

**Town of Boscawen
AGRICULTURAL COMMISSION
Boscawen Municipal Complex
DRAFT MEETING MINUTES
Tuesday, July 11th, 2023, at 6:30 PM**

Members Present: John Porter-Vice Chair, Gary Tillman, Ralph Odell, Roger Sanborn, Bill Bevans—Ex-Officio & Julie Fournier-Alternate

Excused: John Keegan – Chair

Staff Present: Kearsten O’Brien— Deputy Planning & Community Development Director

Guests: Emma Richmond-Boudewyns—Fresh Start Farms & Prem Adhikari

Vice Chair John Porter opened the public meeting at 6:30 P.M.

Roll Call complete.

Review and Acceptance of Prior Meeting Minutes:

Mr. Gary Tillman motioned to approve the 06.13.23 draft minutes as amended. Seconded by Mr. Ralph Odell. All in favor. None opposed.

Financial Report:

Mr. Tillman motioned to approve the Financial Report through 07.11.23 as presented. Seconded by Mr. Roger Sanborn. All in favor. None opposed.

Fresh Start Farms: Ms. Emma Richmond-Boudewyns from Fresh Start Farms, located at Pustizzi Fruit Farm, discussed the program and their operations. Fresh Start Farms, as a portion of the Organization for Refugee and Immigrant Success (ORIS), operates like an incubator farm or training farm for new American farmers in Southern New Hampshire. Ms. Richmond-Boudewyns stated they work with about 25 different farmers, providing them support in accessing land, farm resources, and helping them find markets for their produce. She noted many people sell to their food hub. Fresh Start Farms has a contract with the NH Food Bank, and they purchase a lot of culturally significant crops such as amaranth, African eggplant, bok choy, etc. Ms. Richmond-Boudewyns introduced Mr. Prem Adhikari, one of the 6 farmers at Pustizzi Fruit Farm. He introduced himself and explained his experience on the farm. Ms. Richmond-Boudewyns mentioned they just opened a new farm stand at Pustizzi Fruit Farm, opened Thursday-Saturday. The organization’s main focus was to work with the farmers at the new farm stand and continue to build a relationship with the Boscawen Community. Vice Chair Porter inquired if Fresh Start Farms had a central office location. Ms. Richmond-Boudewyns distributed informational pamphlets to the Ag Commission. She explained that ORIS was located out of Manchester, NH

