

BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

MEETING MINUTES

May 16, 2022

Supervisors: Kathie Becker, Elizabeth Austin, Andrew Mintz, Benee Hershon and Julie Weiss

Contractors: Susan Thomas

Partners: Bob Purcell, Natural Resource Conservation Services (NRCS), present for his report; signed off at 7:10

Volunteers: Liz McGuire and Dick Gelpke

Quorum: Kathie started the meeting with a quorum at 7:02.

District Conservationist Report: Bob reported that NRCS had just had a project ranking deadline on Friday. Five applications in Middlesex County were submitted: 2 for Upswing Farm in Pepperell for 5 high tunnels and an irrigation system (they bought the Kaiser APR and are vegetable farming and their well test indicated plenty of water on the land), Kimball Fruit Farm, also in Pepperell, submitted a CSP, Cupp and Sons applied for more thermal curtains, an Ashby farm applied for a high tunnel and Grisha is working with Kelsey on two applications for different programs since his leasing of the land may invalidate a CSP application.

There will be a Quality Assurance Review of the Holden office in June. Maggie Hanson will be working with Bob. These are done in 3 year rotations. The Westford office had one done under Heidi.

Meeting Venue: David Williams had wondered if this meeting would be live rather than virtual, which raised the question of whether or not the Supervisors want to meet virtually or in person with some restrictions now having been lifted. While this meeting could not be live until the Supervisors discussed it at a meeting, Sue did poll attendees as to their opinions and some people are not comfortable meeting in the conference room at this time, others are often not local, and the rest were neutral. Sue noted that the State is permitting open meetings to be held in virtual forums through July. It is not clear what will happen at that point. Julie made the motion that the Board meet remotely in June and discuss how to proceed as things progress. Andrew seconded this motion and all were in favor.

Minutes: Tabled until next meeting.

Workshops: Sue reported on three educational events: Healthy Soils, No Till Practices & Equipment Viewing with Farmer Dave and NRCS, Wild Edible Plant Ramble with Russ Cohen, and the Massachusetts Envirothon. MCD provided the first two events with support from the EEA Innovation Grant. MCD attended the Envirothon, which is an EEA funded program, as a volunteer sponsor.

Healthy Soils, No Till Practices & Equipment Viewing with Farmer Dave and NRCS While NRCS and Farmer Dave were hugely supportive and made the event both informative and multidisciplinary, as well as deliciously social, virtually all of the attendees worked for Farmer Dave. Gerry Cavallo from Johnny Putt Farm in Littleton was the only other farmer in attendance, however, everyone learned a lot, Dave had his soil sampled and brainstormed with Kate about possible solutions to some of his concerns, the equipment investment has definitely helped Dave to save time and reduce costs, and we all enjoyed a delicious dinner. Kate came prepared with a soil demonstration, written materials, and the ability to demonstrate soil sampling and evaluation onsite. Kelsey also attended. Sue advertised the workshop on our website, to our farmer list, through NRCS (Bob) and, very carefully, on Facebook, since it was strictly for farmers. This event and the food were free. The board believed the April timing was the problem regarding attendance. Discussion did not uncover a good time for this topic, but revealed that maybe April, when planting is going on both inside and out, is not the best, particularly for small farms. WCCD had a similar workshop last summer with good attendance, but Farmer Dave was only available spring or fall, and in the end Covid concerns and schedules made fall of 2021 unworkable. An early spring made April too late, in a weird way, this year.

Wild Edible Plant Ramble with Russ Cohen This is the second ramble MCD has sponsored with Russ Cohen. The first was in the fall of 2021. Like that event, this workshop sold out (parking at the Acton Arboretum is limited) to an enthralled and deeply interested audience who would have stayed much longer if Russ had been willing to extend his time. The event was free, but ¾ of attendees made a donation in some amount, covering a proportionate amount of Russ's fee, making it very inexpensive to offer and about a third bought Russ' book, thereby supporting conservation land in Essex County. As was true in the fall, attendees googled the topic and came from a good distance (one woman drove from Western MA, another from Cambridge). They were not familiar with the property we walked, the District, or in many cases, even Russ, prior to attending. The workshop was advertised on our website and Facebook page as well as on Russ'. It sold out weeks in advance, so no further promotion was required. We maintained a waitlist and were able to accommodate some people the same day.

