

Durham Agricultural Commission

13 January 2025
Durham Town Hall

Meeting Minutes (draft)

Members present: Theresa Walker (Chair), Ray LaRoche (Vice Chair), Curtis Register (Town Council Rep), Lee Alexander, Anton Bekkerman, John Carroll, Bryan Cassidy, Dave Langley, Alberto Manalo, and Dan Winans

Members absent: Ellen Karelitz, Holly Philbrick, Tom DeCapo (Planning Board Rep)

Visitors: none

1. New Business

A. Minutes from December 2024 – approved with no changes, one abstention (Register)

B. Correspondence -

1) e-mail on Town re: sending a AgComm rep on a Town Wide program on composting by the Integrated Waste Management Advisory Committee on Food Waste Composting

- Potentially this would investigate alternatives to the current costs associated with Turnkey.

Curt will investigate further.

2) Jennifer Wilhelm (Fat Peach Farm) asked if she should still maintain the website for the “Oyster River Foodshed”. It was agreed that despite being a good concept, a cooperative foodshed is not really needed. Chair pointed out that local producers are not able to produce more than they currently sell. Curt and Theresa said that a link could be added to the AgComm website.

2. Old Business

A. AgComm Initiatives

1) Resident Outreach – survey, Capstone students

a) Anton described his thoughts on encouraging community recognition on the benefits of local food production. (e.g., a sign about being a local, “farm-friendly” community). Perhaps start with a survey on collaborative community agriculture. Bryan feels that public “accountability” should be a factor. Anton suggested that this matter of local food production be brought up with the Town Council. This matter (Durham being a “Farm Friendly Town”) be added to the current survey draft.

b) Curt explained the challenge of creating an e-mail distribution list to conduct the survey

2) Animal Capacity Estimator – Dave continues to refine.

3) Bee Friendly Program – Lee Alexander reported that due to global warming, 2024 was a very challenging year for beekeeping. Unfortunately, this continues with abnormally high levels of winter mortality already occurring. Of the approximately 25 bee hives in Durham, only 3-4 hives are still alive. The dead bees from two different hives/locations were sent to the USDA Bee Research Laboratory in Beltsville, MD for diagnosis on the cause of death.

4) Garden and Farm Mentors – Bryan will be scheduling pruning workshops (starting in February). Announcements will be placed Friday Updates

5) 2025 Farm Day – August 16th

B. Land Stewardship Subcommittee – John reported on “problems” with beavers flooding and eating poplar trees at Oyster River Forest.

C. Community Gardens – no report (Ellen was absent)

D. Farmers’ Markets – no update

3. Other Business

- A. Chair asked AgComm members if suggest one thing that AgComm “should do” this year.
- Curt suggested that perhaps community gardens could be established on a neighborhood scale. The first steps could include sharing extra seedlings with neighbors. Dave is willing to be a “Train-the-trainer”.
 - John suggested there should be a “directory” of local area growers. He also suggested that the Strafford County Extension be contacted.
 - Dave suggested a workshop on “preservation/storage” for locally grown crops (etc., canning, drying, root storage, pickling, etc.).
 - Alberto suggested that that some Durham farmers should be featured in the “Friday Update”
 - Ray suggested that a new/updated brochure (3-fold flyer) about Durham farms be prepared. Ideally, this could be done via a joint Lee – Durham 3-fold brochure.
 - Bryan suggested that we do more partnerships with other towns/groups. No need to duplicate or compete.
 - Theresa suggested some sort of competition about growing food.

Members were encouraged to further describe their recommendations, to be discussed at the February meeting.

Next AgComm meeting: 10 February 2025

4. Meeting adjourned at 8:15pm

Recorded by Lee Alexander