

ENFIELD AGRICULTURAL COMMISSION
MINUTES OF THE REGULAR MEETING
Tuesday February 8, 2022

A Regular Virtual Meeting of the Enfield Agricultural Commission was called to order by Chair Karen LaPlante on Tuesday, February 8, 2022 @ 7:06 PM

ROLL CALL

Kathy Vose took the roll.

Present - Chair LaPlante, Commissioner Cote, Commissioner Pfeifer-Hall, Commissioner Dynia, Commissioner Vose, Commissioner Wyzga, Commissioner McGuire and Commissioner Kober.

Also present: Georgie Driver - Staff and Karen Timpone – Recording secretary

Absent – Commissioner Sacerdote

Approval of Minutes: A motion to accept minutes of January 11, 2022 was made by Commissioner Vose and seconded by Commissioner Kober – Commissioner Cote questioned whether the members of the public spoke at the EAC meeting or the ECC meeting and it was determined that the minutes were correct and they spoke at the EAC meeting – after discussion a motion was made by Commissioner Cote to accept the minutes as written and seconded by Commissioner Kober - passed unanimously 7/0/0 – Commissioner Wyzga was not logged into the meeting at the time of the vote.

Public Participation: Justin Latkofsky of 346 Brainard Road, Enfield, CT – he owns and operates Johnny’s Roadside Market off of N. Maple St and also has farmland on Brainard Road – behind his house. He is here to discuss the 490 changes – parcels were taken out of tillable B and put into tillable A which changes the bracket. Land that has barns and scrub brush areas that would normally not part of the tillable side of it, which is basically the whole side of it (around tobacco sheds) was now considered tillable A. He feels that is not fair. The 490 from his understanding is what is useable and is what the land owner/user says is usable. There are some swamp areas at the edges of some properties that the Assessor is saying should be taxed at tillable A. To his knowledge there is not much tillable A. Most of the soil in Enfield is considered tillable B. He explained that there were some areas that were written in as scrub, woodland, wasteland and were kicked out of that classification to tillable soil. He suggested to any farmer who is concerned about the new classifications that they fight it now as it will be locked in for five years and there is no going back. There may also be a new mill rate coming out. Chair LaPlante asked if he was sent a letter or if there was any communication telling him his qualifications for 490 were changed. There was a form sent out to have the land owner state what the land use was and the Assessor did change some of them. Commissioner McGuire stated that it is the actual use of the property. These properties already had their applications approved for the land use and if there was no change in the use of the land, there should be no change in the status of the land. Commissioner McGuire asked the Assessor how he made his determination and he said he drove by some, tried to visit some, and went by the topography. Commissioner McGuire asked Justin if the Assessor contacted him before he made the changes and Justin said he did not and does not think the Assessor visited his farm. Commissioner Pfeifer-Hall stated that even the wetlands maps are not 100% accurate and is for general use only and a soil scientist would need to determine what they are. Chair LaPlante stated that at the time of the application it was accepted by the Assessor and should not be just changed without speaking to the landowner/farmer. On a reassessment year they have until December 30th to appeal but some of the letters did not go out until the beginning of December and the forms were filled out in May. Justin suggested if anyone has an issue or trying to fight

the new assessment they should go to Town Hall and get the history of each parcel. It is 50 cents per sheet. It has the tillable soils and history. Chair LaPlante stated that anyone who has a question/issue should call the Assessor him to talk to him before the deadline and file for the appeal. The deadline has been pushed to March this year. Justin suggested that anyone going before the Assessor have all the information needed prior. Justin also stated that different barns in the town are taxed differently even if built in the same year/same size depending on where they are. Chair LaPlante stated that the EAC is going to try to get Joan Nichols from the CT Farm Bureau to come talk to the farmers regarding the 490 interpretations and regulations.

Correspondence : None.

Review of Bylaws: Commissioner Kober made a motion to table this discussion to a later date- seconded by Commissioner Pfeifer-Hall – passed unanimously.

Approval of Invoices or other Financial Matters: None.

Reports of Officers, Committees and Staff: Georgie stated that Art Mullen has decided to withdraw his application for the Community Farmland Preservation Program. He decided he would like to do other things with his land and being in the program restricts him from doing. He did not find out about the restrictions until he got close to finishing the process. Georgie told him that he would qualify for the open space preservation program. He did not give any indication if he would pursue this. Georgie did state that there are other farmers in town who may be interested in the Community Farmland Preservation Program and hopefully another farmer will apply and asked the EAC if they knew of any farmers that may be interested.

Unfinished Business:

POCD – This was tabled until next month. Commissioner Cote asked about the timeline for completion of the POCD. Georgie stated they are not close to finishing yet due to COVID, etc. She would like to finalize it sometime this year.

