

Farmland Preservation Advisory Board  
Meeting Minutes  
December 3, 2015  
10:00 am  
Department of Agriculture  
Room G8A  
165 Capitol Avenue  
Hartford, Connecticut

MEMBERS PRESENT: Jim Zeoli (chairman), Ben Freund, Lucy Nolan, Joe Bonelli, George Malia, Joan Nichols(left at 11:19am), Terry Jones, Henry Talmage, John Guskowski, Robin Chesmer (arrived at 10:33am)

MEMBERS ABSENT: George Hindinger, Jim Krissel

AGENCY STAFF PRESENT: Commissioner Steven K. Reviczky, Chief of Staff George E. Krivda, Jr. (DoAg), Bureau Director Linda Piotrowicz (DoAg), Jason Bowsza (DoAg)

1. Call to Order
  - a. The meeting was called to order at 10:07 am in Room G8a
2. Review of Minutes
  - a. It was moved by Freund, seconded by Bonelli, to accept the minutes as presented.  
Motion carried **unanimously**.
3. Old Business
  - a. Commissioner's Updates
    - i. Commissioner Reviczky offered updates pertaining to the agency and state government
  - b. Farmland Preservation Update
    - i. Commissioner Reviczky touched on highlights associated with the Farmland Preservation Program over the last several months. He noted the preservation of a portion of Mountain Dairy as a considerable accomplishment. The commissioner noted that the Department is averaging closing on approximately two farms per month, and that five recent projects have been done in partnership with NRCS funding as well. He discussed other obstacles and opportunities as well.
  - c. State Owned Farmland Updated
    - i. Commissioner Reviczky announced that the agreement with M&K Dairy at Savin Farm has just been renewed. The Savin Lake Dam has also been repaired by DOT recently. He also noted the potential use of some land at Savin Farm for composting of depopulated poultry in the event of an Avian Influenza incident. Chairman Zeoli asked about the status of the proposals received so far concerning Southbury Training School. Commissioner Reviczky explained that the applications have been reviewed in detail, but some of the application information should remain confidential at this point because no decisions have been made.
  - d. FPAB subcommittee update on comparative report

- i. Mr. Guskowski reviewed the draft of the Comparative Farmland Preservation Program Study. He noted that the Department has been making considerable progress with the purchase of development rights. He reiterated that the purpose of this study is not to critique or criticize the program in any way.
- ii. Mr. Jones wanted to be clear that this is not in any way intended for public distribution, but to advise the commissioner and the department.
- iii. Mr. Freund stated that he has the utmost faith and confidence in Commissioner Reviczky to administer the farmland preservation program. The last thing that Mr. Freund wants to see is any piece of this report to be taken out of context and used against the board, the program or the department. Mr. Jones agreed completely with Mr. Freund.
- iv. Mr. Malia suggested adding Rhode Island, New Hampshire, Maine and New York – states that have had little to no work towards farmland preservation. Chairman Zeoli agreed that this would be valuable information to include
- v. Commissioner Reviczky noted that the FPAB is a group of well-respected individuals with varying expertise. Whatever this body says or does carries a lot of weight with him. Every application that the agency receives is voluntary on the part of the property owner, and is permanent and forever, which means that the agency has to work very hard to get the process correct, because it can't be undone. Some of the information included in the subcommittee report is misleading, while other parts are inaccurate, and all can inadvertently lead people to conclusions that are unwarranted. Commissioner Reviczky has compiled some charts and graphs that tell a different story, comparing Connecticut to several other states with similar programs. The commissioner noted the differences in programs between states, resources available in different states, etc. There is a need to ensure that, if any report is to be issued, it present a complete picture and not an incomplete one.
- vi. Mr. Talmage reiterated that the intention is to offer positive ways forward, and that this is not intended to be used as a means of tearing down the good works of the agency. There remains some improvements that can and should be made to the draft report to make it more accurate.
- vii. Mr. Guskowski would be open to specific suggestions. Commissioner Reviczky pointed out that he has offered those suggestions, but they've been discarded by the subcommittee.
- viii. Mr. Zeoli was under the impression that they met and had worked out the disagreements. Apparently there was a meeting, but disagreements have not been resolved. He thinks that the report is based on past circumstances, but that those circumstances have probably changed already. Mr. Zeoli had hoped that issues that the commissioner felt to have been inaccurate in whole or in part would have been considered and addressed by the subcommittee.
- ix. Mr. Jones sees the challenge as an opportunity to spend more money. The agency has administered the program in excellent fashion.
- x. Mr. Zeoli thinks that the current financial circumstances confronted by the state are significant, and that we as a board can be doing our part by withholding requests for more money faster for the time being, but it is still important for us to be preserving farmland at a consistent pace, as the agency has been doing.

- xi. Mr. Chesmer sees this from both perspectives, but thinks what is said isn't as important as how it is said. He believes that the farmland preservation program is key to the success of agriculture in Connecticut.
- xii. Mr. Malia asked who the final intended user is, and was told that it was the commissioner. It was pointed out that it will be used beyond this board, which is a concern.
- xiii. Mr. Freund noted that there was a point in time when this report and suggestions were necessary, but that time has passed and the department has turned the corner. None of the issues faced by the department were overcome because of this report, and this report could actually cause more problems than it solves.
- xiv. Mr. Talmage would like to see how this report can be used towards the future of the program. Is there any reason to object to the inclusion of data from other northeastern states. Mr. Zeoli stated that any report should include where we've been, and where we hope to be.
- xv. Mr. Jones would still like to be spending more money faster.
- xvi. Mr. Malia cautioned that some of the delays are the result of challenges that any state has with buying real estate. Massachusetts has more staff, more acreage, and very similar problems and frustrations as Connecticut.
- xvii. Mr. Zeoli would like to hear updates periodically on the redevelopment plans at the Hartford Regional Market, and he'd like to see improvements made at the School of Agriculture at UConn. His point is that, while preserving farms is very important, it is just as important to teach young people HOW to farm.
- xviii. No vote was taken to accept the draft report from the subcommittee.

4. New Business

a. Approval of 2016 meeting dates

- i. Motion by Guskowski, seconded by Talmage, to approve the meeting dates as presented. Motion carried **unanimously**.

- 1. 2016 FPAB meetings will be at 10am on March 3, June 2, September 1 and December 1.

5. Adjournment

- a. The meeting was duly adjourned at 12:24pm