

Caroline Agriculture Committee Meeting Minutes of March 12, 2022

The Caroline Agriculture Committee meeting was held in person at 262 Harford Road on March 12, 2022 beginning at 2:00 p.m.

Attendance:

Liaison to Agriculture Committee, Councilmember Katherine Goldberg
Agriculture Committee member Andrew Dygert
Agriculture Committee member Caleb Scott
Agriculture Committee member Emily Adams
Community member Pete Hoyt
Community member Jonathan Snow
Community member Anne Dygert
Community member Brandon Huntone

Zoom link is open during meeting; no zoom attendees are present.

Recording Secretary:

Councilmember Katherine Goldberg

Brief discussion regarding committee structure

Reiteration of the initial charge to committee via Town Board resolution; it is not specific.

Resolution re. purpose of the committee states: *"Investigate and recommend measures to support local agriculture & food justice issues"*

How best to communicate as a group - email, Google Doc/Group, Slack, other channels. Emily offered to set up a Google Group to allow for central sourcing of information, documents, etc. Informal, friendly structure of meetings is appreciated by participants; Katherine to take minutes from this meeting, agreeable to continue as long as this is acceptable to the group. Would the committee wish to have a "leadership" structure? Would a presence on the town website be desirable? To be determined.

Brief discussion regarding farm/homestead listing

Do we want one? How to organize? Would some prefer not to be listed; public list v. internal for this committee? Potential goals of a listing include community building, resourcing among agriculturally inclined residents, increased traffic/marketing for farm businesses, other. To be determined.

Discussion regarding food sovereignty

Reiterated history of this committee re. food justice/food sovereignty; people think that committee was formed because of zoning, this isn't the case. Discussed goals for committee: find a way to make being a farmer profitable, encourage farmers to keep their land, support local businesses. Consider having town attorney review potential local law related to food justice, discuss how to expand markets for farmers, including the Brooktondale Farmers' Market, consider a community supported store. Information shared regarding feasibility study related to community or employee ownership of Brookton's market. Initial stages only. Broad goal for committee = convincing town board to "get agriculture". Discussed potential connections with Anna Kelles, other legislators to bolster support for agricultural efforts in Caroline.

Envision a time when *"agriculture becomes, once again, a main part of Caroline"* - Anne Dygert

Discussion of Right to Farm Law

http://www.townofcaroline.org/uploads/6/2/7/8/62781479/1999-1_rites_to_farm_law.pdf

How to revise and make relevant for the current climate in Caroline. Consider formation of subgroup/working group to meet separately for review and revision. Questions include: when/where does RTF operate? Intersection between RTF, Ag Districts, Zoning, code enforcement and other local laws. What does RTF primarily hope to accomplish? Primary/historic purpose is prevention of nuisance suits from non-farming residents who are farm-adjacent.

Reiterate discussion from last meeting regarding definition of farm/farmer/agriculture, and potential positive impacts for supporting Ag in Caroline with local definitions. Discussed also in relation to food justice issues, marketing for "Caroline Safe", "Made in Caroline" (or some such designation/labeling) farm products.

Questions & clarification around code enforcement and moratorium, related to agriculture. Exemption text is as follows (from moratorium law):

"Any traditional Agricultural Action that is protected under Article 25-AA of the Agriculture and Markets Law by being exempt under the Town of Caroline's subdivision or site plan review procedures and laws."

<https://www.nysenate.gov/legislation/laws/AGM/A25-AAA>

Residents may apply for a variance from the moratorium.

Discussion regarding zoning and related feedback to commission/board

How and when to provide feedback? Discussed benefits/burdens of acting individually versus as a group of content experts with working knowledge of local agriculture (which describes this committee's membership). Reviewed current process and timeline for potential zoning law which could reasonably be reviewed; how to best allocate energy and efforts in this regard. Re-emphasized importance of providing feedback to shape the potential zoning law currently under discussion; those who are engaged in agriculture and understand the community are best positioned to provide realistic feedback.

Much curiosity offered around planning/zoning tools which actually benefit agriculture versus functioning in service to the vague notion of "rural character".

Action Item: Research agricultural zoning tools and impacts, look for municipalities which are similar to Caroline, what has/hasn't worked?

Discussion regarding small, doable things to help farmers

Cooperative Ag Plastics Recycling!

Incorporate into town highway barns; Katherine to discuss with town board.

Beyond zoning/planning, big picture things, this is a specific actionable item which would benefit the agricultural community in town, as there is no farm large enough for Ag plastics recycling on its own.

Other ideas:

Meat locker

Community hay storage

Increased local markets for Caroline farm products

NEXT MEETING will be held in Town Hall, time/date TBD

---Adjourn at 4:06 PM---

Respectfully submitted,
Katherine J. Goldberg