

**Town of Boscawen
AGRICULTURAL COMMISSION
Boscawen Municipal Complex
MEETING MINUTES
Thursday, March 8th, 2021 at 7:00 PM**

Members Present: John Keegan – Chair, Bill Bevans - Vice Chair, Julie Fournier, John Porter, Roger Sanborn & Gary Tillman

Absent- Kellee-Jo Easler- Planning & Community Development Director, Tina Laroche & Rusty Colby

Others Present - Crystal Tuttle- Planning & Community Development Clerk, Hannah Gardner-Recording Secretary & Hanna Flanders, guest speaker from Kearsarge Food Hub

Chair John Keegan opened the public meeting at 7:00 P.M.

Chair Keegan read off the Covid-19 Public Meeting Notice of Telephonic Meetings, which reads as follows: In light of the state of emergency declared by the Governor on March 13, 2020, and to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic, the chair has determined that an emergency exists and that accordingly, until further notice, (a) members of the board may attend all board meetings telephonically, without the physical presence of a quorum; and (b) members of the public who wish to participate in hearings may, on request, participate telephonically or submit comments in writing to be included in the record of the hearing.

Roll Call: completed and guests introduced.

Chair John Keegan stated that Josh Marshall resigned as a member. Mr. Marshall has moved to Canterbury which is where he will reside. To serve on a Town board or commission, you must be a resident of Boscawen. Chair Keegan invited Mr. Marshall to attend any future meetings. He just can't vote. Chair Keegan will keep a line of communication open with Mr. Marshall for future endeavors and asked he do the same.

Review and Acceptance of Prior Meeting Minutes:

- Chair Keegan requests one correction, line 72, change 'Berkley's' to 'Berkeley's'.
- Chair Keegan requests one correction, line 111, change 'Hannah' to 'Hanna' and add her last name 'Flanders'.

Mr. John Porter motioned to accept the 02.11.21 meeting minutes as amended. Motion seconded by Ms. Julie Fournier. All in favor. None opposed.

Financial Report:

Ms. Fournier motioned to accept the 04.08.21 financials as written. Motion seconded by Mr. Roger Sanborn. All in favor. None opposed.

Re-elect Officers:

- Ms. Kellee Easler reminded Chair Keegan, that every year the Agricultural Commission at its first regular meeting following the annual Town Meeting must elect Commissioners for Chair and Vice Chair.
- Mr. Porter nominated Chair Keegan for Chair.
- Mr. Tillman nominated Mr. Porter for Vice Chair.

Mr. Tillman motioned to nominate Mr. Keegan as Chairman and Mr. Porter as Vice Chair. Seconded by Mr. Sanborn. All in favor. None opposed.

Old Business:

- New Members: Chair Keegan formally welcomed Mr. Tillman and Mr. Sanborn to the Commission. The current Commissioners couldn't be happier with two good additions, people interested in the growth of the community and the agricultural sector.
- By-laws: The Committee hasn't updated the by-laws since 2012. There are two items in the by-laws the Commission hasn't been following. Chair Keegan referred to Article C Organization and Officers. In the explanation of the Officers, it references a secretary and treasurer. The Committee took an action in 2012 to make that a one-person responsibility. Subsequently, with changes in the Town Office, the responsibilities of the treasurer and secretary have been assumed by Town staff. Ms. Katie Phelps handles the finances and Ms. Kellee Easler, and her staff take on the role of secretary. Chair Keegan suggested updating these by-laws, so that part C of Article C is deleted. The only current officers are the Chair and Vice Chair. The Commissioners should vote on whether or not they would like to consider changing Article C, Part C. Next month, the Commissioners will vote on this motion. Ms. Fournier asked where the Community Garden liaison falls in the by-laws. Chair Keegan said it's not in the by-laws but as Chair, he has customarily established committees and named members. Chair Keegan asked that if the Committee found anything else in the by-laws to be changed at the May meeting.

