

**Town of Boscawen**  
Agricultural Commission  
Meeting Minutes – Draft  
Boscawen Municipal Complex  
January 11, 2018 7:00 pm

Members Present: John Keegan – Chair, Rusty Colby, John Porter, Josh Marshall,

Members Absent: Tina Larochelle,

Ex-Officio Absent: Roger Sanborn

Alternate Member Absent: Ken Marshall

Others Present: Alan Hardy, Linda Chandonnet

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Chairman Keegan called the meeting to order at 7:00pm with a voting board.

Roll call made by Chair Keegan.

Accountant Report will be emailed as it was not available for the meeting.

Review and Acceptance of Prior Meeting Minutes:

Chair Keegan asked if anyone had any changes to the previous minutes from 12/14/2017 and the following changes were made: Line 46 - How will it be taxed. (Take out the question mark and parentheses and just put commas) Line 42 – One of the reasons, (add letter s), Line 43 - form (change to from), Line 47 – Take out (also) Line 53 – take out extra period, Line 53 – capitol (change to capital), Line 56 – So, if the assessor is looking market value at (change to as), Line 61 - (change to In regards (capital I for in and take out letter s in regards), Line 66 - doesn't (change to does not) Line 69 - (change from spectrum to municipality) Line 70-71 - from municipality to municipality Line 72 - after issue (put period) You have to make sure the accessor understands (take out come up is) Line 77 - farm Credit (change to capital F) Line 79 - One of three approaches. Line 89 - after question mark (change to if permanent) also correct word to permanent, Line 94 - has two periods, Line 99 - after Sanborn (add word mentioned) after example (add that) Line 134- under annual report section should have a bullet point.

**Motion made to accept the October minutes by Mr. Marshall and seconded by Mr. Colby amended. All in favor, none opposed.**

Land Use Happenings:

Chair Keegan asked the Board what they would like to do with all the information they have been hearing and collected on the subject of taxation of farm buildings.

Mr. Porter stated he thinks they are on to something for getting help on the agricultural community. He said Dave Bishop suggested Farm Bureau and he isn't sure if Rob Johnson II who the Policy Director would be the person there and is looking at the bigger picture and not just at us. Since Mr. Johnson II does have a good report with them it was suggested to possibly have the municipal association have it in an educational way and talk with the assessors or go to one of their meetings.

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Chair Keegan said at the end of a previous meeting Cara Penley had made an interesting point that they do assessments on a contract. Rusty Colby mentioned the idea of possibly assessing the two sugarhouses and both using different municipalities, roughly with the same equipment as examples of how the same materials are assessed in a different way. Josh Marshall added the goal would be to show disparity and provide them with something that would require them to bring it up with Avitar or whomever. Chair Keegan asked Mr. Porter what he sees them taking to Farm Bureau and the Municipal Association. Mr. Porter stated he thinks bringing what they have learned at Farm Bureau and Municipal Association is loss capital, specialized equipment, specialized structures, equipment vs. real estate are all those kind of issues that many people are not exposed to a lot.

Mr. Marshall stated that if you brought something like that to Farm Bureau maybe the aim should be to get them to develop some language to define those issues that you are talking about of equipment vs. real estate. He thinks that would be what their role would be and in regards to what Farm Bureau does in terms of legislation and if there is a rule or more definition that needs to be correct.

Chair Keegan stated that in what he had heard in Ms. Penley's presentation is that municipal assessors are not aware of the details and finer points that really drive the issue of single use buildings as an example. Technology in the agricultural fields is evolving in such a way that things that may have been previously looked at traditionally as a structure are now part of the equipment side of things. John Porter added that many agricultural structures really are single use in a lot of ways and not easy to convert. Chair Keegan mentioned what Cara had previous stated that on the useful life if you are putting up a new barn you can expect the life of that facility to be around 20 years which does affect the depreciation in a significant way. It is things like this that are not captured by the municipal assessors when they are looking at these kind of structures.

