

Harvard Agricultural Advisory Commission (HAAC)

Town of Harvard, MA

Minutes of Meeting May 31, 2023
Approved October 25, 2023

Attendees: Kerri Green (Chair), Christiane Turnheim, Matthew Varrell

Meeting opened by Kerri Green at 7:35pm

Kerri read remote participation disclaimer

Item 1: Discussion of Letter of Support for 13 Massachusetts Avenue

Green reached out to the Board of Health to obtain a copy of Stable Permit Regulations and list of current Stable Permits within the Town. BOH responded that they do not maintain regulations and follow MGL Chapter 111 Section 155, which speaks to licensing of stables within municipalities. Varrell provided a summary of existing permits, evaluated by acreage. There does not appear to be a correlation to acreage in permits issued. MGL Ch 111, S 155 states requirements for stable permits, as issued by the BOH and associated fees (Harvard does not charge a fee), and the ability of the BOH to establish regulations to govern the Stable Permit. The language does not create regulations, but states that regulations may be developed. Varrell stated that there appears to be a difference in the interpretation of Ch 111, S 155 between BOH and HAAC. There is no language about permission from abutters or neighbors for Permit issuance. Varrell recommended the HAAC issue a letter to the BOH recommending the BOH develop draft regulations as allowed in Ch 111, S 155 for submission to HAAC for a 45 day review and comment. Turnheim noted that there are only 14 Stable Permit issues in the town and feels there are likely many more properties that would qualify for the need or a Stable Permit. It does not appear the requirement is being enforced town-wide. Turnheim recommended the Stable Permit requirement be applied and enforced equally town-wide. Varrell described his farm's experience in obtaining a Stable Permit and the requirements of the current application. Turnheim commented that the town would likely require more than 50 permits town-wide, based on her estimate of properties that have livestock. There was a discussion of how many animals on a property would trigger a Stable Permit and that question would likely become part of any regulations developed by the BOH. Turnheim commented that one animal in a building would likely trigger a Permit. Green concurred. The Committee agreed that the BOH does not appear to be pursuing animal owners to apply for a Stable Permit and the individuals who apply for a permit should not be penalized for applying for a Permit (especially if regulations are not in place).

Varrell made the following motion: Motion #1: *The Harvard Agricultural Advisory Committee (HAAC) prepare and issue a letter to the Board of Health recommending that the Board of Health generate regulations pertaining to the issuance of a Stable Permit within the Town of Harvard (as allowed in MGL Ch. 111, Section 155). The HAAC further recommends that such draft regulations be submitted to the HAAC for review and comment in accordance with M.G.L. Chapter 111, Section 31.* Turnheim seconded the motion. Motion was discussed and minor edits made. Approved 3-0.

Subsequently, Varrell made a second motion, as follows: *The Harvard Agricultural Advisory Committee (HAAC) prepare and issue a letter to the BOH, recommending that the Board of Health issue a Stable Permit to residents who request such a permit, in light of the fact that no current regulations exist in the Town of Harvard. Based on discussions to date, HAAC supports the issuance of a Stable Permit for 13 Massachusetts Avenue, if so applied for.* Turnheim seconded the motion. Motion was discussed and minor edits made. Approved 3-0.

Green noted that she will issue separate letters, based on the above motions. The HAAC encouraged the 13 Massachusetts Ave owner to keep us apprised of their application.

Item 2: Discussion of Installation of Harvard Grown Signage

Discussion was held on current locations of installed signage and that, all in all, it looks very good. Green stated she spoke to town officials about adding farm specific signage to the Harvard Grown signs. A question was raised if an “ethics violations” would occur if such signage occurred for individual farms. Green stated the Town Counsel will be reviewing the question. Varrell noted that the State Ethic Board has a helpline for such questions. Discussion was held on signage ethics issue and HAAC needs to wait to hear from Counsel on feasibility of private signage.

Item 3: Discussion of Future Forum Action Items/ Member Updates

Discussion of progress reports to Selectboard and each HAAC member is looking into a topic. Turnheim described report submission to show progress to date.

Varrell noted alpacas have been shorn and one baby is due this summer. Varrell will be attending a Tourism Expo for Merrimack Valley and a discussion he had with the organizers about emphasizing agriculture in future expos. Varrell will be bringing Harvard Grown brochures for distribution.

Turnheim noted they are now selling eggs in their farm stand. A new medicinal plant trail is now open at their farm.

Green discussed how weather has adversely affected their farm. The situation is bad, based on this year and previous years.

Motion to adjourn made by Varrell at 8:59pm. Seconded by Turnheim. Approved 3-0.

Submitted by: M. Varrell