Mr. Tillman motioned to consider action on eliminating part C. Secretary/Treasurer in Article C of the by-laws at the next regularly scheduled monthly meeting. Seconded by Ms. Fournier. All in favor. None opposed.

- Community Garden: Mr. Abbe has sent a circular to the people who have signed up for the Community Garden for two Saturday workdays during this month. Among the activities are: putting in 16 new 12'x12' plots which will require 4 new spigots and ground work. He is trying to engage more gardener's to join the group of people that will be responsible for week-to-week maintenance. Mr. Abbe and a couple long time gardeners have done most of this work to date. Ms. Fournier said at Town Meeting, the

Community Garden was represented with garden applications on a table near the entrance. Also, while the Town offices are closed Community Garden applications are available for people to pick up and sign up at the entry. Also, she did notice the sign is out on the corner of Cornhill Road advertising the garden. Ms. Tuttle reported about 19 gardeners have applied and there are only a few applications left. Mr. Sanborn offered to do any tilling needed. Chair Keegan asked him to talk with Mr. Abbe.

- Boscawen Signs: A pending task has been to replace the signs that have been stolen. Chair Keegan has been in communication with Josh Marshall. Prison Industries report that some of the materials needed were back ordered. They should be ready in a couple of weeks.
- Land for Good: Mr. Porter updated Mr. Sanborn and Mr. Tillman and others on *Land for Good*. His draft service announcement was adapted by their staff about how they would offer their service to the public on matching land and farmers. The big breakthrough was the appearance of the service announcement in the Department of Agriculture, Markets and Food's Weekly Market Bulletin which the Commission had asked Commissioner Jasper to do. Each week to date he has placed the announcement near the subscription coupon, promoting the networking service. Mr. Porter has reached out to employers of *Land for Good*, but they haven't responded. He brought them up to date on what the Commission has done. He thinks it's great for awareness.

New Business:

- Kearsarge Food Hub, Bradford, NH: Chair Keegan introduced the guest speaker, Hanna Flanders to talk about how the Kearsarge Food Hub got started, where they are at this point and where they are looking to be in the future. Ms. Flanders introduced herself as a co-founder of the Kearsarge Food Hub established in Bradford, NH, in 2015. Their mission is to "reinvigorate their community within a restorative local food system by cultivating food sovereignty, growing engaged learners and nurturing community". They envision a resilient and connected community where everyone is empowered to access healthy food, where local farmers are supported and the land is nourished, and where all people share a common sense of place. Ms. Flanders is the Director of Community Engagement. Her role is to carry out the community outreach program and marketing. They got started after 4 of the 6 co-founders including Ms. Flanders, all graduated from Kearsarge High School. They wanted to take action related to food production, distribution and land use. These three factors were at the core of the issues about which they were trying to effect positive change including impact on climate change, social justice, human health, etc. They started small with a pilot project called Sweet Beet Farm and Sweet Beet Farm Stand. Community members lent them land to start growing crops such as onions. With community support, they built their own farm stand. People donated designs for the farm stand, offered to help with logistics and farmers around the area helped them gain knowledge. Many of the co-founders had experience due to the local farms providing internships and outreach programs. On July 4th, 2015 they opened the Sweet Beet farm stand not only to sell their own food but also to aggregate food from

other local farmers and producers. They wanted to provide support to the local farm network in the form of a new market outlet. They ran the farm stand for two years, but their goal was to move in the direction of a year-round, local food market that could provide an access point to the community. They wanted to instill the idea of a grocery store in which the community could eat local food all year long. Sweet Beet Market opened in the Old Bradford Inn in 2017. They were invited to move there by the building owners, a company called 'Unless' to make it an exciting place for the community. They hosted a fundraiser for a Community Kitchen and compiled several new ideas. The kitchen is a work in progress. For a period of time, it was a business incubation space for the Village Café. Unfortunately, the Café didn't last past COVID.