These were the first workshops to use the registration capabilities of our ecommerce platform, Woocommerce, and associated email lists were created and used for follow up, in Mailpoet. These lists can be used for future outreach.

Massachusetts Envirothon Sue was able to attend this event in person for the first time. She worked registration which allowed her to meet everyone quickly and to spend the balance of the day attending student presentations and the educational testing each sponsoring state agency was running (NRCS (soils), Forestry, MA Wildlife, Water). WCCD ran the catering operation and paid for the food. City Compost was present throughout the event for educational and disposal purposes, as the topic was "Achieving a Zero Waste future for Massachusetts". Dave Williams had intended to volunteer but had to drop out at the last minute. MCD was listed as a supporter/sponsor of the event. The team from Lexington won. There were many teams from Middlesex County, as apparently is typical. There were only about half of the usual number of teams, and there were more urban teams than usual, which is a focus. This is a huge endeavor supported by EEA, and several state agencies, and represents a tremendous opportunity to educate the environmental leaders of the future. There is a lot that could be done to grow the program as we emerge from Covid. However, many hands make light work and the Board, which includes WCCD's Lisa Trotto, is looking for more volunteers as the person in charge of developing the topic would like to retire and it is the volunteer coordinator's last year in the role.

EEA Grant Review and 2023 Proposal

Sue reported that MCD currently has 3 outstanding grants: the basic grant for this year, which partially supports the District Administrator position and administrative expenses, which will definitely be exhausted by the end of the fiscal year, and two innovative grants: the Climate focused workshops, which will run through next year and are underway, and the Manure Management Grant, which will expire as of July first. Sue is working with EEA and Kathie to extend this grant again as the scope and content have had to be changed over the course of the grant due to Covid, however, now the pilot project on manure composting at Shady Tree Farm in Sherborn is finally getting off the ground at a new site, with new community partners and MA DEP licensing in place, and is poised to achieve the goal of the grant, which is to develop a model for stable waste composting that can be promulgated throughout the Commonwealth and adopted at various scales. We just need a bit more time.

Sue also discussed the next grant round, and while she loved the idea that the 75th anniversary committee came up with to profile various successful farm models from around the county and highlight how they have evolved to thrive in our changing environment, both physical and economic, to feed and educate the public, she fears that it will not be funded. This year's innovative grants are expected to address a particular conservation issue or land use problem and trial unique approaches to addressing it.

Sue expressed concerns about fleshing out a viable idea in time to meet the very tight deadline for the Letter of Inquiry. The Board expressed a desire for her to try to follow up on several ideas:

- Century Farms
- Programs in other states that might be implemented in Middlesex County
- Mixing pollinator plants into forage for grazing in Concord with Steve Verrill and the Town
- Asking Dave Dumaresq if he might be willing to work with us on a project/issue/idea
- Talking to Patrick Herron with the Mystic River Watershed Association to see if they have a need

The Board feels this is important in order to get additional funding in future years. Sue expressed concern that they apply for money they are not well positioned to use with projects still outstanding.

Sue will investigate options and reach out to Kathie. She will submit the LOI on time, and provide it to the Board. Sue asked if anyone else wanted to be involved.

Treasurer's Report Sue presented the report for the year to date. Andrew made the motion to approve the reports, Julie seconded the motion. All were in favor.

