

**Town of Boscawen  
AGRICULTURAL COMMISSION  
FINAL MEETING MINUTES  
Tuesday, February 13, 2024, at 6:30 PM**

**Members Present:** John Keegan – Chair, John Porter – Vice Chair, Gary Tillman, Ralph Odell, Julie Fournier – Alternate & Lorrie Carey– Alternate Ex-Officio

**Staff Present:** Kara Gallagher – Planning & Community Development Coordinator/Recording Secretary and Ruth Ashby – Planning & Community Development Assistant

**Guests Present:** Dave & Donna Boudrias – Owners of Lidgetop Sugar House

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Chair John Keegan opened the public meeting at 6:30 p.m. and completed roll call.

**Minutes:**

- Line 40 – Chair Keegan requested adding “the” before “Old Home Day”.
- Line 61 – Ms. Fournier asked to reword the sentence to read “Chair Keegan reviewed the 2023 calendar and suggested the following edits/additions for the 2024 calendar”.
- Line 89 – Chair Keegan asked to add “the Agricultural Commission.” to the end of the sentence and to strike the following sentence.

**Mr. Tillman motioned to approve the 1/16/24 draft minutes as amended. Seconded by Mr. Odell. All in favor. None opposed.**

**Financial Report:**

Mr. Tillman requested an additional report to show the bank balance. He requested the two reports be combined. He said every month the starting balance, interest, and total balance should be included in the financial report.

**Mr. Tillman motioned to add a line to the Financial Report showing the bank account balance from the previous month. Seconded by Vice Chair Porter. All in favor. None opposed.**

**Old Business:**

**Lidgetop Sugar House:** Chair Keegan introduced Dave and Donna Boudrias and said they were present to discuss their maple sugaring operation on Oak Street. Chair Keegan spent a few hours with Mr. Boudrias learning about their operation and specifically, the details of how he removes the water to make syrup. Chair Keegan had requested Mr. Boudrias to bring some tools and printed information to show the Commissioners how the equipment and science has evolved since they began making maple syrup. Mr. Boudrias explained they started out with just a pan on a pile of bricks using wood as their fuel and the operation grew from there. As more taps were added larger pans were needed, storage for sap grew and more sophisticated technologies such as reverse osmosis and vacuum systems have come into common use, especially for larger producers. He showed a “typical grading system” based on the color of the syrup and not its taste. He explained the state of NH has adopted the Vermont grading system. That grading system

included Grade A-Light Amber, Grade A-Medium Amber, Grade A-Dark Amber, Grade B, and Grade C/Commercial. That changed recently and now everything is Grade A. Grades B and C are gone. The new system includes Grade A-Golden, Grade A-Amber, Grade A-Dark, Grade A-Very Dark and Processing Grade. Mr. Boudrias noted every state in the union and every province in Canada has their own grading system. Most of Ledge-top Sugar House's production goes into maple BBQ sauce. To sell their BBQ sauce they are required to meet certain specifications, including Public Health Requirements such as proper PH with a minimum shelf life of one year. The testing for compliance is done in Maine. Ms. Fournier asked if getting rid of Grade B was a benefit to their operation. What used to be Grade B ends up falling into the Grade A-Dark category in the new grading scale. The Grade A-Very Dark is decided by the producer, who should make sure it has a good flavor. This grade is very easy to go 'off' flavor. Off flavor syrup becomes Commercial Grade. In 2002-2004 Mr. and Mrs. Boudrias started offering samples of their exclusive maple BBQ sauce at the Hopkinton Fair. They quickly learned the maple BBQ sauce sold to the public must be made in a commercial kitchen, which requires it be inspected by Public Health. At that point they built the kitchen and Ledge-top Sugar House became a licensed part time business. Chair Keegan asked what some other challenges were that they've faced. Mr. Boudrias gave the example that everything must be cleaned using hot water. Ms. Fournier asked how they clean the lines. Today producers can use a vacuum to clean the tubing. The lines today are much cleaner because all the sap in the lines is removed so bacteria can't grow. Mr. Tillman asked where they collect their sap. Mr. Boudrias said they have two locations; one on Elm Street and everything else is done around the sugar house on Oak Street. They have 600 taps. Ms. Fournier asked if they used wood as their heat source. Mr. Boudrias said they use oil for two reasons, wood is much more labor intensive, and the FDA is more carefully monitoring wood burning related to agriculture. Mr. Tillman asked the length of the season. Mr. Boudrias said it's about a 6-week operation. Mr. Tillman asked how many taps are put in one tree. Mr. Boudrias said it would depend on the size of the tree. Mr. Boudrias discussed Mr. Jeff Abbe's maple operation who has been tapping since 2010. Mr. Abbe provided his production data for the Commission to review. Mr. Boudrias went on to observe that whether 1 gallon or 1,000 gallons of syrup is made everyone is just trying to eliminate the water in the sap. There are currently many different technologies to help achieve this goal. One example is steam-fired evaporators. They do not need as much attention as oil-fired or wood fired. Steam will boil syrup, but it won't burn the syrup. Mr. Boudrias said this is a new technology on the horizon. Chair Keegan said during the 30 years he was involved in maple sugaring there were more open pans with wood as the heat source than today. The producer may spend only 6 weeks in the sugar house, but there was wood to cut, and the wood would need to dry out. This resulted in a lot of handling and was very labor intensive as well as time consuming. The new technologies make it much easier to get into sugaring but rising costs are a factor. Ms. Fournier asked what the Canadian market was like. Mr. Boudrias said his understanding was everything is sold to the government. The Canadian government allows a certain number of individuals to have a certain number of taps which is regulated by a lottery system. Maple weekend for Ledge-top Sugar House is on March 16<sup>th</sup> from 10:00 am-2:00 pm. Ex-Officio Carey asked how much longer Mr. Boudrias plans to make maple syrup. He said he wants to keep going until he can't anymore. Mr. Boudrias said they sell their BBQ sauce to some stores including all three Agway's, Riverhill Market, and local apple orchards in the fall. Chair Keegan thanked Mr. and Mrs. Boudrias for the educational and informative presentation.