- Cultivating Food Sovereignty: One initiative in their mission statement is food sovereignty. It's about the right to control, as a community, how their food is grown, distributed and shared. Sweet Beet market is a great avenue for achieving this initiative. Ms. Flanders presentation showed a map of Sweet Beet Partners. The red dots indicated the partnering farms across the region. They started with a focal point of a 30 mile radius around their operations. It has grown to a 50 mile radius, but all of their produce is sourced hyper locally from about 20+ vegetable farms and 70+ NH base food producers and makers of different kinds such as meat, dairy, eggs and bread. The green dots indicate where their food goes. They donate food to local pantries, the Sister Market, Warner Public Market and they started aggregating for Fresh Start Farm in Concord, NH. It is a refugee farm supported by the organization ORIS. They started working with regional producers to bring in grains and coffee. Every product has a very clear label and source identification. Their staff is very knowledgeable about each product and how to use it. They offer recipes and weekly newsletters to inform and inspire people around using local foods. There is a 25% veteran's discount on all products, all the time. They also started accepting SNAP and EBT to make it more accessible to everyone.
- 2020 Impact of Kearsarge Food Hub: The way they coordinate their food is a unique home-grown system. They created relationships with local farmers, used Google Spreadsheets, took and placed orders and coordinated delivery. They built, a Cold Storage facility which is used to store all of their products. Last year, over 17,000 pounds of produce, meat, groceries and baked goods were donated. In response to COVID, they increased their donations by 737% to serve 7+ food pantries and backpack programs that reach over 200 households. They use their non-profit infrastructure to place orders with farmers and deliver customers the food that they request. They made about \$45,000+ in products for Warner Public Market. They also grow on their own Sweet Beet Farm over 13,395 pounds. They are really focusing on regenerating farming, practices that not only nourish the land but are also viable in business for small farms. They are testing a paper pot Trans planter which has reduced their onion planting time by weeks. Last year they planted 800 onions in 2 hours. They're using chain seeders and a greens harvester for their salad produce. They are gaining the experience of using new tools in order to

recommend them to local farmers. They are working on their Organic certification this year.

- Long-term effect: The long-term effect of growing food in their area engages young folks to get involved in the agricultural sector. The average age of a farmer is about 62-65 years old. They want young people to see the value in farming and feel it as a viable career. They work with students from 1st grade to college level. It's all about helping them feel inspired, showing them what's possible and where their food comes from. For college students, they are working with one on developing her own farm as a new and beginner farmer. Their goal is to expose people to farming and helping them become farmers. It's not just isolated to student learning; they also include the whole community to learn about local food. Last year, before COVID hit, they held an educational series called 'Rooted'. They held it in their community room, inviting local chefs who prepared a meal of their choosing and talked about any aspect about eating local foods that interest the chefs.
- Nurturing Community: Their bedrock aspiration is to really nurture their community. They want people to feel like they belong, that they're a part of things and that this is their food system. They are involved with NOFA New Hampshire and the effort to increase membership among local growers and increase organic gardening. They are active in their community, participating in 4th of July and grilling competitions. Their FEED Kearsarge partnership (Food, Expansion, Education, and Distribution) started last year among community organizations interested in advancing food security for folks. Some projects they are continuing this year are 'Tray it Forward' on Spring Ledge Farm. They allowed people to sponsor a tray for a community member in need. Sweet Beet Farm coordinated all of their resources to distribute 250 gardens in a tray to food insecure households and inspire them to grow their own food. Colby Sawyer College students helped them put out educational materials all summer. In Bradford, they built three new garden beds. One at the elementary school, one at the food pantry and one at a young boy's home to help people learn how to grow food and take control. In addition, they hold workshops, host film screenings to look at Native American food ways and partnered with Native American Food Ways to talk about how it relates to their community and how they can support appropriate food for that community in their area. From this partnership, they are working on an Abenaki Seed project where heritage seeds will be passed out to local growers in the near future. Farmers can grow the crops and then donate them to the Abenaki Food pantry.
- Developing a Food Hub Network in NH: Sweet Beet owners started with a local food promotion grant in 2017 and finished it in 2019. , The purpose was an assessment of the Kearsarge Area. They met with local farmers, restaurants and institutions to see the two sides of the equation: who is growing food and who wants to buy more food. The grant led them to the concept of what is really needed, a State-wide Food Hub Network. This would allow collaboration to occur with Food Hubs and partnering farms to meet

