

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
FARMLAND PRESERVATION ADVISORY BOARD

DRAFT Minutes of Meeting

September 16, 2013, 9:30am

**Southbury Training School
2nd Floor Administration Building
Moser Library, Southbury**

MEMBERS PRESENT: Chairman George Hindinger, Terry Jones, John Guszowski, Jim Zeoli, Lucy Nolan, Jim Krissel, Henry Talmage, Joe Bonelli, Paul Larson, and Ben Freund.

MEMBERS ABSENT: Robin Chemser

ALSO PRESENT: For the Department –Commissioner Reviczky, Bureau Director J. Dippel, Property Agents Lance Shannon, Katherine Winslow and Denise O’Meara; Others – Southbury Training School Director Eugene Harvey, Town of Southbury, Ed Edelson, Tom Crider, Southbury Land Trust, Susan Payne, Roxbury Land Trust, and Lisa Bassani of Working Lands Alliance, and George Mailia, Farm Credit East.

I. CALL TO ORDER:

Chairman Hindinger called the meeting to order at 9:35 am.

II. REVIEW OF June 10, 2013 MINUTES

The minutes of the March 4, 2013 meeting of the Farmland Preservation Advisory Board (Board) were distributed and approved (Zeoli- Krissel, Unanimous).

III. BUSINESS:

1. **Introduction of Southbury Training School (STS) Director, Eugene Harvey, brief history of the STS.** Director Harvey discussed the history of the construction of Southbury Training School, which was built in 1939 in response to overcrowding at Mansfield Training School. Harvey indicated that Southbury Training School’s 1,400 acre site was the State’s first attempt to create a model facility for providing a normal community-living environment for persons with mental disabilities, versus the typical hospital/asylum, institutional environment. Harvey stated that as time went on, more and more people were admitted, and added that in 1984, conditions were not good, due to being overcrowded, and understaffed. Harvey indicated that due to an investigation, stemming from the passage of the Civil Rights of Institutionalized Persons Act (CRIPA), in 1980, the State signed a Consent Decree in July 1986, which provided a detailed plan of specific actions to be implemented towards protecting mentally handicapped residents residing at Southbury Training School (STS). Harvey indicated that with the passage of The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), in 1990, there was a national movement away from segregated institutions and towards mainstream integration into a community environment. Harvey stated the national movement of the ADA, resulted in mandated, phased closing of cottages at STS, and integration of the residents into community, group homes. Harvey added that there are currently 356 residents, with an average age of 67 years old.

2. Commissioner's update

- A. **State owned Farmland – STS and DOC.** Commissioner Reviczky and Bureau Director, Dippel discussed the site map of Southbury Training Schools' 1,400 acres. Dippel stated that the total property is currently in the process of being surveyed, with discussions of how the land will be transferred. Dippel indicated the farmland to be preserved, will consist of 825± acres to 1,000± acres. Dippel added the farmland is under lease for dairy support, with cropland in hay and corn, with a five year renewable lease. Commissioner Reviczky added that the preservation of farmland at Southbury Training School also provides the perfect opportunity to do an incubator farm for new, starter farmers.
- B. **Governor's Council for Agricultural Development.** Reviczky stated that the top priority is for the Farmland Advisory Board to prioritize state land. Reviczky stated the Governor's Council is preparing a second report, with hopes to be published in December 2013. Reviczky stated the Council's number one recommendation is to compile an inventory of state-owned lands and to set a goal for Agricultural leases, with a specific acreage goal and date. Reviczky added that resources are available thru the Farmland Restoration Program, which provides funding to bring back fallow land into suitable agricultural land, in accordance with a plan.

3. **Farmland Preservation Programs updates & summaries.** Director Dippel discussed the pending and closed farms to date. Dippel indicated that there are currently 56 farms in the pipeline for a total of 6,140 acres, with three farms already closed this year, 14 farms pending closing, 7 farms with offers extended, 3 farms being appraised, and 22 farms under negotiation/configuration. Dippel indicated that the burdensome and redundant requirements of the federal Farm and Rand Land Protection Program have made it more difficult to close on farms.

A new 2013 Cooperative Agreement is being negotiated and the State of Connecticut has requested significant changes to the draft document. Reviczky stated that NRCS has turned a viable program into a bureaucratic process which makes it virtually impossible to preserve farms. Reviczky indicated that this has become a major problem dealing with NRCS's new bureaucracy of stipulations and requirements. Reviczky stated our mission is to preserve farms, with the State already requiring robust checks and balances, and indicated that we may have to use our own resources to protect farmland.

IV. SUBCOMMITTEE REPORTS:

1. **Community Farms Preservation Program – status update.** Guskowski discussed the Pilot Program which has been in effect a little over one year, with the subcommittee reviewing any lessons learned, and what may need to be tweaked. Agent Winslow, indicated there are two farms under contract, and the Department is ready to make several joint offers with towns on approved applications. Guskowski indicated disappointment that only 25 towns, out of 169 towns within the state applied to the Pilot Program for approval, and stated there should be more public outreach and education.

V. **OTHER BUSINESS:**

1. Southbury First Selectman, Ed Edelson & Southbury Land Trust, Tom Crider.

Crider expressed appreciation on behalf of the Town of Southbury, for the time and effort the Department of Agriculture has put towards preserving Southbury Training School.

2. STS tenant farmer Platt Farm, Ed Platt.

Platt discussed his history of farming at Southbury Training School and discussed the problem of competing interests with state-owned land.

VI. **ADJOURNMENT:**

Next meeting, Monday, December 2, 2013, 9:30am, Department of Agriculture, Large Conference Room. The meeting was adjourned at 11:00 am. (Chesmer/Zeoli- Unanimous).

VII. **SOUTHBURY TRAINING SCHOOL FARMLAND TOUR:**

Director Harvey conducted a guided tour of Southbury Training School grounds, which included viewing existing agricultural structures that are currently not in use, various resident buildings, agricultural land, a poultry-laying operation, and luncheonette, which is run with the help of residents of Southbury Training School.

Respectfully submitted by Denise O'Meara. Date: September 19, 2013