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Mayor

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NEWTON FARM COMMISSION

MEETING MINUTES

February 5, 2009
7:00 pm at Newton City Hall
Room 209

MEMBERS PRESENT: J. Harper, Chair; J. Hepburn, D. Lang, L. Mottard
L. Bruyn, V. Schnell

MEMBERS ABSENT: P. Lewenberg, R. Lipof, R. Shoul

MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC: Greg Maslowe, Rebekah Smillie

L. Bruyn said R. Shoul is thinking of resigning from the Board and members should try to find a replacement for her.

Newton Community Farm Inc. Report

Report on Farm Operation

Peter Barrer reported that he is the new president of the Newton Community Farm, although Rebecka is still on the Community Farm board. He reported that classes have started and they are looking for a part-time education coordinator for the year.

Update on Barn Work

The barn door is expected to be installed by March, at the latest. The farm held a 'donor appreciation day' at the farm for the barn last Sunday. The CSA is fully subscribed. Seventy (70) shares were sold, including work shares. The NCF is rebuilding the web site – a new board member is doing the work. The Spring Fair is scheduled for May 17th this year. Greg is still working on insulation in the house. He reported that the seed order is done and he is working on a planting schedule. He will start seeds in the basement (if too cold in the greenhouse). He will be wholesaling greens to Whole Foods, which has a corporate mandate to buy from local farms. In May the farm stand will open.

L. Bruyn asked Greg if he is still excited about the farm work, and L. Mottard asked him how he finds living in the house. Greg responded positively to both questions.

General Business & Announcements

Business Plan

P. Barrer reported on some updates to the business plan and discussion followed. **Motion by L. Mottard to approve the 2009 Business Plan as revised 2-2-2009. Second by V. Schnell. Vote: All approved. Motion passed.**

Newton Farm Commission

1000 Commonwealth Avenue, Newton, Massachusetts 02459

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Contract with Newton Community Farm

J. Harper said the sub-committee met on January 15th, and the proposed changes to the contract were emailed to everyone (see attached). J. Hepburn said she has not seen it because her computer is not working, and V. Schnell also did not see the recommended changes. Anne forwarded the proposed changes to Ouida Young in the Law Department. Ouida said the longest contract the City has with anyone is 5 years, and she recommends a 5-yr contract with the NCF, that would be reviewed and can be extended at 5-yr intervals for up to a total of 20 years. J. Harper asks what is the mechanism for the City to act if it is not satisfied. Vaunita said a 20-yr term surprised her, and she wants to hear the advantages and disadvantages of such a long contract. Gene Rubin has said, in the past, that he thinks a longer contract would make it easier to get donations if the public is convinced the farm will be there for a long time. The Farm Community also needs stability for long-term planning. J. Harper asked about towns with larger farms that are leased out to farmers. Greg said that many such agreements may be made on a “handshake” rather than a detailed written lease agreement or contract. J. Harper, in response to his earlier question, noted that the original contract provides, that in case of a breach of contract, the City has the right to cancel the contract with 45 days written notice. That notice would be revised to 90 days in the new contract. The Business Plan and the 5-year plan will provide the framework for operations. **Anne was asked to mail out a copy of the original contract for review before the next meeting.**

P. Barrer said that, as a separate matter from the contract, the NCF would like help from the city to get water and sewer services to the barn, and some time in the future want to ask the BOA to remove the requirement for an annual audit. D. Lang asked, if the Ordinance is changed (to remove requirement for the audit, would it be a problem for the contract? P. Barrer said no – the contract makes reference to the Ordinance.

Pullet House & Greenhouse

Greg said he needs to double the size of the greenhouse to meet the demand for greens. He needs the room for lots of seedlings, some of which will be planted out, some sold at the Spring Festival, and some will be kept in the greenhouse until harvested for sale. They are organic seedlings. The farm is mostly ‘maxed out’ in terms of space and length of growing time, unless he uses the greenhouses to expand the growing season. There are no plans to heat the greenhouse. If he can protect the plants from desiccation by wind, and increase the daytime temperatures above freezing, he has no problem growing in winter (in the greenhouse). Barrels of water are stored in the greenhouse, which help stabilize the temperature. In order to expand the greenhouse, the pullet house needs to be moved/removed. P. Barrer said they are still not sure what they want to do with the shed, and whether they will try to use it as a toilet or a potting shed. It’s removal should be reviewed by the Historic Commission, which meets next on February 26th. Greg said the timing is critical and the new greenhouse needs to be in place as soon as possible in order to keep to the proposed production schedule. The pullet house must be demolished, because it is in such poor shape structurally, that it would surely collapse if they attempted to move it. Discussion ensued regarding the possibilities for re-use of the pullet shed. D. Lang asked if the Newton Farm Commission should be the applicant to the Historic Commission, or if the NCF should submit it.

Motion by J. Hepburn: to approve doubling the size of the greenhouse in the location and proposed footprint as proposed by NCF; to approve dismantling and removing the pullet shed after documentation of its appearance; and to approve shed reconstruction or replacement by a building of the same or smaller size, with plans for its use and location to be determined and approved within 1 yr of this date. Second by D. Lang for discussion. D. Lang proposed amending the motion to include: documentation of shed features by photographic and CAD files (of all 4 sides), and reconstruction or replacement in a format within the framework of attached documents (dated February 1, 2009); Vote to approve as amended: V. Schnell abstains. D. Lang, J. Harper, J. Hepburn, L. Bruyn, L. Mottard in favor. Motion passed.

NCF will submit the proposal to the Historic Commission with the emailed packet dated February 1, 2009, consisting of text and diagrams of the existing greenhouse and pullet house with alternative proposals for re-use of the shed.

Accessibility for Classes

P. Barrer said there is an effort to make all classes accessible, but the house is not accessible for people with disabilities, and some other locations of classes are also not accessible. He will make a presentation to the Mayor's Committee on Disabilities. And, he will put a statement on the class information sheets to inform people that, although the site is not ADA accessible, the NCF will make every effort to make them accessible.

January Minutes for approval

D. Lang reported that the Historic Commission staff, Brian Lever, says the information in last month's Farm Meeting minutes constitutes a misunderstanding of what was said regarding the Historic Commission's approval of the barn window. The Historic Commission approves the windows.

Motion by D. Lang to approve December meeting minutes. Second by V. Schnell. Vote: All in favor, except L. Bruyn, who abstained. Motion Passed.

Miscellaneous

MA Ag Commissions Conference- Jan 23-24. R. Lipof said he was interested in attending, but is not present to report. He can report at next meeting.

