

Meeting Minutes  
Durham Agricultural Commission  
December 12, 2022

Commission Members Present: Anton Bekkerman, John Carroll, Bryan Cassidy, Dave Langley, Ellie Lonske, Alberto Manalo, Ray LaRoche, Holly Philbrick, Paul Rasmussen, Dan Winans  
Commission Members Absent: Ellen Karelitz, Lee Alexander, Theresa Walker

LaRoche called the meeting to order at 7:02 p.m.

I. New Business

- A. Minutes from November Meeting: Winans moved to approve the minutes as written; Carroll seconded the motion. The motion carried with Lonske and Philbrick abstaining.

II. Old Business

A. AgComm Initiatives

1. Redefining Agricultural Activity

Langley said that he plans to refine the animal-husbandry spreadsheet; he would like to adjust land areas for features such as landscaping, lawns, and septic systems.

LaRoche asked if the agricultural ordinance should address livestock abandonment. He noted that there had been instances of chickens and other animals wandering away from their owner's property. Runaway pigs may potentially be a problem. He added that no one has talked about this issue, and that the town may be responsible if the ordinance does not address it.

Rasmussen said that this may mean that the town registers every animal.

Bekkerman noted that there could be a couple of benefits to registering animals: First, it may provide incentives for people to be careful with their animals. Second, it may raise funds for catching strays.

Rasmussen said that it would be exceedingly difficult to make such an ordinance enforceable. Also, an ordinance that includes animal abandonment will discourage people to raise animals. He also said that instances of stray animals are rare in Durham.

2. Bee Friendly Program

There was no report; Alexander was absent

3. Garden & Farm Mentors

Cassidy said that he is thinking about holding workshops on four Saturdays, from 1 to 4 p.m., in February 2023 in various locations including Emery Farm. These workshops will be donation based.

4. Oyster River Foodshed

Philbrick reported that the group will resume meeting around the end of January 2023. People are happy about having the website. The group wants to talk about future direction and next steps.

B. Farmers Market

There was no report

C. Land Stewardship Subcommittee

Carroll said that he missed the last meeting of the subcommittee because of a scheduling conflict, but he watched the meeting video. The new town Land Steward will be in place shortly. He also said that there was a long discussion about Durham Housing Committee issues. He added that housing should be an issue for the AgComm and Land Stewardship Subcommittee because of their mission to protect agricultural lands and conserve land.

Lonske suggested that AgComm may want another of its members to sit on the Planning Board which discusses housing proposals. Rasmussen said that he would like to see younger people on the Planning Board.

LaRoche said that he would like to get young people, for example, UNH students, involved or engaged in AgComm's work.

Bekkerman suggested that AgComm could set up internship opportunities for UNH students, but AgComm must clearly define the work and expectations for the students.

Lonske said that something like Durham's Sustainability Fellow position is another model to consider. An issue with this approach is the stipend for the Fellow.

Bekkerman said that he will investigate the possibility of involving UNH agriculture faculty and students. He also mentioned that AgComm may want to hold one of its meetings on campus so that it is more easily accessible to students.

Rasmussen raised again housing issues that affect agriculture. He said that conservation subdivisions, where a specific area of a property is allocated to housing, and the rest of the land goes to conservation, typically allow only recreational uses, and prevents agriculture in the conservation areas. He said that town-controlled conservation-area designations should allow agriculture.

Bekekrmann noted that in his experience, the regulations covering conservation areas are very restrictive. He has wondered about the possibility of relaxing such restrictions.

Winans said that the term "conservation" may be the issue. He suggested that a more inclusive name may be helpful.

Lonske said that "gardening" may be a word that could work. People usually do not attach anything negative to gardening.

D. Community Gardens

There was no report. Karelitz was absent.

III. New Business

There was no new business.

IV. Adjourn

Rasmussen moved, and Winans seconded, to adjourn the meeting. LaRoche adjourned the meeting at 7:49 p.m.