

Agricultural Commission Minutes

Tuesday, April 11, 2017

Attending: Ann Wiedie, Julie Hyde, Alex Anza, Avery Chaplin, Charlotte Donaldson, Yet-Ming Chiang, and guests Paul Penfield, Phyllis Halpern Nina Danforth, Holly Ameden, and Kristina Lukas

Minutes from January 10 approved.

Paul Penfield from RTAC came and presented letters sent to Eversource: one sent by the Town of Wayland, another from the Weston Historical Commission. Paul and Yet-Ming Chang presented a third letter which the Agricultural Committee may consider sending. The request to EverSource in these communications is to preserve a cattle pass of the modern type (closed top) which is in Wayland. (The modern pass in Weston is too near wetlands to consider saving; preservation of an older version (open top) in Weston at Gun Club Lane has already been agreed upon.) The committee agreed to the sentiments in the letter. Ann will print copies on town letterhead, and Alex will sign on behalf of the Commission and mail to the parties listed at the end of these minutes.

Holly Ameden (outgoing President of Lands Sake Board) and Kristina Lukas (current President) visited to discuss the Case Estates. Selectman Michael Harrity has continued working on the Legacy Trail which runs from the Community Center to behind the original location of the now removed Summer House. Also since last year much clearing and rehabilitation of the Parcel 9 has happened, under advisement by Tom Wirth, Michele Grzenda, George Bates, and others. This parcel is designated municipal, and the Affordable Housing Trust wanted more time to explore sites in Weston, so a decision on conserving it has been put off until May 2018.

Michael has also made headway (with assistance from the Historical Commission) in stabilizing the buildings on Wellesley Street. RFPs for the buildings and surrounding properties are not expected for another 18 months. The current 3-year contract for 40 Acre Field expires in December 2017.

Kristina spoke of expanding fundraising for Lands Sake. Also long-term goals of having a building, toilets, running water, closer proximity to schools, etc.

Nina Danforth spoke of her 5-year efforts to graze animals on the edge of 40 Acre to keep invasives at bay, expose children to animals, promote a rural flavor. Needed is a good way to herd the animals in the evening, also protection from wild predators and dogs (Alex reminds us that part of the Dog Committee from years ago is a rule that all dogs must be on leash on agricultural lands), and shade and a supply of green forage even in drought periods. Nina has two ewes which are likely to birth two each and so six will be available. John Burgess has goats. Anna Cohen, educational director at Lands Sake, is coordinating the childrens' programs which would take advantage of the animal presence. Nina needs to discuss with Pam Hess (director of Lands Sake) the logistics of the issues outlined above.

DRAFT, April 11, 2017

Ms. Brona Simon
Executive Director
Massachusetts Historical Commission
220 Morrissey Blvd.
Boston, MA 02125

Dear Ms. Simon:

At its regularly scheduled meeting April 11, 2017, the Weston Agricultural Commission voted unanimously to support the request to you from other town committees in both Weston and Wayland that the cattle pass in Wayland under the abandoned railroad line not be destroyed or damaged during the forthcoming construction of the rail trail.

After Weston enacted a Right-to-Farm By-law in 2005 the town Agricultural Commission was formed. Its members are appointed by the town Selectmen, and its general purpose is to administer this By-law. Related activities of the Commission include promoting farming in town, maintaining and increasing agricultural awareness among residents, and educating the public on farming issues, especially those of importance to Weston and nearby towns.

Weston's farming tradition dates back to the 1600s when, as part of Watertown, it was known as the Farmers' Precinct. The initial subdivision of land and granting of plots to Watertown residents took place in 1642, and by the 1690s there were enough people living in what is now Weston to justify local governance. A local parish church was started in 1698 and then fifteen years later the Town of Weston was incorporated.

Though farming is not the dominant economic sector in Weston that it once was, agriculture has continued to this day. Among towns with both a Right-to-Farm By-Law and an Agricultural Commission, Weston is the one closest to Boston. Weston's semi-rural character encourages widespread interest in farming and its history. The highly successful Weston organization Land's Sake connects residents of all ages to the land through activities in farming, gardening, land stewardship, forestry, hunger relief, and education. Weston people are therefore likely to be amenable to learning more about farming.

The new rail trail that goes through both Weston and Wayland will let us enhance our educational activities through presentation to the public of an important though not widely known farm facility, namely the cattle pass. Because the Massachusetts Central Railroad was built through farmland in both towns, means had to be provided to let livestock cross the tracks safely. Cattle passes, which are essentially culverts under the track, along with fencing to keep cattle off the track, were present from the start. We believe that if these cattle passes are displayed to the public people can informally gain appreciation of one aspect of farming history that will increase their awareness of and inform their attitudes toward farming today.

To that end, we are pleased to hear that Eversource, which plans to construct an access road on which the rail trail will be built, has agreed

to preserve one of the nineteenth-century cattle passes in Weston. However, there are also cattle passes of a more modern style, from the very early twentieth century. We hope that at least one of those can also be preserved during the construction, so that both types can be seen by people using the rail trail. We believe the one in Wayland, the largest of these, is the one that would be most effective.

Please do what you can to require Eversource to design the Wayland portion of their road so that this cattle pass is preserved for people to see.

Thank you.

Weston Agricultural Commission

Alex Anza, Diana Chaplin, Avery Chaplin, Yet-Ming Chiang, Charlotte Donaldson, Julie Hyde, Ann Wiedie

Recipients of above letter:

Denise M. Bartone, Sr. Environmental Engineer, Eversource
David Halliwell, Project Manager, VHB
Dan Driscoll, Director of Recreation Facilities Planning, Mass DCR
Ellen Berkland, Archaeologist, Mass DCR
Sherre Greenbaum, Chair, Wayland Conservation Commission
Gretchen Schuler, Chair, Wayland Historic District Commission
Phyllis Halpern, Co-chair, Weston Historical Commission
Pam Hess, Executive Director, Lands Sake
Elisa Scola, Chair, Wayland Historical Commission
Jack Sands, Chair, Weston Rail Trail Advisory Committee
Laurie Bent, Chair, Weston Conservation Commission
Pam Fox, President, Weston Historical Society