institutional demands and/or the needs of larger markets. They are now in the second grant phase with the 'Specialty Crop Block Grant'. Specifically, they are looking at developing a network among all the partnering food hubs. It's a great representation of how all these pockets of local food activity can work together. If Kearsarge Food Hub collaborated with a shared network, they could potentially build a central facility and have trucks that move food and work to create farmer advocacy networks. They are waiting to review the business plan that will come of the grant. It will require a full-time logistics operator to manage the different food hubs and figure out how they can collaborate and amplify their connections across the State. They are a 501c3 Donor and Community supported nonprofit. Last year, even with COVID, over 40 people volunteered in their operations. Eighty seven people signed up for their Grow with Us Monthly Giving Program and 360 individuals donated in 2020. Looking to the future, they are interested in how to spread this message, being more accessible to more people and creating more space and jobs.

- Questions/Observations from Committee: Mr. Porter asked where they get their dairy and what kind of products, they are handling. They get milk and cheese from Contoocook Creamery. Based on customer demand, they get raw milk from Brookford farm. They started working with a lot of great creameries such as Abbott Creamery and Blue Ledge Farm. They use Walpole Creamery for ice cream and started incorporating Narragansett cheese from Rhode Island. They are working within the vision of Food Solutions New England, to increase food production in New England, up to 50% of what is consumed is produced locally by 2060. To fill this vision, they need to think regionally as well. Chair Keegan asked what essential elements to have driven the growth and evolution since 2015. The founders have been very invested in their mission and volunteered on innumerable occasions. In addition, the founding community members and so many different people have given a great deal to their mission such as donating land or money and volunteering at events. The owners of the Bradford Inn are also major investors. Their support and enthusiasm have added to making the business viable. Mr. Porter asked for clarification around sharing their kitchen. They were exploring a few different things. They had a café renting the kitchen. It closed down during COVID. The kitchen is currently closed for renovation. They have plans to, hopefully, fill the space with a focus on educational and volunteer opportunities. They also want to incorporate meal prep, whether to donate it to the Senior Center for Meals on Wheels or sell through Sweet Beet Market. There is an exciting project underway in Warner. The Harris Lodge was purchased by Main Street Warner Inc. They have designs for a food processing facility. Chair Keegan asked what the role of local Government has been. They work closely with the Planning Board and town government to ensure that on their end that they are doing everything appropriately. As a non-profit they haven't found a way to engage appropriately with the government. They are very interested in getting into more advocacy. Mr. Porter asked about what public health people they are working with. They are inspected by DHHS. All relevant programs meet code. Chair Keegan asked, given what Ms. Flanders has seen with this Ag Commission, what would she see as our role in

supporting the concept of the regional hubs and aggregation of their related organizations? She mentioned with the grant how they are currently working on the expansion of a regional food hub network. Another recommendation is farmer collaboration that specifically focuses on supporting farmers in identifying their needs such as access to land, business training and product development.