- Plant Sale – Sue reported the profit to be just over \$3000 not the \$7000 that Carolyn had estimated. Carolyn was away and could not attend, so Sue was not sure where the discrepancy was, however she discussed some possible reasons, some preventable, many not, as to why the profit was so low this time around. Benee reported that she ran the plant sale for the Conservation District in NH where she works, and that she partnered with Fedco and purchased from their Native Plant and Tree catalogue. Fedco gave her a customer number. Customers visit Fedco's site and order with the number and the CD gets a portion of the profit. They had about 15,000 in sales and received 15% of the profit from those. Fedco keeps the customer and order data. Benee was able to mark up the plants to cover shipping to her distribution point. She had one shipment to unpack, which was a lot. Some things do sell out. Sue asked if MCD had used the NH State Tree nursery in the past and both Julie and Liz thought there had been timing issues with our seedling sale. Stock isn't ready in time. Every state has a state nursery? Bonuses: Kathie proposed that given the extraordinary nature, once again, of this sale, with the need to learn new tools and undertake the effort for the first time for Carolyn, and in Gini's case, provide additional support, like going to pick up plants to avoid shipping costs, MCD award each of them a small bonus. She suggested Carolyn receive a bonus of \$300

and Gini receive \$150. Julie made the motion to do so, Andrew seconded it and all were in favor. Sue agreed to send out the bonuses the following day.

- Debit Card and Bank change – Carolyn has announced that she is no longer willing to pay for plant sale expenses up front and be reimbursed. Many of our vendors are less willing to extend us credit under current conditions, and few will take debit cards. Some places are unwilling to reserve stock and wait for a check. Sue and Kathie recommended that we pursue a financial vehicle for these payments as well as other online payments, and put a process in place for approvals, as well as some sort of limit to expenditures. WCCD has been doing this. Sue also advised we not pay for all of the stock up front, just deposits, as some stock is bound to fail or arrive in unsaleable condition and it is easier to reduce the final payment than it is to get refunds. She shared with the board that Frances' card was mistakenly billed for thousands in plants this past spring because her card was still on file. Sue repaid her immediately and Frances was not upset (she got points on her card), but it was a wake up call about using personal cards. A discussion was had about the merits of debit vs credit cards, and when they are taken and how to control disbursements and set up approvals. Given this need for new procedures and good communication with our bank, Kathie recommended switching from Citizens, whom we have found difficult to work with, to Middlesex Savings Bank, with whom both Sue and Kathie have had very good experiences with regard to customer service and responsiveness to questions. Andrew made the motion that we move our accounts from Citizens to Middlesex Savings Bank and explore an appropriate tool for contractors to use to pay for District expenses. Elizabeth Austin seconded the motion. All were in favor.

Budget Tabled until the next meeting.

Long Range Plan Liz and Kathie drove around and got the signatures for the Signature page. Thank you to all. Patrick has formatting changes he plans to send to Sue. Liz also had an edit Sue needs to look for, that was approved at a prior meeting. Benee had sent around some wording changes in an email which make the document more neutral and sensitive to the perspectives of native people and those who were not permitted to be landholders at the time being addressed in the text. Elizabeth Austin made the motion to approve the changes detailed in the email and our discussion (necessary because the text had already been approved), Andrew seconded the motion and all were in favor. Sue agreed to follow up and finalize and publish the plan.

New Business Kathie announced Sue's resignation effective no later than June 30th, her regret and understanding, her appreciation of Sue's work to date, and the need to start a search for a new District Administrator. Others expressed their sorrow at this news. Sue expressed her pleasure at being able to work with people so dedicated to conservation, at her appreciation for all she has learned and everything they do, and her continued commitment to make the transition as easy as possible for the District, leaving it, she hopes, in a stronger place than she found it. Sue suggested two meetings, rather than one in June, in order to accomplish a smooth transition. The first meeting was set for June 6 and the second for June 20th on Zoom.

Andrew made the motion to adjourn the meeting at 9:00 p.m. Elizabeth Austin seconded, all were in favor.

Minutes recorded and respectfully submitted,

Susan Lavigne Thomas

District Administrator

