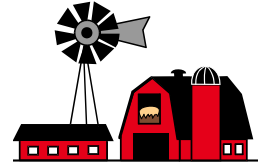




STATE OF RHODE ISLAND AND PROVIDENCE PLANTATIONS
Agricultural Lands Preservation Commission
c/o Department of Environmental Management
235 Promenade Street
Providence, RI 02908



AGRICULTURAL LANDS PRESERVATION COMMISSION

Draft Meeting Minutes for
Thursday, August 17, 2017 at 5:00 pm

COMMISSION MEMBERS PRESENT: Laura Bozzi, Kevin Nelson, Diane Lynch, Martha Neale, Everett Stuart

COMMISSION MEMBERS ABSENT: Ken Ayars, Jon Reiner, Dave Wallace

STAFF: Michelle Sheehan – DEM

The meeting was called to order at 5:1 at USDA, 60 Quaker Lane, Warwick, RI by K. Nelson, Chair.

- 1. Meeting Minutes.** On a motion by M. Neale and a second by E. Stuart, the Commission voted unanimously to approve the minutes of the July 20th meeting.
- 2. Review of current ALPC budget.** M. Sheehan provided update on current budget. The current balance remains the same at \$2,977,808.52. Whaley and Adams will be the next to close.
- 3. Status update of farms in negotiation:**

Adams, Glen Rock Road, Exeter: M. Sheehan informed the Commission that the closing is expected in September.

4. ALPC Scoring Criteria.

General Discussion:

K. Nelson led a discussion about amending the criteria that ALPC uses to score incoming applications. He gave a brief history of recent amendments to the criteria, the last being done in 2007, and suggested that science has changed since then and our criteria should reflect that. D. Lynch expressed the need for more guidance about how to do the scoring, especially for the more subjective criteria. L.Bozzi inquired about the process for scoring – do commissioners do it ahead of time, is there discussion. K. Nelson commented that during the last amendment process most of the commission wanted a degree of flexibility in the scoring process, and less black and white numerical calculations. E. Stuart noted the need to balance the current business plan vs. the more permanent aspects of the farm and fact that the farms will be perpetually protected. He also noted that more often than not, the applicants that submit business plans as part of their application are for farms that are changing hands. Temporary vs. permanent was echoed by K. Nelson who also noted that the development pressure criteria was extremely subjective. He brought up the idea of having a primary and secondary scoring process where the more permanent agricultural aspects of the farm would be scored first, and if a certain scoring threshold was met, then the farm would be scored

with secondary criteria, such as water resources and scenic qualities. E. Stuart suggested we look at the application form as well. K. Nelson suggested the commission take into consideration DEM's work on the State Wildlife Action Plan and new GIS layers.

Size

M. Sheehan mentioned that the Farmland Preservation Act is more expansive in its definition of agricultural land, allowing for auxiliary uses to be included in the 5-acres, while the Criteria is more strict, defining the minimum farm to be accepted as having at least 5 acres of productive land.

L. Bozzi advocated for changing this to be more flexible, noting that you can have viable 3-4-acre farms. And beginning farmers can only afford small farms.

K. Nelson brought up the concern for abuse and protecting people's back yards. L. Bozzi suggested that perhaps a stronger look at agricultural operation and viability would help. E. Stuart mentioned the specter of "estate farms" and the need to protect against this. This was echoed by M. Neale. M. Sheehan suggested the active agricultural provision that could be added to the Deed to Development Rights would help to mitigate this. E. Stuart mentioned that zoning might be an issue as well, if parcels are the same size as the minimum lot size, there would be no extra development potential and value would be an issue. M. Neale wondered if the scores assigned for each acreage level should be reworked. K. Nelson said that these were originally based on the average farm size, which may have changed by now. General agreement that ALPC should reconsider reducing the acreage of required acreage in production as long as we include a provision that requires that these farms remain in active agriculture.

Flood Zones

D. Lynch mentioned that it would be helpful to have guidance about A vs. V flood zones. K. Nelson noted that there is not much difference between the two. V just indicates a coastal location. This should be clarified in the handbook.

Development Pressure

E. Stuart commented that it seems to him that development pressure is everywhere in the state. Some locational differences do exist, for example if a farm is level and has significant road frontage. Also, if there is an older farmer with no succession plan. K. Nelson commented that ALPC's task is to protect something that is in the public benefit – what is the public benefit of development pressure? Suggests that development pressure be considered once a farm has scored into the program. D. Lynch commented that land quality and development pressure are probably aligned. D. Lynch and E. Stuart commented that we have limited resources and need to protect the farms that are most threatened.

Consistency with Plans

D. Lynch wondered if there is any farm protection project that would go against the State Guide Plan. K. Nelson answered no and that if there were any issues it would be with the local comprehensive plan. He recommends that this scoring criteria come out altogether – ALPC shouldn't be doing anything that goes against any plans anyway. Or if ALPC decides to keep it in, then the standard should be plan *implementation*, for example, if the protection of a farm aligns with Cranston's scenic farm loop. General agreement that this criteria should come out. E. Stuart wanted to make sure we keep the total possible score at 70, so that previous scores are comparable. K. Nelson said that should be the goal, but shouldn't hamstring the best scoring system.

Soil Quality

K. Nelson wondered if soil quality was the best way to judge a farm. E. Stuart noted that the soil maps were completed in the 1970s, and some soils do change due to removal of rocks, etc. M. Sheehan wondered about some farms that have been successfully in production for several decades with no prime/important farm soils. K. Nelson mentioned that having good soils on a protected farm ensured that future use of the farm could evolve over time with market changes. M. Neale wondered if we should give as much weight to soils. She indicated that new technology such as high tunnels and better soil amendments have made the underlying soil types less important. L. Bozzi wondered about food security as another criteria that could be considered. K. Nelson commented that soil quality was one of those permanent things about a farm so ALPC should carefully consider decreasing its importance. D. Lynch commented that just because something is permanent doesn't mean it is important. M. Neale would like to come up with a better scoring system for soils. K. Nelson commented that the handbook shouldn't limit the commission's discretion, the system is not that rigid, perhaps this should be called-out explicitly. E. Stuart said it would be interesting to see how much the different soils scores have ranged. K. Nelson reminded the commissioners that DEM calculates the Relative Agricultural Value of the soils for each farm via GIS. E. Stuart mentioned that he uses this calculation as a starting point and then adjusts it based on locations of the soils, etc.

K. Nelson would like to get input on some of the scoring criteria from experts at DEM and elsewhere. He will come up with a list of questions, and requests that the other commissioners do the same. E. Stuart wondered whether data exists for recharge areas for future water supply. Also commented that 10 points seems like a lot for water. ALPC will continue the discussion next month.

There being no further business, on a motion D. Lynch, seconded by L. Bozzi, the Commission voted unanimously to adjourn the meeting at 7:02.

Respectfully submitted by Michelle Sheehan, DEM