

Harvard Agricultural Advisory Commission (HAAC)

Town of Harvard, MA

Minutes of Meeting 15 August 2018

Approved: September 19, 2018

Present: Kerri Green (chair), Frank Carlson, Rob Traver, Peter Basile, Nikki Schmidt (prospective member), Matt Varrell (guest; resident)

Green called meeting to order at 7:20. Minutes of 15 May 2018 meeting were read and approved.

Matt Verrell introduced himself and expressed interest in the work of the Ag Commission as he and his family raise Alpacas in Harvard and run educational tours and manage a shop part-time related to Alpaca husbandry and products.

Nikki Schmidt introduced herself and noted her desire to serve on the Ag Commission derives from family efforts to establish and manage a small vineyard and orchard in town.

The meeting turned to its main, and current, focus on agro-tourism and Harvard farms and community. The Commission discussed the Planning Board's decision NOT to create an agro-tourism overlay district for a few select agriculturally related enterprises in Harvard. The Commission agreed that such an overlay district would NOT serve the best interests of all the farm enterprises in town. The Commission believes that the overlay district consideration has been concluded, at least for now.

The meeting discussed Harvard Energy Advisory Commission's (see Broadbent, AAC Minutes of 5/18/18) successful grant proposal, Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness Plan, for \$35,000. The Ag Commission looks forward to working with the Energy Commission as it develops the plan in relation to the needs of Harvard's agricultural community induced by climate change. Attention turned to a Farm Survey, with its focus on agro-tourism activities, proposed by the Planning Board. The Commission considered the draft Farm Survey not only in terms of its content but its distribution and analysis as well. In particular, the Commission wonders who will be surveyed, which and what kinds of farms in town will be represented, how will the results be interpreted, and for what purpose? These questions represent not only typical methodological concerns for any survey, but go to the heart of what constitutes a farm and farming in Harvard. To start, it may be best for the town to opt for a more encompassing invitation to comment on agro-tourism within Harvard, perhaps through the use of a well-publicized electronic survey portal, and to let individuals or entities self-identify as farmers, growers, agriculturalists, or other. The Commission noted that there is a USDA census that might be consulted, though these have a lag time of a few years. In any case, the Commission does not think the Farm Survey as currently designed is ready for release.

Throughout these discussions, the Commission kept in mind its chief advisory request from the Planning Board: What should the town be doing about Agro-tourism? The Commission remains

steadfast in its advice to the Planning Board and others that they should wait until the Commonwealth completes its current effort, now in the House Ways and Means Committee, to adopt agro-tourism legislation. Any attempt to outdistance the Commonwealth may result in unacceptable or redundant by-laws. In the meantime, there is sufficient state level legislation to address the issues that arise at this time.

The Commission discussed the need for Commission presence at the upcoming 10 September meeting of the Planning Board. Green will lead this action item. In addition, she will distribute documents that relate to the overlay-zoning discussion.

Meeting adjourned at 9:30 pm

Submitted by: Rob Traver