Mr. Colby stated that even if Farm Credit would come up with a plan the town still has to accept a change and he thinks this is more of a long term issue than just saying this is right. So, the question is how do you get to the first step? Mr. Hardy stated that there is one book for the entire state. Mr. Marshall added that you would have to get something changed in it that more accurately reflects what is going on in agriculture. Mr. Hardy added, you have to walk away from perception vs. reality. The difference between the two barns that was given for example was the tax rate. So, when we are doing an analysis and trying to get things better we have to work on facts and not perception. We went for a long time thinking the Boscawen Assessors were putting all the equipment into the conversation and we found out they did not.

Chair Keegan said one way to do this is to contact a few of the Agriculture Commissions in the towns of Durham and Lee. To have a discussion between the three towns to see if there is some way to get their hands around it and put it into the hands of someone to carry it state wide. One point that Mr. Hardy made is that this cannot be done here on a town level.

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Mr. Hardy added that property owners have an opportunity every five years and Boscawen is required by statute to reevaluate the towns' total values. That means in the calendar year 2018 we will go completely around the town and reset values based upon current data. If a change in value through a discussion happens in 2018 it's the rarest of all opportunities because if you get the value taken down in 2018 it goes down and stays down and it effects your tax bill positively. It is the one year when it adds up all the number so if having the lowest possible number. After the assessment is completed every property owner will receive a letter that states this is where you are right now and if you'd like to talk about it you can call us up and schedule an appointment. That is where the golden opportunity to have a conversation with the assessor is because if you can convince them, then the adjustment is made before the total is redone. It is an opportunity that every property owner will have for a conversation without going through the formal appeal process. When he was asked if the total valuation goes up does the rate go down Mr. Hardy replied yes, and that he does think that is what will happen. They saw the rising trend that has happened when they were going into the 2012-2013 time frame. What they follow for trends is what we are seeing right now and there are two things are happening,

1. The total assessable taxable value of the town is will go up.
2. As of today without the revaluation the total taxable value of the town has gone up by over 6 million dollars and that is with new construction.

If you take the total value up that will take our tax rate down. If we could get large scale of agricultural development considered in a way that we could help assist and give something to the firm to get it up and running. In a conversation that he previously had with Karl Johnson who is a Partner and Farm Outreach Director of Pete & Jerry's, he asked if this is a good business for a farmer to get into. The answer he was given is, we always want it to be a family, and they will only be allowed two barns. While they are paying the loan off it is subsistence but when the note is paid off it is a good living. It takes about seven years to pay off the note and if they had the means to have a positive impact in that period and we could provide some sort of relief that could go away in ten years, then you are giving them an opportunity to get started.

Mr. Marshall stated what Mr. Hardy is talking about now makes more sense at their level because it's for Boscawen residents. What they were previously talking about was at a state level and it is not something they can change specifically on their own. Even if they would educate every assessor on different things they are still going to go by the book. He asked if our time and purpose is more valuable in trying to look at what Mr. Hardy is saying or if the town can make a way to help farms and attract more farms to come here after we speak to other agriculture commissions and if people want to get at it and then go to who it is we need to talk to and say this is an issue? Maybe our time would be more valuable working on creative ways to help new agricultural businesses in Boscawen. Mr. Hardy replied that he thinks this is correct and there are two phases to this. There is the part that they control as voters in Boscawen but the other part of it is the

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incentive program has not been opened up to include agriculture. That would be the legislative step and we as towns get to drive it home after that. The legislative change has to take place first. Mr. Porter added that he thinks we can do both of these parallel but it is going to be a long slow process. Mr. Colby said there has to be some education on it and to include the selectmen.

Mr. Hardy stated that the challenge is that we as a community are not supportive of reaching out to find nonresidential property owners. He asked where the town would be without Electrasola and Ross Express. Electrasola was one that the three selectmen who had said they had enough of this and went out and found them. He said they are not too concerned with finding a business, the issue is finding the land. Chair Keegan added that in terms of available land the two enterprises they were talking about had the land it is just the question of can they finance it. How can the commission act in a way that is going to add an incentive there and to do what they are contemplating. Mr. Hardy stated that if we can find businesses like Farm Credit East or any of those types of organizations and if they would look at it then we can make the connection.

