

WINDHAM CONSERVATION AND OPEN SPACE COMMISSION

REGULAR MEETING

July 25, 2011 7:00 P.M.

Windham Town Hall

1. Call to Order – The Chair called the meeting to order at approximately 7 PM. Those present were Patricia Szczys – Chair, Mary Concklin, Axel Oschman, James Finger as staff, and Jennifer Kaufman from the AGvocate program. Michael Westerfield was absent. Since there were so many people present, the Chair asked for everyone to introduce themselves. Axel Oschman introduced himself. Patricia Szczys introduced herself as the Chair of the Commission and that she is a professor of Conservation Biology at the University. Mary Concklin introduced herself and explained that she has a farm in Windham – Raspberry Knoll Farm, and that she is on the Commission. Ann Dunnack and Jim Corso of Columbia Conservation and Agriculture Commission came to offer support to Windham for merging agriculture with the Conservation and Open Space Commission. Also present was Debbie Vanoni was present who had been part of the AGvocate program, and owns a Horse stabling business on Parish Hill Rd. She said she is interested in serving as an alternate on the Commission, but wants to learn more about it first. Jennifer Kaufman introduced herself with the AGvocate Program and came to support the Town’s merger of Agriculture with the Conservation and Open Space Commission. Others present were Roberta George, and Shirley Crespo representing a church sponsored community garden at 126 Quarry St. in Willimantic. Sally Millius also came in – she is a private educator from Mansfield and had participated in the AGvocate program.

2. Citizens and Delegations – none

3. Approval of Minutes of Previous Meeting - The Chair explained that their main staff person Tara Risley was not available this week, so the Commission did not have minutes to approve from the last meeting.

4. Correspondence The Chair then offered various correspondence items to the other members to review, but said there was nothing pressing – just mail.

5. Additions to Agenda - On other items to add to the agenda, and indicated that there are two: she wanted to update the Commission on the status of the ordinance change, and the other is to have a conversation about Agriculture, and what other Towns are doing in the area.

6. Consideration of Land Use Proposals if any The Chair then asked James Finger – the staff if there were any land use proposals, and he answered that there

were none, but that the Planning & Zoning Commission had revised some of its regulations, and he could talk about that later in the agenda.

7. Discussion: Update on progress of ordinance revision

The Chair then explained the introduction of the ordinance change to the Town Council on the previous Tuesday (July 19, 2011), and had hoped to speak at citizens and delegations after Axel had spoken, but the Council just moved on to setting a hearing date. The hearing has been set for August 16, 2011 at 6:30 PM directly before the Council's regular meeting that night, and that we are on the agenda that night for the Council to adopt the ordinance change. She added that she hadn't heard of any objections or difficulties with the change, but that she would be at the Council meeting to answer any questions. James said that Axel made a good presentation to the Council – so it may have answered all the questions they may have had. The Chair said that it would be good if all the people in support could come to the Town Council meeting for the hearing, and then she repeated the date as August 16, 2011 at 6:30 PM, and that the Town Council meeting is at 7 PM, and we are on their agenda; so if you're not able to attend the hearing at 6:30 PM, then you could speak at their Citizens and Delegations shortly after they start their meeting.

8. Discussion: Visit with Columbia's Conservation/Ag Commission

The Chair then invited the guests to speak.

Ms. Dunnack of Columbia's Conservation and Agricultural Commission said that she brought along a copy of their by-laws and procedures and explained that she was not the Chairman.

She then explained that they function as the Conservation Commission to consider applications to their Planning & Zoning Commission and Wetlands' Commission. They go on the Planning & Zoning Commission and Wetlands' Commission site walks, and review their applications and then make a recommendation to them on how the proposed development or subdivision would affect natural areas of farms. She said that they also sponsor a farmers market in the fall for local farmers to sell their produce. This year it will be on September 24th, at Yeoman's Hall – at the Green actually.

Next Ms. Dunnack explained that the Town of Columbia's Conservation and Agricultural Commission had operated as separate Commissions for a long time; but found that some of the members served on both Boards, and so it was easier to merge both together. She explained that they had worked on their Town's Plan of Conservation and Development. They also urged support of an initiative for their Town to help in purchasing the development rights for a farm in Columbia; and that now they operate a Community garden on a portion of the Szedga Farm. Someone

asked if they have had any conflicts among the Conservationists, and Farmers on their Commission, and Ms. Dunnack and Mr. Corso replied that they have had occasional differences of opinion, but they work out their problems to a reasonable compromise for all. As a result of their experiences, they have come up with their own definition for agriculture for their community. They have also been working on a Farm advocacy program, and are trying to implement some tax exemptions for farmers in their Town. They have also assisted their Planning & Zoning Commission in developing zoning regulations that are sympathetic to Agriculture- which changed the emphasis from exclusive residential zoning to allow residential and agriculture with guidelines on keeping farm animals.

9. Other Business Staff person James Finger then briefed the Commission on the zoning revisions that the Planning & Zoning Commission adopted recently which will reduce the amount of parking required, which in turn will reduce the amount of stormwater runoff to control.

10. Citizens and Delegations - none

11. Adjourn – with no further business, the Chair adjourned the meeting at approximately 8:30 PM

Here is the link to the Columbia Conservation and Agricultural Commission's web site for more info.

http://www.columbiact.org/index.asp?Type=B_BASIC&SEC=%7B8B671200-D1B7-4742-AD8E-FC25F3F2106A%7D