

Town of Red Hook

Agriculture and Open Space Committee

Minutes of June 3, 2015

Attendance: Co-chairperson Pete Hubbell, Marina Michahelles (8:00), John Hardeman, Town Board Councilman William O’Neill (liaison) and Linda Keeling, secretary.

Absent: Co-chairman Norman Greig, Ken Migliorelli, Mike Robertson, Rich Biezynski and Mary Ann Johnson

Guests: Robert McKeon, Talea Hekman-Taylor

Meeting Opened: *Co-chairman Pete Hubbell* opened the meeting at 7:15 pm.

AGENDA

1. Approve Minutes: March 24th
2. VOTE: Interested New members: Talea and Hanna
3. DISCUSSION Article emailed: PJ Article: Millions of dollars available for farmland protection
4. Weather Station
5. ZRC: spite fencing wording finalization? Bill O’Neill
6. VOTE: New Red Hook Farm list update from 2012
7. Community Preservation Fund Status: used \$245,000 for Kalina and Greig; \$120,000 left
8. OPEN CONVERSATION: any new issues from farmers?

Minutes: There was no meeting in April. The May 26th meeting was canceled. This is a special meeting in lieu of the regular May date.

The March 24, 2015 minutes could not be voted on as there was NOT a quorum.

OLD BUSINESS

1. **ZRC and Fencing Language:** *Bill O’Neill* read the fencing language and all in attendance agreed with the verbiage. *John Hardeman* would like to see the referenced law sections before finalizing this (See item 10 Addendum)

NEW BUSINESS

1. **Resignation:** The Town Board received a resignation letter from *MaryAnn Johnson* due to her conflict with another meeting at the same time.

2. **Potential New Member:** *Talea Hekman-Taylor* of Historic Hudson Valley Montgomery Place Farm introduced herself and described some of her background and interest in the AOSC. She grew up on an orchard farm and they have been farming at Montgomery Place for 29 years. They have a unique situation in that they do not own the property but rather lease it as tenant farmers. They have a “Mom and Pop” farm stand. Their children use to help with the farm but as there is no security, the one son has

left to earn money but would like to farm in 20 years. They conduct school tours, appreciate the local area and the help from local farmers. Her husband, Doug, develops many varieties of cider through experimentation. They produce hard cider and are licensed but the potential bottling process is being held up because they changed their business name and NYS requires more paperwork. They should be fully licensed by the fall. Due to the 60 varieties grown they produce specific sweet ciders based on one type of vintage apple. They get their older varieties from California and Dave Cummings. It is a long wait to get the trees (2-3 years). It is difficult growing from cuttings (scions) as there are ownership royalties involved now-a-days.

John Hardeman added that the older varieties are coming into their own again as the newer sweeter varieties don't have the tannins and tartness to make a quality cider.

Pete Hubbell asked what she might be able to bring to this committee. Talea responded based on her family's length of time in the community and the fact that it is not always certain that a historic preservation company has the best interests for the farm, she would like others to be aware of the hardships they have endured with the leasing of farm land so others will not have to experience the same thing. She sees the trend for absentee rich farm owners. She wants young farmers to benefit and the lands to remain open for farming in the future.

Robert McKeon added it is invaluable to get the tenant farmer perspective. He noted historically there have been tenant farmers on these lands for hundreds of years. Beth Mead and Lindsey Shute have done great work efforts in assuring that young farmers will be able to farm their own lands. A young farmer can try out their business plan on a small acreage without a huge capital investment then move onto a large property. Installing fencing for livestock depends on the ownership of the land.

Talea noted that fruit growing is entirely different than yearly crop cycles. A year-to-year arrangement is not business cost effective regarding putting in a cover crop. If you are in a long term agreement, taking care of the soil is the most important aspect of farming. With a year-to-year lease the profits must go into the business rather than into capital land improvements.

RECOMMENDATION: The AOSC members would like to recommend Talea to the town board to join as our newest member. Bill O'Neill will try to move it through at the next Town Board meeting.

Hanna Beal had also shown an interest. She has 2 acres on Hapeman Hill Rd. (Her email address is now corrected.)

2. Agricultural Business Districts (ABD): Bill O'Neill noted that if the land goes out of the ABD then they must reapply and all the old records are consulted.

3. Weather Station: There was some discussion on the types of stations. Old ones were located on Greig and Fraleigh Farms. Ken Migliorelli signed up recently for the NOAA station. *John Hardeman* indicated these stations are located throughout New York and informs farmers of where the coldest temperatures were located.

This past winter was very hard on the fruit trees as it went down to 16 below. Peaches and cherries were impacted. *Talea Hekman-Taylor* and *John Hardeman* said they had blossoms in spite of the cold weather. *John Hardeman* is convinced the sweetness of the wood and leaves of the trees draws deer to his cherry trees which they love. He has noticed this with apples as well as they will bypass one row and go to a row with a sweeter variety. He will need to erect a fence soon as he has lost his crop to the deer.

