

Meeting Minutes: 09/18/2023

FINAL

Present: Audrey Prior (Chair), Joan Ganotis (Vice Chair), Dieter Ebert, Pollyanna Ford (alternate), Rowan Perkins (alternate)

Absent: Hank Brandt, Phil Thayer, Cheryl Kasztejna (alternate)

1. Opened meeting at 7:03 p.m.

2. Approval of Minutes:

Motion: To approve the minutes from 08/21/2023 as written.

1st: P. Ford

2nd: J. Ganotis

Motion passed unanimously.

3. Old Business

3a. Brochure Update: J. Ganotis is working on getting permission to use a photo of a barn that has a discretionary barn easement on it. P. Ford will send a list of North Hampton agricultural businesses. Once these two items have been received, A. Prior will send out a revised draft of the brochure for review.

3b. Community Newsletter: There will not be a fall issue of the Community Newsletter. The next issue will be the winter issue, usually due in January. Everyone will think of possible ideas for that article.

3c. Community Garden: A. Prior presented the revised rules and a draft of the email that will be sent to the gardeners, notifying them of the rule changes that will go into effect upon signing paperwork in the spring of 2024. The commission discussed what to do about existing tree and shrub plantings that will no longer be permitted under the new rules. It was decided that A. Prior will add a suggestion to the email that any of the gardeners with trees and shrubs in their plots should plan on transplanting them within the next year or so, as they will need to be removed prior to the restructuring of the garden plots. The commission reviewed the revised rules and decided to add that extensions can be granted on a case by case basis for the requirement that plots be cleaned out by November 1st, as some gardeners may wish to continue gardening for a bit longer than this, but the majority will likely be done by this time.

Motion: To adopt the amended Community Garden application and rules.

1st: P. Ford

2nd: D. Ebert

Motion passed unanimously.

A. Prior will notify the gardeners of the rule changes in late September/early October and will advise the commission of any comments received at the next meeting. The Commission discussed the duties that they would consider having a garden manager do. It was decided that this should be a separate email, to gauge interest, so A. Prior will work on writing a more formal job description for discussion at the next meeting.

4. New Business

4a. Review of potential Zoning Ordinance amendment: The Planning Board ADU Subcommittee has requested the Agricultural Commission's input on a potential amendment to the Zoning Ordinance (ZO). They are considering an amendment to the Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU) ordinance (ZO Article IV, Section 401) that would allow ADUs in the barn area of a structure that exemplifies the traditional architectural form of New England connected farm buildings.

Under the current ordinance, an ADU would only be permitted in the barn if all of the buildings/structures between the primary dwelling unit and the barn had been converted to living space. The intent of this amendment is to retain barns, preserve the rural characteristics of North Hampton and limit added density of new buildings. Allowing ADUs in connected barns would offer these barn owners another possible use for the barn.

The commission discussed the proposed amendment. The general consensus was that the Agricultural Commission is not opposed to the proposed amendment and doesn't feel that the proposed amendment would be detrimental to agriculture, but also doesn't feel that the proposed amendment would solve the problem. It is restrictive, and limited in scope, such that only a small portion of barns and properties will qualify. And for many, it would likely be cost prohibitive to build an ADU in a historic barn. The email to the Agricultural Commission regarding this amendment specifically referenced the configuration, "Big House, Little House, Back House, Barn." Commission members questioned whether any form of connected farm buildings would qualify, or if the structure would have to have those four buildings in order to qualify under this ordinance. Commission members also wondered whether a structure would qualify if it originally did have this form of architecture, but one of the connected buildings has been lost at some point and the barn is no longer connected, such as if the "back house" had had to be torn down and thus the "little house" and the barn are no longer connected. Would this ordinance still apply if the barn had at some point been converted to a garage? J. Ganotis explained that when conducting the Agricultural Commission barn survey, some homeowners didn't consider their barns to be barns, not recognizing that that is what the structure was before it was converted to its current use (in many cases, a garage). Commission members also wondered what brought this amendment to be proposed, as it is very specific. Some members also suggested that if this was being considered for aesthetic reasons (i.e. because it would place the ADU at the back of the structure, so that it would be less visible), then it shouldn't be limited to just barns. ADUs are useful for agricultural properties because they allow the property owner to house a farmhand, and being allowed to have an ADU that did not have to share a wall with living space in the primary dwelling would be beneficial.

5. Adjournment:

Motion: Adjourn at 8:18pm.

1st: R. Perkins

2nd: P. Ford

Motion passed unanimously.

Submitted by Audrey Prior. Next meeting: October 16, 2023 at 7:00 p.m. at the North Hampton Town Clerk's Office, 237 Atlantic Ave, North Hampton, NH 03862.