

Burlington Conservation Commission
Meeting Minutes
Tuesday, Mar 16, 2021 – Virtual Meeting via Zoom
7:00 PM

1. Call to Order: Chairman Melanie Wilhelm called to order at 7:04 PM. Present: Tom Finan, John Hebert, Richard Miller, Jackie Shadford, Melanie Wilhelm. Absent: Tom Roberge, Mitchel Kvedar. Guests: Jon Crane, Whigville Preservation Group & Burlington Land Trust; Dwight Harris, Johnnycake Mountain Assoc.; Rob LaMothe, Lamothe's Sugar House; Jordan Tonn, Tonn's Marketplace & Farm.
2. Review/Accept Minutes: MOTION made, seconded and passed unanimously to accept Meeting Minutes from February 16, 2021 (Finan/Miller).
3. Citizens Comments: Invited guests comments were deferred to Agenda item 5.a. Municipal Tax Reduction Program for Farmers.
4. Communications: None
5. Old Business:
 - a. Municipal Tax Reduction Program for Farmers:

Chairman Wilhelm gave an overview of the four year process by the CC to encourage the BOS to review and accept a proposed ordinance to be voted on by residents of the town. Wilhelm received a list from Town Assessor Beth Paul of eligible PA 490 farmers who might qualify for an additional Municipal Optional Tax Exemption on farm buildings used exclusively for agriculture. At a recent BOS meeting Assessor Paul said she believed the tax liability to the town might cost approximately \$12,900 a year.

CC members and guests participated in a discussion where all agreed this ordinance would help to retain Burlington's rural character and preserve its farms and agricultural heritage, provide locally produced products and support the local economy.

The farmers recognized that none of them are getting rich from farming and the capital investment for machinery and maintenance of barns and out buildings can be daunting. The farmers prefer to retain their land, even as they face the pressure to sell for profit to developers for residential housing. Their more important desire is for them to be able to leave a legacy to their children, grandchildren and future generations.

CC members asserted that if farmland was sold and converted to single family housing then property taxes would not cover the cost of services the town provides to a household (i.e., education budget). The group discussion contended that the town's Economic Development Commission would propose a tax break

for new commercial development, and it should consider the same for farms. Burlington's 2020 Plan for Conservation Development (POCD) encourages the retention of existing farms, new farms and forestry. The Plan also encourages the town to consider the adoption of a tax exemption ordinance for farm related operations, as in Connecticut General Statutes CGS 12-91.

MOTION (Hebert/Miller) The Conservation Commission shall provide more details to the Board of Selectman to revisit a vote for an agricultural Municipal Optional Tax Exemption on farm buildings. Vote passed unanimously 5-0.

The CC Board has directed Chairman Wilhelm to request a meeting with the BOS to present the Motion stated above.

- b. Johnnycake Mountain Recreation Facility: A newly selected Johnnycake Mountain Park Advisory Commission will be creating a survey of residents, using Monkey-Survey, requesting input as to ideas in planning the Park's design. Commission Members are requested to send their ideas to Tom Finan. MOTION (Hebert/Shadford) Request that the Board of Selectman install Tom Finan as a representative of the Conservation Commission to the JMPAC in light of recent resignation of a member. Vote passed unanimously 5-0.
- c. Open Space/Land Acquisition: Chairman Wilhelm received a reply from the BOF, forwarded through First Selectman Ted Shafer, concerning the request of \$15,000 funds for Land Acquisition for the 2021/2022 Town Budget. The BOF is not inclined to budget any money unless there is a surplus at the end of the year.
- d. Recycling: Mark Bobman of Bristol Resource Recovery Facility responded to a letter of assistance regarding ideas that the Commission can implement in order to improve waste management and recycling in our town. The letter was forwarded by email to all Commission Members. The Board will address these concerns at the next meeting.
- e. Sustainable CT: Kvedar was unable to attend the meeting.
- f. Earth Day 2021: Shadford decided against providing a video of Hard Rain Farm due to lack of technical experience and equipment. She and Wilhelm will work together on a children's photo/drawing contest. Assistant Town Clerk Christa Renalter is willing to manage the contest on the town website.

Shadford spoke to Linda Graham of Renaissance Farm (36 Town Line Road). She has agreed to have her farm included on an Open Farm Day Tour.

- 6. New Business: Tom Finan was concerned with pesticide use and warning signage at the Rails to Trails. He will speak to Public Works Director Scott Tharau on the matter and he will report back at the next meeting.

MOTION (Hebert/Finan) was made to purchase a voice recorder to help aid the Secretary with meeting minutes. Motion passed unanimously 5-0.

Chairman Wilhelm will speak with the Lewis Mills Principal concerning the school's Eco-Club and their participation with the Conservation Commission.

7. Adjourn: Motion made (Miller) and seconded (Hebert). Motion passed unanimously to adjourn at 9:03 pm.

Next Meeting: April 20, 2021. Details to follow.

Respectfully submitted,
Jackie Shadford, Secretary