Community Garden 2024 Applications: Chair Keegan reported the yearly review was completed, and the only updates made were to the dates. Garden applications will be available at Town Meeting on March 12<sup>th</sup> and then on the Town's website, at the garden, and in the Municipal Office entryway. The "Welcome Back" letter was sent to 2023 gardeners to remind them to claim their spots soon if they want the same ones as last year. Chair Keegan said no new plots will be tilled this year.

Chair Keegan said, as previously discussed, Mr. Abbe and Ms. Anne Lacroix plan to rejuvenate the herb garden this year. Mr. Abbe had provided a proposed budget to reconstruct the current herb garden. The current herb garden was constructed 10 years ago. The total proposed budget was \$602, minus donated materials to equal \$332. Chair Keegan suggested approving a little more in case the donations fall through.

**Mr. Tillman motioned to authorize Jeff Abbe to use \$450 from the AgComm bank account. Seconded by Mr. Odell. All in favor. None opposed.**

Mr. Odell Update on School/Young Person Outreach: Mr. Odell said he's tried to contact Boscawen Elementary School. They have a gardening program and now the teacher that used to run it is no longer there. He contacted Merrimack Valley High School, but there is a new person in the position, and he has not heard back. He contacted the former agricultural instructor at Winnisquam Regional High School and was told there are two new people in the program. Neither are from New England and are new to the region. Mr. Odell contacted their administrative assistant to attempt to contact the new instructors. He has not heard back. The Farm Bureau's *Communicator* had an article about agriculture in the classroom. Peterborough has a wonderful program. Right now, students at all the Conval schools garden in fall and spring. They have a farm to utilize for activities. Sixteen schools in the state have agricultural programs. Overall, their goal is to provide healthy food. Mr. Odell wondered if the community garden could have plots dedicated to families. There aren't many children typically seen there. An idea was mentioned to create mini plots for families with children by splitting a regular plot in half and work with Boscawen Elementary School. Chair Keegan will discuss the idea with Mr. Abbe.

Old Home Day/Twiggs Discussion-Pending: Chair Keegan has asked Mrs. Adele Sanborn to meet with him to discuss the details of the Old Home Day contest. Her calendar has been pretty full. Chair Keegan is going to sit down with her in March.

Calendar Review: This topic was deferred to next month.

Farm Bureau Membership Status: PCD Coordinator Gallagher reported this is all set and the membership cards are available in her office.

Logo Development-Pending: This item will be kept on the agenda. Chair Keegan will discuss this with Mrs. Sanborn.

Economic Development Committee Pumpkin Ride and Walk: Vice Chair Porter said the date has been set for October 5<sup>th</sup>. The EDC would like to have a small farmers' market as part of the event to show off Boscawen's farmers and their crops. He suggested asking Fresh Start Farms, Mr. Josh Marshall, Highway View Farm, and Mr. & Mrs. Boudrias to participate. All concurred. Fresh Start Farms was successful last year. Chair Keegan requested all Commissioners come up with one possible participant and bring their name to the next meeting. Chair Keegan will ask the Market Manager of Fresh Start Farms, Mr. Tillman will ask Mr. & Mrs. Boudrias, and Vice Chair Porter will ask Highway View Farm to participate in the EDC farmer's market.

### **New Business:**

Reappointment of Porter & Tillman: Vice Chair Porter and Mr. Tillman's appointments will expire in March. The Commission must decide whether to reappoint each for another term.

**Mr. Tillman motioned to reappoint John Porter. Seconded by Mr. Odell. All in favor. None opposed.**

**Ex-Officio Carey motioned to reappoint Gary Tillman. Seconded by Vice Chair Porter. All in favor. None opposed.**

Pending Tasks:

- Chair Keegan will discuss creating mini plots with Mr. Abbe at the BCG.
- Chair Keegan will meet with Mrs. Sanborn in March to discuss the Old Home Day Contest judging.
- Chair Keegan will discuss the creation of a logo with Mrs. Sanborn.
- Chair Keegan will ask the Market Manager of Fresh Start Farms to participate in the EDC farmer's market.
- Mr. Tillman will ask Mr. & Mrs. Boudrias to participate in the EDC farmer's market.
- Vice Chair Porter will ask Highway View Farm to participate in the EDC farmer's market.

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

**Next Meeting:** March 11, 2024 @ 6:30 p.m.

*Respectfully submitted by Kara Gallagher.*