and their farm team worked in an office near the downtown Concord area. There are also three farm locations; Dunbarton with 11 farmers, Concord with 12 farmers and the Pustizzi Fruit Farm with 6 farmers. Vice Chair Porter asked how the organization was supported. Ms. Richmond-Boudewyns noted a lot of their programs were supported by federal grants. Most of Pustizzi Fruit Farm and the farm stand are operating off of the Farmers Market Promotion Program (FMPP) federal grant. Through the grant, Fresh Start Farms received funds to build infrastructure, get a new register, a new fridge, and to pay the staff salaries. Ms. Richmond-Boudewyns, the Marketing Manager, works closely with the farmers and assists in coordinating operations, such as the farm stand or farmers markets. She serves as the main point of contact for the Boscawen site. Vice Chair Porter inquired about the lease duration. They have a 5-year lease that started last year, with the option to re-lease for another 5 years. Vice Chair Porter recommended using a 5-year lease, renewable each year to help farmers plan their crops and have an idea of when the program will be closed. Discussion ensued. Vice Chair Porter asked if Fresh Start Farms was tied to Joe Pustizzi's project with his farming experience. Ms. Richmond-Boudewyns clarified that the program was not tied to Mr. Pustizzi's project, but he served as a great resource for knowledge on farming and crop maintenance. Ms. Julie Fournier inquired if the organization provided equipment and tools for the farmers. Mr. Adhikari said the organization covers the water resource, chilling and fencing but the farmers themselves pay for small machines like a rototiller. Ms. Richmond-Boudewyns explained that the organization operates as a small team, making it challenging to have one machine handle multiple tasks. Fresh Start Farms is a nonprofit with a limited budget, which restricts their ability to provide all the desired equipment and tools. Ms. Richmond-Boudewyns noted that they are seeking grants or funding opportunities to acquire equipment for the farmers' usage. She asked the Agricultural Commission to provide any available resources concerning grants or funding opportunities. Ms. Fournier inquired about the funding for the material used in farmers' markets. Mr. Adhikari explained that the funding was cooperative, with farmers contributing towards their tables, while the organization also provided some necessary materials. Ms. Richmond-Boudewyns added that for new farmers, there was funding accessible to supply them with tables, a tent, and a banner. Ms. Fournier inquired about the payment options available for purchasing goods through the program. Customers have the choice to pay with either cash or card. However, at the farmers market, a token system is utilized. In response to Ms. Fournier's question about farmers working with bees, Ms. Richmond-Boudewyns mentioned that currently, no work has been done with bees. Deputy PCD Director Kearsten O'Brien mentioned that PCD Director Kellee Easler has experience with honeybees. Two challenges faced with honeybees are cold weather and diseases. Vice Chair Porter asked if the organization was a member of NH Farm Bureau. Ms. Richmond-Boudewyns was not aware of any direct ties to NH Farm Bureau, but they do network with other farm organizations such as Cooperative Extension and the National Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). Vice Chair Porter inquired if they are in contact with the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) and whether they have obtained certification for their scales. Ms. Richmond-Boudewyns confirmed that they do acquire certification for their scales and that the team has a contact at the USDA. She mentioned that the scales used by the farmers are registered under the Fresh Start Farms organization, making registration coordination challenging. Ms. Richmond-Boudewyns had requested to organize a registration day at one of their farms, but the idea has not yet been approved. Vice Chair Porter mentioned they have a clinic in Boscawen

at the Cooperative Extension office. Ms. Fournier asked how long their season was. Ms. Richmond-Boudewyns said they usually farm through the end of October. Mr. Tillman asked if there would be any specialty fruits or vegetables at the farm stand. Mr. Adhikari will be selling Asian vegetables called Karela (Bitter Melon) which tastes similar to a cucumber and Lauki, similar to a summer squash. Ms. Richmond-Boudewyns mentioned other farmers and examples of what they sell. One farmer, Patullo, from Somalia, makes Somali meat pies out of a place on Main St. in Concord and another farmer, Godance, from Rwanda, sells eastern African crops such as African Eggplant, Sawa Sawa, African Corn, etc. Ms. Richmond-Boudewyns noted as an idea to promote customers to buy the new crops, they are going to put out recipes. Discussion ensued. Ms. Richmond-Boudewyns expressed gratitude to the Ag Commission and town staff for their assistance in promoting their new farm stand and program. She emphasized their primary objective of engaging and establishing a strong relationship with the Boscawen community. Ms. Richmond-Boudewyns requested Ag Commission members share any ideas that may arise in this regard. She inquired about organizing a tour of the farm with the Ag Commission, Community Garden members and general public to attend. Ag Commission members will discuss further and reach out to Ms. Richmond-Boudewyns to schedule a tour. Mr. Tillman asked if any farmers produce cheeses or jams. Ms. Richmond-Boudewyns stated currently they sell other New Hampshire based products such as Laurel Hill Jams and Jellies. She noted the Farmers Market Promotion Program (FMPP) was doing value added product training with their farmers, so they are hopeful to sell value added products in the fall or wintertime. One of their farmers harvests dried herbs and teas. Ms. Richmond-Boudewyns mentioned that they were open to suggestions regarding value-added products from Boscawen or other local towns. No further discussion.

