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NEWTON FARM COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES December 6, 2007

Meeting opened at 7:10 pm with the following attendees:

MEMBERS PRESENT: P. Lewenberg, Chair, J. Harper, J. Hepburn, L. Bruyn R. Shoul, D. Lang, and staff, Anne Phelps; V. Schnell and Jim Harper arrived later.

MEMBERS ABSENT: C. Lappin

MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC: Gene Rubin, NCF and Rebekah Smillie, NCF, Peter Barrer, NCF, and Lee Mottard

Newton Community Farm – update on current activities

New Member

Mr. Mottard introduced as possible representative from Parks & Recreation Commission to the Farm Commission. Mr. Mottard was given packet with draft minutes and agenda, the farm Ordinance, the Farm Commission Policies and Regulations, a list of members of the Farm Commission and the 2008 schedule of meetings. Peter L. said he hoped Mr. Mottard would decide to join the Commission.

Update on Farm

Rebekah Smillie, President of the Community Farm Board, provided the update. She said that Greg Maslowe is working on budgeting and planning for the next year, including planning for an orchard that will have pear, peach and apple trees (all dwarf varieties) on the Ledgebrook property. There will be 24 trees. Greg is planning to do early and late season cut greens (they will be started in the greenhouse) and providing them to local chefs (or to the CSA). This program will start in the fall, and is intended to fund a salary for Tom Libby. Greg is also advertising for a position for a work-share person to work the Friday farmer's market. Sign-up for CSA for next year will begin February 1 or 2; prior CSA members get to sign up a week early.

Peter L. asked how the farm was doing in terms of CSA shares. The amount of food going into CSA shares is about the same between 2006 and 2007, but the amount of food going to the Friday Farmer's Market is much higher, mainly because more of the field was in production this year, and from more double-cropping. Space will ultimately limit how much the farm can produce and the income from sale of the crops. The farm will add sales from the greenhouse and the orchard fruit. The farm does need a volunteer (work-share) person for the market, though, because the time it takes to transport and sell the food is not cost-effective for Greg to do.

In response to the discussion from last meeting about whether the farm is certified “organic”, Greg has been looking into the process for organic Certification. There is a lot of paperwork to be filled out and the certification costs about \$750/year (although part of it may be refundable).

Louise asked whether Greg needed help (perhaps from Green Decade) to fill out paperwork. Peter B. suggested that the Green Decade newsletter and the Newton TAB could interview Greg and publish the interview regarding the “organic” issue. Peter L. wants Greg to know that the Farm Commission does not intend to pressure Greg to get the farm certified “organic.” Ted Chapman noted that the certification is issued by the state, but the criteria are federal. Louise and Judith, when they attend the AgCom meeting on Saturday, can ask more about the benefits of becoming certified as “organic.” Becka has sent out the December appeal letter to approximately 950 people (an increase of perhaps 30 over previous mailing). There is no other fund-raising activity at present.

Repair work on the tractor: Ted said opinions about whether the (used, donated) tractor can take a front end loader are mixed. They have a front end loader available to them, but it will cost about \$4000 to have it installed on the tractor.

Low salt zone

Peter L. asked about the Farm Commission’s request for a salt-free or low-salt zone near the farm. Cheryl Lappin has communicated with Dave Turocy about this and staff is waiting for him to investigate further.

Update on barn repair

Peter B. reported that the Newton Community Farm Bard completed its exercise to understand its priorities regarding use of the barn. The Board engaged architect Russell Feldman to advise them on code requirements and how they related to structural issues as well as various uses to which the barn might be put. The board has three main priorities. The Exterior should look as it did historically. It will be red in color, and shingles are preferred unless there is cost reason to use clapboard. The roof could be metal or asphalt (it has been asphalt), and asphalt would be cheaper – metal would be better for solar power. The farm operation would need 4 bays and one upper loft.

The 3 highest priorities are:

Public bathrooms need to be installed with composting toilets preferred

Need space for 20 persons to meet, with preference for heated space

Need space for storage of educational materials

Would also like to have:

Large heated space for public events, w/facilities for food serving preferred

Basic kitchen

Lending library

Also want,

Laboratory material storage

Space for preparation of produce

Heated office space

Small tools workshop

Jim Harper said the house is large and might offer some space for some of the activities.

Architectural students from MA College of Art did a class exercise exploring ways the space of the barn could be used for the various activities. The Farm Commission would like to have a (one half hour) presentation from the students (perhaps at the February meeting) if it can be arranged. Ted will try to schedule this. Peter B. said the structural defects in the barn should be repaired before the start of June planting /growing season. The siding and roofing can be done over the summer (hopefully, without interfering with the rest of the farm operation. Then, the interior work can be done in the fall – or later as dollars and permitting hurdles are overcome, for plumbing, a kitchen, etc.

Barn clean-out – Vaunita removed copper and aluminum from the barn and took it to a scrap yard in Somerville and sold it for scrap. Vaunita will give the check received to the barn renovation fund.

[Rona had suggested we should get a copy of] Greg's [video-]taped talk to Conservation about the farm – Becka found a copy of the videotape on the internet and put a link to the video on the Angino web site.

General Business & Announcements

AgCom Workshop Dec 8th – Louise said all attendees to the workshop are being asked to answer three questions: What AgComs Are Doing, What AgComs are Planning To Do, & What Issues Do You Need Help With? Louise has prepared answers. Peter suggested that one aspect that the Newton Community Farm might need help with is how to meet the challenge of functioning as an organization plus fund-raising and [soliciting/utilizing] volunteers.

Budget: Ted asked whether Commission wanted a presentation on the budget in January or February. Last year the budget was presented at the January meeting and approved at the February meeting. Peter asked for a comparison of the actual numbers for 2007 to 2008 at the January meeting.

Possible representative (from Parks & Recreation) – what should go in information packet – Anne provided packet for Lee Mottard containing a copy of the agenda, the November draft meeting minutes, the ordinance, the policy and regulations, and the board membership.

Approval of 11/1/07 Minutes – Motion by D. Lang to approve November minutes with spelling correction. Seconded by R. Shoul. Vote: All approved. Motion passed.

Miscellaneous

Farm stand - Ted reported there has been some stealing from the farm stand. Greg asked the Commission for any ideas to curb this. Peter suggested a sign saying there is a video camera in use.

Next agenda – Anne said that, because she is taking vacation time & because of the holidays, the agenda for the Jan. meeting will be going out early, and asked if there were suggestions for agenda items. Items requested included: Quarterly budget report, AgCom workshop report, Barn update, Tree removal.

Farm name-awaiting response from Law Dept.

Crosswalk: will be on docket for next traffic council

Meeting adjourned at 9:00 pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Anne Phelps, Sr. Environmental Planner