

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

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

Members Absent: Tina Larochelle, Bill Bevans

Alternate Member Absent: Ken Marshall

Others Present: Linda Chandonnet – Recording Secretary, Alan Hardy –Co-Administrator

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 assessor 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.

Commissioner Porter stated he thinks they are on to something getting help for the agricultural community. He said Dave Bishop suggested Farm Bureau and he is not sure if Rob Johnson, the Farm Bureau Policy Director, would be the person there looking at the big picture. Since Mr. Johnson does have good rapport with Municipal Association staff he suggested having the Municipal Association offer an educational program for the municipal assessors. Another option might be to go to one of the assessor's meetings with an educational program.

Chair Keegan said at the end of a previous meeting Cara Penley had made an interesting point that the Bank contracts to do assessments. Commissioner Colby mentioned the idea of possibly

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

assessing the two sugarhouses Roger Sanborn mentioned at the December meeting that had such dramatically different assessments. Each is in a different municipality but both have roughly the same equipment and are the same size. This could serve as an example of how the same structure and equipment are assessed differently. Commissioner Marshall added that the goal would be to highlight data showing the disparities between assessments and provide a reason for assessors to review their work.

Chair Keegan asked Mr. Porter what products he sees the AGCOM taking to Farm Bureau and the Municipal Association. Mr. Porter thinks bringing what we have learned about loss capitol, specialized equipment, specialized structures and equipment vs. real estate are all issues that many people in agriculture do not really understand. Mr. Marshall stated that bring something like that to Farm Bureau the aim might be to have them to develop legislative language to better define issues such as equipment vs. real estate. He thinks that would be a valuable service. Chair Keegan stated that Ms. Penley's presentation pointed out that municipal assessors are not aware of the details and finer points related to single use agricultural structures. Agricultural technology is evolving in such a way that items that may have been considered a structure may now be equipment. Mr. Porter added that many agricultural structures really are single use and not easy to convert. Chair Keegan mentioned what Ms. Penley had also noted that the useful life of a new dairy barn is around 20 years. That basis has a significant affect the depreciation schedule. It is things like this that are not captured by the municipal assessors when they are looking at these kinds of structures.

Mr. Colby stated that even if Farm Credit came up with a plan the town still has to accept the change. He thinks this is a long term issue. It is more 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 assessment book for the entire state. Mr. Marshall added that whatever the change, it must accurately reflect what is happening in agriculture. Mr. Hardy observed, you have to walk away from perception and deal with reality. For example, we went for a long time thinking the Boscawen assessors were putting all the equipment into the structural calculation for a newly constructed chicken barn but, upon careful review, found they had not. The difference between this and a similar barn in another municipality was the tax rate.

Chair Keegan said one way to move this question is to contact the Agriculture Commissions in Durham and Lee. To have a discussion among the three Commissions to determine if there is some way to 'get our hands around' these issues and find someone(s) to carry changes state wide. One point that Mr. Hardy made is that this cannot be done here on a town level.

Mr. Hardy noted that property owners have an opportunity every five years to review their property tax assessments. All towns in NH, like Boscawen, are required by statute to reevaluate the towns' property values. In 2018 Avitar will go to every assessed property in Boscawen and reset values based upon current data. If a property's value falls in 2018 and remains so it will have a positive

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

effect on your tax bill. After the assessment is completed every property owner receives a letter stating the assessment results and offering to schedule an appointment to discuss the results. It is an opportunity for a conversation about the assessment without going through the formal appeal process. When asked if the total valuation goes up does the rate go down Mr. Hardy replied yes. He does think that is what will happen. Town officials are following two trends:

1. The total assessable taxable value of the town is going 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 Boscawen could attract large scale agricultural development with some incentive or assistance it might be a way for them to get it up and running. In an earlier conversation Mr. Hardy had with Karl Johnson, a Partner and Farm Outreach Director of Pete & Jerry's, Mr. Hardy asked if selling eggs is a good business for a farmer. The answer was yes. Mr. Johnson explained they always want their contractors to be a family unit and will contract up to two barns. As for the finances, while paying the loan it is subsistence but at the seven year mark, when the note is paid off, it is a good living. For someone starting in the business, some sort of financial relief from the town or state, that lasted for ten years, would have a positive impact and provide an opportunity to get started.

Mr. Marshall stated what Mr. Hardy is talking about now makes more sense at our level because it's for Boscawen residents. What we were previously talking about was at a state level and it is not something we can change on their own. Even if we educated every assessor on different things they are still going to go by the book. He asked if our time and energy are more valuable in trying to look at what Mr. Hardy is saying or if the town can develop a way to help farmers and attract more farms to Boscawen after we speak to other agriculture commissions? Or do 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 citizens control as voters in Boscawen but the other part of it is the 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 approval of legislation. The legislative change has to take place first. Mr. Porter added that he thinks we can do both of these in parallel but it is going to be a long slow process. Mr. Colby said there has to be some education on both the process and the desired products and to include the selectmen.

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 short term we get something that will give Boscawen a possible support for agriculture and put the education idea on the table. However, he does not feel our vision is very clear and that we need to continue working to make it so. Mr. Marshall added that he liked what Chair Keegan was saying

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

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.

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 towns 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 Jim 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 months as guest speakers.

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

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 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