

# DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

## *FARMLAND PRESERVATION ADVISORY BOARD*

DRAFT Minutes of Meeting

**March 4, 2013, 9:30am**

Department of Agriculture - large conference room, Hartford, CT

**MEMBERS PRESENT:** Chairman George Hindinger, Joseph Bonelli, Terry Jones, John Guskowski, Robin Chesmer, Jim Zeoli, Paul Larson, Henry Talmage, and Ben Freund.

**MEMBERS ABSENT:** Lucy Nolan, Jim Krissel.

**ALSO PRESENT:** For the Department –Bureau Director J. Dippel, Property Agents Katherine Winslow and Denise O’Meara; Others – Lisa Bassani of Working Lands Alliance.

I. **Call to Order:**

Chairman Hindinger called the meeting to order at 9:37 am.

II. **Review of December 3, 2012 minutes:**

The minutes of the December 3, 2012 meeting of the Farmland Preservation Advisory Board (Board), were distributed and approved (Freund/Guskowski – Unanimous, with Zeoli abstaining).

III. **Business:**

1. **Commissioner’s update**

**A. Governor’s proposed budget.** Director Dippel discussed the outcome of the Finance and Bond Committee meeting, indicating that the Governor has proposed 20 million for the Farmland Preservation Program, over the next two years, allocating 10 million for fiscal years 2013/2014, and 10 million for fiscal year 2014/2015. Dippel indicated that although funding has been consistent over the past 5 years for the program, 4 million may be taken from total CIA funding at 1 million a quarter, which funding will be shared among the four agencies. The impact to the Department of Agriculture will come 100% from the Farmland Preservation Program. Dippel added that \$500K of new bond funds has been proposed each fiscal year for the Farm Reinvestment Program.

**B. Legislative updates.** Director Dippel stated that three of ten proposals submitted by Commissioner Reviczky to Legislature for consideration, deal with the Farmland Preservation. Dippel indicated that the proposed Legislative Acts would bring the Community Farms Program and Municipalities into alignment with the main Farmland Preservation Program, through various provisions.

**C. State Owned Farmland-Southbury Training School.** Dippel indicated that the Governor's bill, titled 'An Act Concerning the Preservation of Farmland at the Southbury Training School' is designed to preserve 825± acres of the campus farm. Dippel indicated the bill would assign the development rights to a third party, while the fee interest would remain in custody of the Department of Agriculture. The deed of conveyance would recognize a third party, which will help protect State-owned land for its intended use as farmland in perpetuity.

**2. Farmland Preservation updates & summary.**

**A. Farmland Preservation Program (FLP).** Director Dippel discussed the summary sheet of pending and closed farms to date, which indicates there has been a drop in closed farms between 2011 and 2012. This is due to new programs including the Community Farms Program, and Farmland Restoration Program, which have required a significant amount of administrative staff time, with no additional staff. Dippel indicated that there are currently 53 farms in the pipeline for a total of 6,007 acres, with 11 farms pending closing, three farms pending SPRB approval, 5 farms with offers extended, 8 farms being appraised, and 26 farms under negotiation of configurations for preservation.

**B. Federal Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program (FRLP).** Dippel indicated that due to changes with the federal program, which is now being administered from Washington, rather than the State level, has become very burdensome accommodating federal requirements. The program has gone from being streamlined, at the state level, to a cumbersome, bureaucratic process. Dippel added that this has become a national problem, with other states having the similar issues, due to burdensome federal requirements.

**C. Community Farms Preservation Program (CFP).** Dippel discussed the status summary of existing cooperative agreements with Municipalities, and farm applications received for the Pilot Community Farms Preservation Program.

**D. Farmland Restoration Program.** Dippel indicated that of the \$5 million bond funds, \$1.1 million has been assigned to 70 farm projects in the pipeline.

**3. Programs and other updates.**

**A. Governor's Council on Agriculture Development (GCAD).** Talmage indicated that the Governor's Council is dealing with farm labor issues relating to immigration and guest workers reform, and indicated it is a major national issue also. Talmage stated truck weight has been addressed to allow an increase in truck weight from 80,000 lbs to 100,000 lbs. Talmage also indicated that farm energy is being addressed relating to Agriculture net metering on farm projects.

**B. Program Review and Investigation.** Hindinger mentioned 6-7 highlighted items on the handout recommended from the Legislative Review Board's report to discuss. Dippel indicated the Commissioner responded to the report to address the recommendations, citing that there are insufficient available resources. Discussion ensued over various recommendations and stewardship monitoring to ensure accountability, safe guards and basis as support for the program as worthwhile.

**D. State Plan of Conservation and Development.** Agent Winslow indicated that OPM has given towns the option to include locally important soils to also be considered when determining farming soils to reach the 25-acre criteria threshold, to be part of the locational guide map, a useful tool to show conservation resources, regarding farming soils. Winslow discussed the problematic issue relating to criteria 25-acre threshold guidelines of the locational guide map, regarding prime farming soils. Winslow stated that arguments have been presented by the Department of Agriculture stating that contiguous parcels, individually falling below the required 25 acre minimum, but reaching or exceeding the minimum 25-acre requirement, due to having contiguous prime soils, be counted as part of reaching the 25-acre threshold requirement. Winslow added that parcels having the minimum requirement of 25 acres, but are not counted due to physical breaks, such as brooks & streams, also be counted towards the minimum threshold, and be included on the locational guide map.

**IV. Subcommittee Reports:** No reports presented.

**V. Other Business:**

- 1. Hartford Regional Market.** Dippel discussed the Hartford Regional Market indicating the market is primarily year round wholesale, and includes a seasonal market. The market accounts for over 400 jobs. He indicated a Master Plan to re-develop the market to become more retail friendly, and allow for more processing.

**VI. Adjournment:**

Next meeting, Monday, June 3, 2013, at 9:30am, at the Hartford Regional Market, Board Room, 101 reserve Road, Hartford, CT. The meeting was adjourned at 11:35p.m. (Zeoli/Larson - Unanimous).

Respectfully submitted by Denise O'Meara. Date: March 11, 2013