New Business: Chair LaPlante sent everyone a draft letter to the Town Council regarding the 490 program. She had a conversation today with Joan Nichols of the Connecticut Farm Bureau and she pointed out some statues regarding the 490 property tax status. She wanted input from the EAC regarding the comments made in the letter. Chair LaPlante attended the Town Council meeting on Monday night. They met with the Assessor in an early meeting which was part of the Executive Session. The last item in the special meeting was with the Assessor and John Wilcox about the reevaluation. She said it is not only the 490 parcels, but it is the home daycare centers, and nonprofits, The Food Shelf, Loaves and Fishes and Mt Carmel etc., that have lost tax exemptions. They should have the new Grand list before the end of the month. A lot of the Town Councilors have gotten complaints from these various business, etc. They felt they were blindsided by the complaints. Out of 238 in 490, 77 were removed and 161 are still on. He was down to 50ish out of the 77. He suggested that they call him and he is will respond. Due to overwhelming response and time constraints for the meeting it was not able to be completed and they want to schedule another meeting. Chair LaPlante is not sure if it will be at the next meeting or not so she wanted to send a memo with EAC input and point of some of issues and see what can be done. Commissioner McGuire stated that there have been significant complaints from many farmers that the Assessor was on their property unannounced, uninvited and they were not aware of it. He is reporting what the farmers are telling him to the EAC. Georgie commented on the second to last bullet point and she is not sure if that is 100% true and what the town rules are. The last bullet point is a standard fee for all Departments for copies at 50 cents per page. Georgie stated that she would like them to be prepared for anything that may hinder this and possibly without proof (pictures) that anyone was on their property. Commissioner Cote suggested that bullet point states that it has been reported to members of the EAC that employees from the

Assessor's office have been entering properties unannounced. Justin suggested that they ask specific landowners who had town employees on their property without permission send the EAC a written statement. Commissioner Kober suggested this letter be shortened to a summary of 1 to 2 pages. He felt the state statues do not need to be included. He also suggested they omit the word complaint and use inquiries, concerns, etc. Chair LaPlante stated she put the state statues in to make the point. Commissioner Kober suggested maybe using foot notes or include a supplemental page with the Statues. Commissioner Cote would like to see paragraph 2 under the bullet points to be removed due to the legality. Commissioner Cote suggested adding one the complaints to the letter – ex. two parcels abutting each other and some of it woodland was taken out of 490. He suggested in the letter they state that there are enough questions concerning the 490 changes that the EAC recommends the Town of Enfield delay the implementation of all changes to the 490 assessments. We recommend the town request from the State or Department of Agg for interpretation of the 490 laws and then do a revaluation of all properties in 490 for the Town of Enfield. Georgie suggested the word “illegally” be taken out in the second paragraph as there are no actual pictures or proof. It was suggested that it be worded as, based off of complaints, it appears that the Enfield Tax Assessor offices may be improperly implementing the PA490 statutes. Commissioner Dynia asked specifically who has received complaints – Commissioner McGuire Commissioner Vose and Chair LaPlante have. He suggested they all be documented. Georgie asked them to contact these people and ask them to e-mail the complaints. It was suggested the business friendly paragraph be taken out or edited. Chair LaPlante asked the commissioners to e-mail her the all the suggestions/changes to the letter and she will put it all together. She would like to have a consensus via email to have the letter finalized and then sent out to Town Council. Georgie will forward the finalized letter to Town Council.

Chair LaPlante is trying to set up a special meeting for Joan Nichols to come and speak to the local farmers about PA490 program. She suggested possibly a breakfast on a Saturday, or during the week at the Town Hall, or Fermi Annex. Joan said she could do it in person or virtual. It takes about an hour and a half to explain all the details and she allows at least two hours for time to answer questions. Chair LaPlante asked if the EAC would like a 490 presentation or should they just address the problems. They would like to have a presentation and Georgie will find a time and venue that will work. Commissioner Dynia would like to see it at the Annex Building. Commissioner Pfeifer-Hall asked about the timeframe of the meeting with Joan Nichols since mid-March is the last day to file for an appeal, Chair LaPlante thinks the farmers would like to come to an informational meeting prior to that. Joan is not available Monday or Friday nights but can do daytime or nighttime on other days. Commissioner McGuire thinks it should be before the appeal date and stated that Joan may be able to give, besides the informational meeting, tips on going for the appeal. Chair LaPlante asked Georgie to see what dates are available for the Fermi Annex and she will call Joan with the dates. The date of Wednesday February 23rd will be looked into. Georgie will discuss it with Laurie and get back to Chair LaPlante.

Next Meeting Date: Tuesday, March 8, 2022

Adjournment: A motion to adjourn was made by Commissioner Dynia seconded by Commissioner Vose – passed unanimously – 8/0/0

The meeting was adjourned @ 8:36 pm