Chair Keegan said that in regards to aligning with two other commissions such as Durham and Lee, maybe the discussion should start around (TIF) Tax Increment Financing. This way in the shorter term we get something that will give Boscawen an offer for agriculture here and put the other one on the table. He doesn't feel our vision is very clear here and that we need to be. Mr. Marshall added that he liked what Chair Keegan was saying because there is an achievable goal. There is a benefit that is not open to agriculture and we would like to pursue to see if that can happen and if you are seeing that in your areas too. Then the conversation can go abroad.

Mr. Porter said he thinks that a meeting with Durham and Lee is a good idea. There is an added advantage of having Chair Theresa Walker who is Durham's Planning and Development because she has some good connections.

Mr. Colby stated that as a commission we will not be able to do it ourselves. The people in the town of Boscawen also have to want it. There will also be some opposition. If something is going to be presented it has to be done in an orderly and legal way. If someone was going to build a barn, they should not just build it, they should first try talking to the selectmen or come to the board because many times you can say I need a tax break or it may be something else that is needed and there are ways to do this. It is possible that something can be done before it is built. Mr. Hardy added that someone asking for a hand getting started is something we can all understand.

Mr. Marshall said the easiest thing would be to reach out to the other agriculture commissions and invite them to our next meeting or to go to their meeting and talk to see whether there is any traction. Mr. Hardy added they started something many years ago at the NH Fair Association in VT that worked very well. Every time they got together and they had a seminar they would say "I have an idea" he said this helped them and it found ways to make things happen.

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Chair Keegan stated that he will call Durham and Lee and try to use our meeting date and say we could go there to talk. UNH is also there and we could share a meal before going and say we have an idea. Mr. Porter suggested, what if we offer to go to one of their scheduled meeting dates as a courtesy. It would benefit us more going to their town meeting because many of the members will be there. Erick Sawtelle is also the Chairman at one of the Committees at Farm Bureau and he talks about legislation.

**Motion made to contact the town of Durham or Lee Commissions and offer to join in their meeting and discuss by Mr. Marshall and seconded by Mr. Colby, All in favor, none opposed.**

Chair Keegan added that he would want to go to this during the daytime in February.

Old Business:

Town Report: Chair Keegan stated the Towns Report was well written and thanked Mr. Marshall, Mr. Porter and Jeff Abbe for doing a great job.

**Motion made to accept the Towns Report by Mr. Bevans and seconded by Mr. Colby, All in favor, none opposed.**

Chair Keegan stated that he wrote a thank you letters to Cara Penley and David Bishop who were here as last month as guest speakers.

Educational Program: Has no current update.

Community Garden: Has no current update, Chair Keegan is reaching out to Dot Perkins for more information.

New Business:

Meeting time discussion: Chair Keegan asked the Committee if they would be open to the possibility of changing the Agriculture Committee meetings times to earlier in the evening and it was decided to keep the same time.

Other Business:

Chair Keegan asked if the future meeting dates for year 2018 looked correct, and the board agreed it looked fine.

Mr. Hardy asked if anyone has been to the Town Forest recently. If you do have a chance try to go in the spring because they have gone through and opened up a lot of the area and now there is five new acres of field that has been uncovered. They might also be interested in getting some

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additional help to do whatever might be needed there. The question is could we put that field into a production of some sort and future use.

**Motion to adjourn made by Mr. Porter and seconded by Mr. Marshall. All in favor, none opposed.**

Chair Keegan stated that for the next meeting he will reach out and call to Lee and Durham to attend their scheduled meetings as close to our next meeting date as possible.

The meeting adjourned at 8:45pm.

*Minutes respectfully submitted by Linda Chandonnet*