MINUTES
AGRICULTURAL COMMISSION
SPECIAL MEETING
April 3, 2024
6:30 PM - SCITICO ROOM

1. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 6:30pm.

2. ROLL CALL

Present: Karen LaPlante, Gretchen Pfeifer-Hall, Kathleen Vose, Nancy Wyzga, Michael Dynia

Absent: William Cote

Also present was Mayor Ken Nelson, Councilor Bob Hendrickson, Councilor Michael Ludwick, Councilor John Santanella, Town Attorney; Tom Tyler, and Recording Secretary; Rebecca Jones. Also present was Board of Assessment Appeals members Lori Longhi and Donna Dubanoski.

3. NEW BUSINESS

A. Members of the Agricultural Commission have been invited to attend a meeting with the General Governance Committee of the Enfield Town Council, Joan Nichols from the Connecticut Farm Bureau, and interested farmers to discuss potential tax breaks for farmers.

Councilor Ludwick thanked everyone for attending. He introduced Joan Nichols of the Connecticut Farm Bureau Association. Ms. Nichols explained that there are a number of tax reduction programs for eligible farmers. Some of the programs are mandatory statewide. Other programs offer municipal options. There are three municipal optional tax reduction programs. The first option offers farmers a $100,000 tax exemption on farm buildings. The exemption is per building and the municipality may choose a level of exemption up to $100,000. There are specific criteria that must be met to be eligible. The second option allows for an additional $100,000 exemption for farm machinery, horses and ponies. This would provide an additional $100,000 exemption from personal property tax for farm machinery, horses and ponies on top of the state-mandated $100,000 exemption, bringing the total exemption to $200,000. The third option is a property tax abatement for up to 50% of the property taxes for eligible farms. All three options require the same criteria to be met and are voted upon by the municipal legislative body. Once the ordinance is voted upon, it will go into effect on the next grand list.

Ms. Nichols shared model ordinances from other communities who utilize these exemptions. Many towns offer a combination of these options or allow each farmer to pick which option best suits them. Mayor Nelson mentioned the possibility of offering one or two out of three exemptions. There will be an impact on the grand list because the reduction of paid property taxes must be made up elsewhere. Chair LaPlante asked how these municipal options affect existing agricultural exemptions. Councilor Ludwick is working with the Finance Director to get a model of how this will affect the grand list. He is also working to find out if this applies to 490 land. Ms. Longhi asked about the effect of the current inflated values of farmland.

Ms. Nichols explained information related to House Bill 5492. This aims to provide farmers with an investment tax credit on their Connecticut income tax for captial improvements. It has bipartisan support and will be voted upon within the next month. Attorney Tyler asked about the bill's timeline. He made a suggestion that the town should begin preparing draft ordinances assuming passage of House Bill 5492.

Chair LaPlante shared that the Agricultural Commission and Conservation Commission are both short on members and encouraged those in attendance to sign up. She shared that the POCD includes language surrounding the creation of farm-friendly zoning regulations. She mentioned the possibility of a subcommittee so that current members can get feedback from farmers as to what regulation changes would best suit them. She also shared information on PFAS in biosolids and urged farmers to not use biosolids on their property. Farmers in attendance shared feedback as to what tax exemptions they would find valuable. Councilor Ludwick does believe this has bipartisan support and he would like to work with the Agricultural Commission to prepare the draft ordinances. Ms. Longhi explained how the abatement option would be applied. Chair LaPlante spoke about the Farmland Preservation Fund. Councilor Ludwick thanked everyone in attendance and suggested that these meetings happen twice yearly.

4. DATE OF NEXT REGULAR MEETING

A. April 9, 2024

5. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 7:36pm.

Prepared by: Rebecca Jones, Recording Secretary.