

Woodstock Agricultural Commission

Regular Meeting, Woodstock Town Hall, 1 pm, Monday, August 21, 2023

Members Present: Linda Auger (1:10), Emilie Hebert, Jon Hermonot, Rebecca Hyde, Paul Miller, Richard Norman, Karen Swanberg

Absent: Stewart Morse

Public present: 2 young Hermonots, Megan Hebert

1. **Call to order** Meeting called to order at 1:00 pm
2. **Seat alternates** Paul Miller seated
3. **Review of minutes** July 2023 minutes were approved
4. **Public participation** None
5. **Old business**

a. **WOSLAPC report** no report

b. **P&Z report** Emilie Hebert has been in discussion with the current ZEO concerning the status of farm stands and stores which are already in operation. She presented the following proposed letter to be sent out from the Ag Commission:

Woodstock Farming Friends:

As you may know, there has been much attention and discussion about accessory uses and activities in support of agriculture in Woodstock. The regulation and oversight of these activities have been a hot topic with the Town's Planning and Zoning Commissions over the past few months.

In response to a recent discussion about retail activity in association with an agricultural operation, our current ZEO, John Guskowski (who is appointed to interpret and enforce the Town's Zoning Regulations), issued the following statement to the PZC regarding his reading of our current Regulations:

"It is important to note that in the definitions and regulations concerning agricultural uses, farm stands, or the selling of agricultural products, there is no specification for the percentage of sales income that must be derived from the different products sold at an outdoor retail sales accessory structure/use on an agricultural property. As I'm sure you're aware, many of the Town's prominent farm stores, wineries, and farm stands sell a wide variety of merchandise (t-shirts, stickers, gifts, etc.) that are not necessarily directly tied to the farm operation but have the broader effect of promoting and supporting agriculture in Woodstock. Further, with agricultural operations and associated accessory uses (as with any other "as of right" uses), there are no explicit limits on traffic or parking. Some of our largest farms park thousands and thousands of cars during

certain times of the year without Special Permitting - because these are deemed accessory uses to permitted farming operations.”

While some Commissioners pushed back against this opinion, the Commission’s overall position was one of acceptance that the Town’s current Regulations has broad latitude concerning accessory uses in support of agricultural operations. This position, however, is always subject to change.

In an effort to create consistency and ensure that all current agricultural retail sales are being handled in the same manner, the ZEO suggests that each operation seek administrative zoning approval and make official their current agriculturally-related retail or other supportive operations. To do this, please consider completing the attached permit and be issued a Zoning Permit from staff (not the Commission). Once issued, current operations are therefore documented and protected from amendments to Woodstock’s Zoning Regulations that would seek to narrow the definitions of agricultural activities or increase regulatory oversight.

The Woodstock Agricultural Commission recommends this action as a way to protect and ensure the continuation of the existing stores and related support operations around town. Currently, the various farm stores located in Woodstock hold a variety of permits, or may not have received any formal approval at all.

ZEO Guszowski is available to answer any questions you may have, and can be contacted at zeo@woodstockct.gov. It is our hope that the agricultural community can get on the same page and present a common and united approach to our operations.

Sincerely,

Woodstock Agriculture Commission

Motion to approve this letter to be sent to farming operations with retail stands or stores. All in favor.

c. Farm Store Definition no further discussion

d. Celebrate Agriculture 2023 Going well. Will be different but good.

e. Other Federal: whole milk bill came out of House committee, Courtney and Hayes signed on, Murphy said he wouldn’t sign on because of the nutritional recommendations, but may be an issue of pushing against the Dept of Ag. 13 Senators have signed on, needs more advocacy.

6. New business

a. \$10,000 American Farmland Trust Grant Rebecca Hyde secured a grant from the AFT for researching agricultural easements in Woodstock and engaging with farmer/managers over soil health improvement practices. The first \$3,000 will be sent in September. Crystal Adams and Rebecca will attend an October training in Vermont. Crystal serves on the Conservation Commission and the Open Space LAPC, as well as being the Human Resources person for the Town. The money will enable the town to hire help to research current easements, propose changes to how they are monitored, and engage with owners, managers and farmers around soil health improvement.

Motion: Moved that the Woodstock Agricultural Commission accept the \$10,000 American Farmland Trust Soil Health Stewards Program grant and agree to administer it. All in favor.

b. State of CT Ag Report. State released guidelines on agrovoltatics for solar on farmland.

c. Other Karen Swanberg brought up the matter of the public trespassing on farms and engaging with the animals without permission. She would like to see the Commission release a PSA on the subject.

Emilie pointed out that farm building and machinery property tax exemptions need to be raised, as everything has become more expensive. This would require state statutes be amended.

7. Announcements none

8. Adjourn The meeting adjourned at 2:08.

Rebecca Hyde, Secretary

(These minutes are subject to approval at the next meeting of the full Commission.)