February 2, 2012 - Meeting Minutes

Present: Wendy Stevens, Chair, George Malette, Vice Chair, Luke Drake & Jerry Little.

The meeting was called to order at 7:02 p.m.

Wendy Stevens made a motion to approve the January 5th minutes. George Malette seconded, Jerry Little and Luke Drake abstained. Minutes approved.

The potluck was rescheduled for March 10th with Dr. Drew Conroy of the Thompson School of Applied Science. Dr. Conroy grew up in Weare and is coming to speak on ruminant animals. He is a leading national expert on draft oxen.   The potluck will be held Saturday March 10th from 5-8pm at Wildwood Farm. Wendy Stevens will write a newsletter and make a poster. Jerry Little agreed to place the announcement in the Market Bulletin.

Current Use was reviewed. Wendy Stevens shared documentation from the Boscawen Agricultural Commission and their meeting with Rob Johnson of the New Hampshire Farm Bureau. It states that High Tunnels can be erected on current use land. A high tunnel is a seasonal, unheated, plastic covered non-permanent structure where crops are grown directly in the ground. Mr. Johnson recommended to the BAC that they place a definition of high tunnels in their Zoning Ordinance's table of uses. It was also noted that hoop structures that house livestock may not be classified a high tunnels and may in fact be structures.

Wendy Stevens agreed to check with the town clerk regarding Current Use administration and how the town administers this Current Use ordinance. Parcels less than 10 acres that produce $2,500 in revenues or more from farm sales are allowed to be placed in current use. She will investigate.

HB 1451 (tax credit for 10x10 garden) was reviewed. HB 1402 (removal of Homesteader's license) and HB 1650 (Made in NH products exempt from federal regulations) were also reviewed. The commission discussed how these three bills will affect Weare. Wendy Stevens noted that 1402 applies to

cheesemakers; soft cheese and yogurt. Luke Drake put forth how 1650 may affect meat regulations as far as USDA. He also discussed product liability insurance.

Wendy Stevens recommended creating awareness if this passes to communicate these tax savings to residents of Weare. A poster was discussed regarding 1451, 1402, 1650 as well as the Current Use specifications. Luke Drake added the importance of information from the Farm Service Bureau & Dept. of Agriculture in terms of resources, grant funds and loan opportunities for residents of Weare. He also recommended developing classes and workshops that help explain these advantages further.

The Town Warrant Articles were reviewed. Due to the fact that there is an ongoing need for volunteer members on the commission, and on town boards in general, Article 29 limits the commission's ability to retain members.

Farm & Forest Expo is Fri Feb 3 & 4. Wendy Stevens noted that The Coalition of NH Agricultural Commissions will have their first meeting as a group at 12:30 on Saturday.

George Malette notated that the Scenic byway is working on a historic workshop for scenic byway structures (including barns) and is a four town sponsored movement.

George Malette discussed the Natural Resources map is nearing completion by the Conservation Commission. He explained the ranking of natural resources. Jerry Little notated that prime soil is very rare and commented that we should be thinking about the necessity of the ability to grow our own food.   The commission concensus was that prime soil is very rare and that we would like to see prime soil ranked high on the list of priorities on the Natural Resource map. The commission plans to gather a list of parcels that contain prime soils and make recommendations based on that data. Groundtruthing was discussed.

There being no other items on the agenda, Wendy Stevens made a motion to adjourn. Luke Drake seconded, meeting adjourned at 8:51 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Wendy Stevens