

Lanesborough Agricultural Commission Meeting Minutes – February 7, 2008

Attendees: regular members - Prudy Barton, Pete Gallant, Marv Michalak
alternate members - Darlene Newton, Aimee Thayer

The meeting opened at 7:03 p.m. in the Planning Board Room at the Lanesborough Town Hall.

1. **Maple Tree Tapping** - Prudy informed Commission members that the issue of tapping public shade sugar maples on upper North Main Street had been resolved between the Tree Committee and the farmer who had been tapping the trees. The farmer has opted to stop tapping the trees.
2. **Ag in the classroom** - Prudy is planning attending a follow-up Ag in the Classroom meeting in the near future. Marv is pursuing the possible visit to his greenhouse operation by students from Lanesborough Elementary School.
3. **New Ag Commissioner** - The newly appointed Commissioner of Agriculture, Doug Petersen, accompanied by Assistant Commissioner Soares made a visit to the Berkshires in the past month to introduce themselves and listen to folks discuss agricultural concerns in Berkshire County. Prudy and Aimee attended this meeting at the Berkshire Athenaeum. Prudy vocalized the concern regarding the availability of large animal vets and the dilemma of trying to administer appropriate medical care to livestock, especially in an emergency situation. The inability of a farmer to procure hypodermic needles to administer vaccines is one of the major problems. Commissioner Petersen noted that it seemed that if there was a legal way for administer a needle exchange program for humans it ought to be achievable to come up with some solution for legitimate home veterinary applications of medical supplies. A few days after their visit to the Berkshires, Commissioner Petersen and Assistant Commissioner Soares also attended an Ag Com workshop in Northampton. Aimee was in attendance and picked up literature for the Commission members and reviewed topics discussed including Chapter 61 provisions and the Agricultural exemptions under Mass General Law. She noted that the issues brought up at that meeting echoed the concerns at the Berkshire meeting a few days before. Another idea put forth at the roundtable discussion at the workshop was to insert a copy of the Right to Farm By Law in residents tax bills to make sure property owners were aware of its existence.
4. **Energy Issues** - Members discussed the impact of high energy costs on the agri-businesses in Berkshire County. Aimee and Prudy gave a report on a meeting sponsored by the Adams Ag Commission on the proposed Berkshire Bio-diesel facility. Their intention is to generate 50 Million gallons of fuel a year. The purpose of the meeting was to familiarize Berkshire Farmers with the bio-diesel process and offer the opportunity for farmers to be able to grow feedstock crops on marginal land not currently use for feed or food production. Aimee indicated that there would be a USDA Rural Development meeting on their energy grant program and value-added grant program sometime in the next month and she would let everybody know when and where it was scheduled.
5. **Farm Inventory Survey** - so far 35 responses have been returned out of 250 mailed. Darlene volunteered to take them home and go through them, entering data into a spreadsheet program she is developing to evaluate the responses. reviewed and refined by the commission. The intention of the survey is to get an idea of the breadth and type of farming in Lanesborough, including part time and hobby farmers. Once finalized, this Commission would like to include the survey in a future town wide mailing.
6. **Ag Commission Business** - Pete Westover, consultant for the DAR to the Ag Commissions requested a letter of support for funding of a yearly Ag Commission Conference. Prudy drafted a letter which the members endorsed.
7. **Dog problems** - A report of harassment of livestock by dogs had been received by a commission member. The resident was interested in state law regarding the issue.
8. **Warrant Article** - after discussion it was decided that Pete Gallant will draft a warrant article for the annual town meeting providing for the establishment of a bank account to hold any funds received by the Commission for program implementation.

Adjournment and next meetings

The Commission confirmed the next meeting next for March 6th, and the following one for April 3rd, 2008 at 7:00 p.m. each date in the Planning Board Room at Lanesborough Town Hall.

A motion was made, seconded and passed to adjourn at 8:43 p.m.