

TOWN OF SHERMAN

**Ad Hoc Advisory Committee on HAPPY ACRES FARM**

Meeting: November 4, 2013

Minutes

Attending: Andrea O'Connor, Fran Frattini, Jeanette Perlman, Joanna Wozniak, Jen Freed, Warren Pitcher, Elyse Smolen, Robert Edmond, Jerrold Siegel, Richard Lenihan  
Also in attendance: Stephanie Warren

The meeting was called to order at 7:07 pm. Warren Pitcher moved approval of the minutes of the meeting of October 16, 2013, seconded by Jen Freed. All voted in favor.

There was a general discussion of the results of farm visits. These visits identified key people who would be of assistance to the group as planning progressed. There was general consensus that the future operation of the farm should involve one or more tenant farmers. It is critical to develop a means of evaluating proposals to ensure the success of the selected farming operation(s). Tenant farmers should be permitted to determine what type of farming they will pursue rather than require them to continue with beef cattle. It is important, too, to specify expectations, such as the upkeep of the buildings and grounds comprising the farm. Group members were encouraged to continue with the farm visits as these are very helpful in gaining an understanding of how to proceed in the future.

Andrea O'Connor initiated a review of the task list created by Jen Freed following the last meeting:

- the Board of Selectmen has approved funding for a clerk. Thus far, the search for a clerk has been unsuccessful
- e-documents continue to be accumulated
- Joanne Wozniak suggested that any hard copy files be kept either in the Conference/Lunch Room or the Meeting Room so these could be accessed by committee members
- Andrea O'Connor has reserved the Meeting Room for scheduled meetings through December and will submit a request to the Town Clerk for room reservations for 2014 in December
- Joanne Wozniak asked committee members to forward to her contact information they felt comfortable in sharing with the group
- Andrea O'Connor reported that Veronica Scheer had identified several possible domain names for a Happy Acres Farm website and that these had been forwarded to Justin Molito, who was not available to report on this
- A Happy Acres Farm link on the Town website has not yet been created
- No action has yet been taken on leasing a portion of the homestead to the Farm Manager, Frank Pruchnik, Jr. Andrea O'Connor reported that she had obtained information on market rate rentals in Sherman, which averaged \$1,800/month.

- available financial information was forwarded by Andrea O'Connor to Richard Lenihan, Neil Volkmar, and Paul Kuhn; the trust attorney refused to authorize release of prior year's financials to committee members
- a job description was drafted by Frank Pruchnik, Jr. and given to First Selectman Clay Cope, but has not been shared with committee members as yet
- Paul Kuhn provided Farm Manager metrics, an impossible task
- no action has been taken as yet on developing a short or long term business plan
- Andrea O'Connor reported on a meeting with Jamie Spannhake to begin the process of forming a legal entity with non-profit status; they will be assisted in this endeavor by Bernadette Schopfer, who has assisted other non-profits in this regard. Jamie has been asked to create a list of documents we will need so that interested group members can participate in developing these
- no action has been taken on securing trademark protection for Happy Acres Farm; it is not yet trademarked
- Andrea explained that having a separate entity to manage the farm would provide greater latitude in investment options for farm funds not possible for a municipality under State statutes
- Andrea indicated that she had an appointment with Probate Judge Marty Landgrebe to determine whether he was willing to interpret the trust document with respect to allowable expenditures from the endowment
- no action had been taken on remaining option

Andrea O'Connor indicated that the discussion of the future of the farm held many exciting opportunities but that there was a need to focus on the short-term management of the farm given the fact that the Town will be asked to take over this management in the very near future and certainly by year's end. In this regard, and following substantial discussion, the committee asked that the following recommendations be brought to the Board of Selectmen for action:

- 1) That a Town Meeting be scheduled to appropriate funds from the cell tower that had been set aside for Happy Acres Farm for use in managing the Farm property and that all future cell tower revenues be directed to a special fund established for this purpose.
- 2) That the homestead property not be rented to or occupied by the Farm Manager but that the Farm Manager be charged with ensuring that this property is protected through the winter months.
- 3) That the Farm Manager be employed as an independent contractor for a term of six months with options to renew for three month intervals rather than hired as a Town employee. It was recommended that sufficient compensation be provided to cover worker insurance as well as wages of any employees working on the farm. It was further recommended that expectations be established in the contract with respect to maintaining the status quo of the farming operation for the duration of the contract.

It was the intent of these recommendations that the Town not lose flexibility in dealing with the Farm property in the future or with using the homestead in ways that would be attractive to a tenant farmer. There was concern that relocating the Pruchnik family to the homestead was unfair if the situation ended up being short-term coupled with a concern that about the difficulty

in terminating a rental arrangement. The committee is seeking to continue the farming operation as is while it continues to educate itself as to the best ways in which to proceed.

Andrea indicated that she would forward these recommendations to the Board of Selectmen for action.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:00 p.m. The next meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, November 20, 2013.

Respectfully submitted,

Andrea O'Connor