Old Business:

Welcome Wagon Handout: Vice Chair Porter gave an update on the Welcome Wagon. PCD Assistant Kara Gallagher updated the 1-pager with one change. Previously, Vice Chair Porter mentioned that he had a conversation with Mr. Josh Marshall regarding the limited availability of copies for the 'Who's Who in NH Agriculture Directory.' As a solution, PCD Assistant Gallagher included a list of links to additional agricultural resource websites. The additional agricultural resources listed included NHDOA Markets and Food, the Development office that provides the 'Who's Who Directory,' and the Weekly Market Bulletin. The one-pager also mentions the Farm Bureau, Cooperative Extension, and the three USDA agencies: Farm Service, AgComm resources, and Rural Development. Vice Chair Porter recommended creating the 1-pager with a heavier material, so it's more durable. He asked if he could leave 6 copies of the 'Who's Who Directory' with Town Clerk Nicole Hoyt to distribute to interested residents. Deputy PCD Director O'Brien confirmed that Town Clerk Hoyt could distribute the directory to interested individuals.

Mr. Tillman motioned to approve the Welcome Wagon Handout as presented with reference to the limited copies of the 'Who's Who in NH Agriculture Directory' available at the town's Tax Collector's office. Seconded by Mr. Odell. All in favor. None opposed.

Draft Horse Event: Mr. Sanborn provided an update on the Draft Horse event. He mentioned that

the dry run event scheduled for June 17th was postponed due to inclement weather, but a new date for the postponement has not been decided yet. The official Draft Horse event is scheduled for August 20th. Mr. Tillman confirmed that he and Ms. Polly Dawson from the Old Home Day Committee will manage the concession stand during the event. Vice Chair Porter offered his availability in the afternoon to provide assistance wherever needed. Ms. Fournier volunteered to cover the morning portion of the event. No further discussion.

Hen Judging Contest: The Ag Commission agreed to secure judges for the *Flashy Flock* Contest. Vice Chair Porter noted he was uncertain about whether Chair John Keegan had reached out to individuals in regard to volunteering. He mentioned that his wife, Ms. Sue Porter volunteered to be a judge. The Commission will discuss further and decide on judges at the August meeting. Deputy PCD Director O'Brien mentioned that Mr. Ed Cherian was creating the map layout for where the cutouts will be located.

New Business:

Fall Festival at Avaloch: Deputy PCD Director O'Brien noted that the Fall Festival at Avaloch has been cancelled for this year due to limited amount of response from businesses and the correspondence with Avaloch on logistics. It will be deferred to a later date so they can discuss further how to entice businesses and individuals to participate. A corresponding event that the Planning Board and Economic Development Committee have been discussing is creating a Tax Increment Finance (TIF) district along Commercial St. The Planning Board and EDC are discussing visioning sessions. A TIF is a tax incentive to drive more of a commercial base. Deputy PCD Director O'Brien explained that TIF districts only pay a portion of taxes and the money raised within the district is used to fund projects for sewer, water, etc. She will send the Ag Commission the TIF district PowerPoint for more information. The Market Basket on Exit 17 is in a TIF district. Deputy PCD Director O'Brien mentioned that she had recommended to the EDC having food trucks available during their visioning session. Additionally, she suggested inviting commercial real estate agents as they play a crucial role in attracting potential buyers. From the Planning Board side, there is a limited number of people who support development. Most of the development is housing and investors are more interested in subdivisions. Discussion ensued. Deputy PCD Director O'Brien stated with Exit 17 filling up and having fewer locations for businesses, they are hopeful that more businesses will want to buy in town. Mr. Tillman asked if there was anything for sale on King St. Deputy PCD Director O'Brien said there were a few properties for sale such as 201 King St, next to Black Forest Nursery. She said they implemented RSA 79E, Community Revitalization Tax Relief Incentive, a tax relief program for owners of historic buildings who want to build up their businesses. Some properties on King Street could potentially qualify and apply to get a 5-year tax incentive, to receive a break on their property taxes. Assessed values would remain the same for 5-years and then after that, reevaluations would increase. Owners would need to make a \$75,000 investment and have a commercial based generated revenue. Deputy PCD Director O'Brien said they are working on tax incentives to attract people to town, but it has been difficult after COVID. Mr. Tillman mentioned that residents received notices about assessors performing reevaluations. He asked if they were finished. Deputy PCD Director O'Brien said they have

completed the field work and reviews. The assessors will finalize the number of assessments and then she will send out letters to residents to schedule individual assessments. She noted that residents can speak to assessors if they have any questions about their assessed value.