- There is a gray area now where farmers seek to be viable with more diverse offerings. They are now hosting events on their property. It becomes a question of whose job it is to regulate these offerings. They had a meeting to examine agritourism and what effect it has on their community. Generally, to sum it up, more farmer coordination across the board for our region is helpful. Mr. Porter asked if they set up farmer markets or channel it all through their system. They are channeling it all from their system. In the past, they have set up farmers markets but the goal of those was to move a bunch of food or as a marketing tool. They are invited to a lot of farmers markets, but they have their hands full with their capacity maxed out in their operations. They would love to support farmers markets and farmers getting involved in them. Mr. Sanborn asked if Ms. Flanders needs market space in this area. He has a location on Main St at the Junction of Route 3 and 4. His wife mentioned that she would be interested in doing a stand to sell goods. Ms. Flanders stated this was a great example of connecting people with land that's available and it seems like a great networking opportunity. They are approached a lot with these types of opportunities, but they don't participate directly. Instead, they would love to support others in doing so. One of Ms. Flanders' dreams is a happy hour where people want to get involved with others who have land and equipment and want to get started farming. She would love to keep in contact with Mr. Sanborn because there is a ton of opportunity out there. Chair Keegan asked Ms. Flanders to send a copy of her presentation to Ms. Hannah Gardner to make it part of the minutes and use it to disperse the word.
- Chair Keegan has been contacted by a Cooperative Extension Educator who works with the NH Food Alliance. They asked him to participate in a webinar during May to talk about Agricultural Commissions. He is waiting for more information. He will represent the Boscawen Commission and also asked if any other Commissioners would like to participate. As soon as he gets clarification, he will send out an email. Mr. Porter will send him talking points from a previous presentation in the Monadnock Region that Chair Keegan could use for reference.
- Mr. Porter has joined the Economic Development Committee as an AgCom representative. He has attended two meetings. The last meeting was a broad perspective meeting outlining their goals. They focused on the future of King St, including highway development and, possibly two more traffic circles for Boscawen. Mr. Porter suggested a sign on Depot St. pointing people from the bike trail up to town. The Committee has a field trip on Depot St next week. The planning group may bring in regional planning

commission resources and maybe get a sign made at the prison industry. They want to entice more rail trail users into Town for food and services.

- Mr. Porter asked for guidance on the sign directing trail users to King Street because at one point they talked about trying to find an agricultural link for that sign. He doesn't know if it is practical. There are some restaurants using local foods but not all and not year round. He asked for creative ideas to promote the link on the trail. An example he stated was "services and stores a quarter mile up the hill." He doesn't know how to do it without misrepresenting local food availability. Ms. Fournier suggested connecting to Crete's Farm Stand. Mr. Sanborn suggested putting a stand somewhere near Depot Street, perhaps working with the Bradford folks and selling local and regional fresh produce. Mr. Porter suggested making the sign generic and putting a weather protected pocket with agricultural information in it. He said at the beginning of the Bike Trail, near his home, they have a similar information pocket, and someone comes buy to refill it regularly. Chair Keegan said they could use the cards the Commission had printed a couple years ago. They list all the farms in the area. In addition, he stated Hackleboro Farm is starting to use their land next to Cumberland Farms. That may be a good venue for selling local products and promoting local agriculture. Mr. Tillman said research should be done on the Penacook Market. Ms. Fournier said it's a good point to see what is happening with it and what does the opportunity bring if they aren't opening. She asked if Josh Marshall will be doing his pumpkins. Chair Keegan has not heard from him. Ms. Fournier suggested if Josh Marshall doesn't grow his pumpkins that Mr. Sanborn's land would be a great place to grow a pumpkin patch. Mr. Sanborn agreed and asked for more input as far as what people would like to do. Chair Keegan asked Mr. Tillman to do a little research on the Penacook Market. Mr. Bevens said Penacook Market is trying to get into Bedde Electric for a Monday market in the front section They are going to try to work it with 'Making Matters'. They are trying to negotiate with Deedee Russel but she doesn't want people spending money on property because she wants it to be free. Mr. Porter said once the Roundabout plantings are in place, the Town sign may need some refreshing. He and his wife have put it on his to do list for this summer.

Next Meeting:

- Thursday, May 13th, 2021 @ 7pm.

Adjournment:

- Motion to adjourn by Mr. Tillman; seconded by Mr. Sanborn. All in favor. None opposed.

Respectfully submitted, Hannah Gardner