The video of the meeting may be viewed here:  https://youtu.be/GKJR46L091

The March 8, 2022, Regular Meeting of the Woodbridge Agricultural Commission was convened by Chairman Chris Sorensen at 8:00 p.m. via WebEx in accordance with SB1202.

Present:  Chris Sorensen, Chair’ Andrea Urbano, Vice Chair; Steve Munno; Kristyna Hulland; and Leland Torrence.

Present for staff:  Geraldine Shaw, Clerk

MINUTES
The Commission approved the minutes of the February 8, 2022, meeting. (Munno – Torrence).

TOWN PLAN & ZONING ACTION RE FARMSTAND REGULATION
Mr. Sorensen reported that the application for a Zoning Regulation change to allow the sale of items other than those produced on the property that the stand is located on went well and is moving forward through the process. He thanked Mr. Munno for the presentation he presented.

DISCUSSION – PRESENTING REQUEST FOR FIVE (5) YEAR LEASES AT THE ANNUAL TOWN MEETING
Mr. Sorensen reported that he met with First Selectman Heller and Town Counsel Gerald Weiner. Due to the language of the Charter extending a farm lease from one to five years is problematic. Mr. Sorensen said that Ms. Heller and Mr. Weiner suggested that the Town help with the grant process or apply for the grant with the farmer being responsible for any matching funds.

Mr. Torrence said that the decision was regrettable as there is no incentive for a farmer to improve the land.

Ms. Hulland said that she leases the Alegi Field and understands that it has been under consideration for a 90’ baseball diamond. She asked if consideration of a five-year lease for the Alegi Field could be an item on the Annual Town Meeting Agenda. The Town could still have discretion to say that it is choosing not to grant a five-year lease on that parcel. This would save the yearly back and forth request for an extended lease. There was a brief discussion re the status of the proposed 90’ diamond.  The Clerk will forward information for the April meeting.

Mr. Munno explained that the entities awarding the grants require that the person applying show control of the property and that the practice for which the grant is requested will have a life of 5 years. He that it would be valuable it the matter could be brought to the Town Meeting to explain the need for longer lease periods.

Mr. Sorensen said that Mr. Weiner and Ms. Heller said that the Town would consider request on a case-by-case basis. If the Town agreed to help with the applications, they would also consider extending the leases. The Commission said that this may be the time for others interested in longer leases to be heard – as the Annual Town Meeting is already scheduled – instead of the Town incurring the cost of a special town meeting. Ms. Urbano asked about reaching out to the other leases to inquire if they are interested in longer leases. Mr. Sorensen said that he would speak to First Selectman Heller re placing the question of a 5-year lease for the Alegi Field on the agenda of the May 16th Annual Town Meeting

QUESTIONS FOR ARBOR HAVEN – PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT FOR THE FORMER COUNTRY CLUB
The Commission VOTED UNANIMOUSLY (Sorensen – Urbano) to submit the prepared questions to the Board of Selectmen and Arbor Haven Development.

“March 8, 2022 – Unanimously approved by the Agricultural Commission
AGRICULTURAL COMMISSION – questions regarding the Arbor Haven planned development on the former Country Club of Woodbridge property.

INQUIRY TO THE TOWN

What is the proposed timeline for a referendum to decide the sale of the former country club of Woodbridge property to Arbor Haven and the proposed development? Please provide the specific date or month/year you expect this referendum to take place.

Given the historical agricultural significance of the property and its agricultural soils, will the Town require the incorporation of any agricultural elements in Arbor Haven’s planned proposal? For example, a space may be set-aside for a community garden. If kept in open space, as other town owned lands, what is the plan for maintenance, and could it include acreage to be leased by farmers? One farmer in Town has expressed interest in using some acreage for hay. Would the Town support a portion of the property deeded back to be used for hay and a walking path, much like at the Fitzgerald Track? Is integrating agriculture/maintaining some portion of the mapped prime, and statewide important agricultural soils a priority to the Town?

Regarding the proposed 50-acres deeded back to the Town for open space: What are the Town’s plans for that property? Specifically, how do you see this acreage functioning for the townspeople of Woodbridge, if at all? If this acreage will remain in the Town’s ownership/for open for public use, how much do you estimate the cost of restoring the deeded recreational features (e.g., tennis courts & pool), and what do you foresee the annual costs of their maintenance to be? This question addresses the Recreation Department requests and addresses a concern of the Agricultural Commission regarding the historical and cultural significance of the property. It also addresses the economics of Arbor Haven’s proposal. Please provide detail.

What environmental and sustainability aspects is the Town going to require detailed in the development proposal? For example, will the Town require houses be sited for use of solar panels? Or will Town require that solar panels be included on each dwelling? Is the Town requiring an environmental impact statement regarding the proposed development? Is the Town weighing in on materials used to construct the proposed houses? What, if anything, is the Town doing to ensure the proposed development has a reduced carbon footprint?

INQUIRY TO ARBOR HAVEN

Please provide specific information regarding the sustainability and environmentally friendly aspects of the project. What are you doing to reduce the environmental impact of construction and the long-term residential occupancies?

What is the environmental impact of the proposed project as it stands today? If possible, please submit your environmental impact statement to the Agricultural Commission for consideration.

The walking paths, pool, basketball court and playground shown on the proposed plan appear to be included in the “common areas” for which the residents of the development pay maintenance fees. The presentation alluded that all these areas are open to all Town residents, not just members of the development. Is this a possible conflict with the homeowners? Please provide more detail on how
common areas and designated areas of “open space” will be maintained and used by both residents of the proposed development and Townspeople at large.”

**KRYSTYNA HULLAND’S GRANT APPLICATION – UPDATE**
Ms. Hulland explained that the name of the grant has been changed to the Farmland Restoration Grant and the deadline has been moved to April 12. She said that she is working with Betsy Yagla on the application. She is seeking the grant to improve the margins of the land and will clarify with the Town what obstacles to mowing may be removed i.e., rocks, trees, brush.

There is a webinar at 10:00 a.m. on March 23rd to discuss the new process for applications. She noted that criteria for the grant and other information is listed on the Department of Agriculture/Restoration Grant website.

**ITEMS FOR THE APRIL 12, 2022 MEETING**
- Agenda for Annual Town Meeting
- Farm Stand Zoning Regulation – Update
- 90’ Baseball Diamond – History – current status
- Feed back from Arbor Haven and Town re submitted questions.

**ADJOURNMENT**
On a non-debatable motion by Mr. Munno, seconded by Ms. Urbano, the meeting adjourned at 8:38 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Geraldine S. Shaw, Clerk