Welcome Signs: Vice Chair Porter gave an update on the Welcome Sign repair. In past discussions, Chair Keegan noted that the Roundabout Welcome sign needed to be repaired. They replaced the sign with the one on Water St and are now repairing the Roundabout sign. Vice Chair Porter said a resident on Oak St who does small home carpentry work, was able to reengrave and repair the sign to look exactly the same. It is now at Vice Chair Porter's house, and he will be putting on the coats of paint and lettering. Once it is fixed, it will be put on North Water St.

Other Business:

Planning and Community Development Department Update: The Planning Board met last week and conditionally approved an amendment to decrease the number of units of the previously approved apartment building at 145 King St. There will be 15 1-bedroom units instead of 16 1 and 2-bedroom units, but they need to come back next month for the Planning Board meeting, to address the façade of the front of the building. It must look like a village district. A Conditional Use Permit for the 31-lot Major Subdivision at 477 High St was approved but they still need to hold a Public Hearing for the Major Subdivision application in August. The 3-lot Subdivision off Raymond Road and High St was continued to next month. The Conditional Use Permit and Major Site Plan applications for a Telecommunications Tower for Verizon, on the Merrimack County property, was approved and they are moving forward. The developers of Eagle Perch Drive asked for an extension to use the building in the front, where they hold their sales meetings for the homes, and was approved. On Daniel Webster Highway, across from the Veteran's cemetery, the storage units were approved for an extension to add two more units in the back. Vice Chair Porter asked for an update on the solar at the Merrimack County Nursing Home. Deputy PCD Director O'Brien said they submitted a request for proposal (RFP), but she was unsure where they are in the process. She noted they will need to contact the PCD Department for building permit reviews, but they don't require any planning or zoning approval. She will follow up with the Nursing Home on where they are in the process.

Deputy PCD Director O'Brien asked about switching over the Welcome to Boscawen signs. Vice Chair Porter said Mr. Jeff Abbe maintains the signs and the next season will be blueberries. Deputy PCD Director O'Brien mentioned that last year when they changed the signs, she posted on the Facebook page to clarify that the Welcome to Boscawen signs were put up by the Ag Commission to announce what crops are in season. She will touch base with Mr. Abbe to confirm what fruit or vegetable season is next.

Ms. Fournier read an AARP article on housing shortages and asked if the Planning Board handles those challenges. Deputy PCD Director O'Brien confirmed Planning Board does and they are currently working on the Housing Chapter in the Master Plan. Next month, the Central NH Regional Planning Commission (CNHRPC) will be joining the Planning Board meeting to discuss

the Housing Chapter. She noted they would like the Economic Development Committee to join the meeting as well. They are looking to change the Zoning Ordinance to allow Accessory Dwelling Units to be detached so there are more housing opportunities. They will also be discussing duplexes. There are certain residential zones in town that require a Conditional Use Permit to allow for duplexes. Ms. Fournier noted the article said towns are not keeping up with regulations and people are building in their backyards. Deputy PCD Director O'Brien said they keep up on the regulations and if there is a violation, they address it quickly.

Action Items:

- Ag Commission will decide on judges for the *Flashy Flock* contest at the August meeting.
- Deputy PCD Director O'Brien will send the Ag Commission more information on TIF districts.
- Deputy PCD Director O'Brien will contact the Nursing home about their progress on the solar.
- Deputy PCD Director O'Brien will confirm with Mr. Abbe when the Welcome to Boscawen signs will be changed.

Next Meeting and Public Hearing:

- Tuesday, August 8th, 2023 @ 6:30 p.m.

Mr. Tillman motioned to adjourn. Seconded by Mr. Sanborn. All in favor. None opposed.

Respectfully submitted, Hannah Gardner