4. ZRC Spite Fence and Ag Fence: *Bill O'Neill* handed out a sheet with the definition of Spite Fence: “*No fence or other structure in the nature of a fence shall be erected for a purpose other than as defined for fences, under Section 143.4, or Agricultural Fences under Section 143.4*” (Amendment to Section 143.28, Insertion of subdivision “D”) Bill read the recommended definition for Agricultural fences. Those present seemed to be in agreement with the statements read.

5. Greig Farm Inn and Restaurant: There was some discussion on the status of the proposed project behind Grandiflora Nursery. It was noted that Norman Greig got a ZBA approval for an increase from 10 to 14 bedrooms. The restaurant portion is supposed to be an accessory use to the bedrooms. They felt it was a good adaptive reuse of a barn in the ABD but had some concerns as to whether or not a 30 seat restaurant is feasible and profitable as furnishing a restaurant is very expensive. A comment was made that Gigi had weddings. *Linda Keeling* responded it was very loud music directed at her house and went beyond the curfew. *Norman Greig* stated at the ZBA he was not going to do weddings but his renter said she was having her daughter’s wedding there. In addition, he stated he would not invoke the curfew. *John Hardeman* said he tells the venue to shut down at 9:00 pm when it gets dark as a courtesy to the neighbors.

It was felt that with the limited number of motels and B&B’s in the Red Hook area, it would be a good thing to house the tourists so businesses could benefit locally rather than extra money going to the Kingston area. Historically, farms use to supplement their income by renting to tourists so they could enjoy the “farm experience”. *John Hardeman* said in the summer the Fraleigh’s would move into an unconditioned attic in order to house the tourists.

Robert McKeon’s concern regarding a high-end tourist Inn/Restaurant is the fear that the tourists would interfere and possibly try to curtail the farmer’s tractor noise, watering and spraying activities.

Talea noted that she has noticed over the years that *Norman Greig’s* farm activities like the haunted hay rides have been several years ahead of his time. After he gives up the activity other farmers try it and succeed. It was noted that there are now and over abundance of local farmers’ markets for which a 20% drop in a farm stand business can hurt the profitability.

6. \$20 Million in Hudson Valley NYS Grant and \$14 million federal grant: *Co-chairman Pete Hubbell* asked if any farmers are interested in applying for this grant money. *Robert McKeon* thought maybe Harriet Rossi, Norman Greig and Sheehan might want their Hapeman Hill properties listed and maybe Mary Godesky on Yantz Rd. *Robert McKeon* thought Norman Greig’s Hapeman property might have trouble getting State funding as there are different criteria compared to the county and town. *John Hardeman* suggested we reach out to these farm folks. *Robert McKeon* said he would be willing to contact Rossi, Greig and Sheehan’s.

Bill O'Neill mentioned the Community Preservation Fund (CPF) has about \$120,000 left now and will continue to grow. It could be used towards Purchasing of Development Rights (PDR). It's a simple form.

7. Workshop: *Co-chairman Pete Hubbell* suggested having an open invitation workshop for all farmers to learn and explore with Scenic Hudson, Art Collins of Dutchess Land Conservancy maybe Jimmy Waterhouse regarding appraisal their land, options and the criteria for inclusion. It was felt that this is a busy time of the year and perhaps a later date would work out better. No definite date was selected or who would coordinate this effort.

8. Updating Red Hook Farm List: *Linda Keeling* handed out the Bicentennial 2012 list which desperately needs updating. She asked for all to look at what needs to be corrected or eliminated. *Robert McKeon* would like it to coordinate with the colored map of the farms and products map.

9. Farm Tours: *Linda Keeling* suggested doing farm tours for the public. They thought it was a good idea to restart this in the future and bring in the historical society, "Historic Red Hook", to help coordinate the event. *Talea's* interaction with kindergarteners breaks even financially but attracts as many and more of the parents attending the event. *Linda Keeling* mentioned that the elementary school has a food garden and it will be spreading to the middle school and high school. It is important to get the next generation involved and excited about farming.

10. ADDENDUM: From my Oct 9 Joint ZRC Notes: *Add to section 143-4 the following definition: Agricultural fences – fences constructed on parcels that are within a New York State certified Agricultural District and constituting a farming operation as defined in section 395-a of the New York State Agriculture and Markets law for purposes of a) containing or protecting farm animal and crops from wild animals or trespassers or b) buffering agricultural areas from residential and commercial uses.*

Modify section 143-28A as follows: Delete the sentence beginning "Fencing for agricultural purposes..." Add the following sentence at the end "Agricultural fences shall be exempt from building permits and height restrictions in all zones."

Motion to Adjourn: *Marina Michahelles* motioned to adjourn the meeting and *John Hardeman* seconded, all agreed.

Adjournment: The meeting adjourned at 8:20 pm.

Next Meeting: The next regular meeting will be **Tuesday, June 23, 2015.**

Respectfully submitted,

Linda J. Keeling, AOSC Secretary

APPROVED 6/23/15