. Smith stated that UCONN does have IPM faculty, although he has not seen a lot of outreach. He stated that most farmers are educated regarding what is legal and what works.

Mr. Smith stated that all pesticides are not created equal. Some will bind to the soil and some are very soluble in water. The given pesticides that are used on a farm are determined by what is being grown. He stated that the last point he would like to make is that a farmer is not going to grow something that he cannot sell whether the farmer is organic or conventional.

Ms. Glassman thanked Mr. Smith for his presentation.

Mr. Barney stated that there are farmers that are farming conventionally on their own land; the Town has no say as to how they farm. He believes that a farmer will need to be more vigilant on the Triangle. He stated that a lot of sewers and water lines have been installed in order to overcome the pesticides and materials that were used in the growing of tobacco in the past. The public paid for a private, at the time, legal use of pesticides and herbicides. It will be a huge public cost for not monitoring what is going on at the Triangle.

Ms. Masino stated that the Town is trying to figure out what to do with this land. She suggested getting some information out to the farmers; establish a priority list in terms of RFP; priority for organic and multi-year lease; and a second priority for transitional farmers. She stated that there are grant monies available for farmers transitioning to organic farming. Mr. Franczyk stated that this is the NRCS Equip Program; the deadlines have passed. Mr. Lane stated that they have extended this deadline. Mr. Beach stated that this grant does not apply to Town owned land. Mr. Franczyk stated that he believes this grant allows for the leaseholders to apply; the Town would not be applying for the money.

Ms. Winters stated that the Town needs to address that if they lease land to a farmer for a long term, they would need to see the crop rotation. Mr. Barney questioned who would judge this. Ms. Winters stated that this would need to be reviewed by someone with more expertise. Mr. Barney stated that

this is not even something that the State does.

Ms. Glassman stated that Brandon Robertson is working on a survey regarding what other Towns require. She also spoke with someone from CRCOG. They have only found Towns that have asked farmers to submit a list of products that they use that are acceptable to the DEP.

Mr. Loomis questioned if there was a clear distinction between approved by DEP and organically certifiable. Mr. Franczyk stated that they have to be approved, although it may be a subset of those that are approved. Ms. Winters stated that there are many approved pesticides that have been taken off of the market because of problems.

7. Town Farm Update

Ms. Glassman stated that the Town has received a letter from Bessie Speers, which she distributed to the Committee members. Ms. Speers has been elected Chair of the Board; they hope to have a lease agreement soon.

Mr. Barney stated that a new Board has been elected and the revised article of incorporation has been filed with the Secretary of the State. The term Town Farm Dairy no longer legally exists. The new name is the Community Farm of Simsbury, Inc. The next step is to prepare a lease that the Town can review as soon as possible so they can start growing.

8. Regional Agriculture Commission Update

Ms. Glassman stated that there was a meeting with Granby and the Farmington Valley Collaborative. They are very interested in getting a meeting together to bring in some expertise and creating a Regional Agriculture Commission. She stated that they are looking for people who may be interested in helping create a model structure of how the Regional Agriculture Commission would work.

Ms. Glassman distributed a CRCOG report. She stated that one of their top priorities is to create a Regional Agriculture Commission. She stated that CRCOG also prepared a Farmington River Valley Open Space and Preservation Map in order to see the open space not only in Simsbury, but how all of the open space interacts with all of the Towns in the region. She stated that there is a lot of open space in the Farmington Valley.

Ms. Glassman stated that a special meeting may need to be scheduled when a lease is ready to be reviewed or if more information is available for the Triangle.

9. Adjourn

Mr. Barney made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 6:10 p.m. Ms. Winters seconded the motion, which was unanimously approved.