

Dummerston Farmland Protection Committee  
Meeting minutes 2/26/19.

Attending: Vern Grubinger, Diana Lischer-Goodband, Jack Manix (chair), Read Miller, Elizabeth Wood. Guest: Noah Hoskins.

The meeting came to order 5:10 pm at the town office.

Current amount in the town's Farmland Protection Fund: \$25,962. These funds can only be allocated with Selectboard approval. A key role of the committee is to identify and propose projects to be supported by this fund.

The Fund has supported two projects to date, in collaboration with the Vermont Land Trust: conservation easements for the Bunker Farm and for the main field of the Moore Farm. In each case, the fund provided \$15,000, or just a few percent of the total cost, as a statement of the town's support for the projects. That support was important to overall fundraising and grant writing needed to make the projects happen. Both projects contribute to the ongoing vitality of agriculture in Dummerston.

It was noted that Jack, on behalf of the committee, had sent an email to the Selectboard requesting \$5,000 in funding be allocated to the Fund in this year's budget, to be presented at town meeting. The Selectboard responded that because there are a lot of demands on the budget this year, especially the proposal to purchase a gravel pit, they kept the Farmland Fund line item at \$2,500. Last year's funding was \$5,000, after a vote at town meeting to double the \$2,500 allocation in the proposed budget.

A lengthy discussion ensued about the importance of the Fund, what the target amount should be for the Fund, and how to develop a long-term plan for growing the Fund. Concerns were voiced about having a floor debate every year at town meeting. It was decided to develop a case statement for the Fund, providing the rationale for an ambitious fundraising goal that included both public (town) and private (donations) support.

The plan should include:

- data on current farms in town – acreage, products employment, etc.
- rationale for the Fund – cost of community services, language in town plan
- case studies of similar funds in other towns –size, use, impact
- perspective of VLT and VHCB about the role of town funding in protecting farmland
- fundraising target, annual support requested from the town, expected Fund allocations.

The plan for the Fund could be presented to the Selectboard, and with their agreement, could be accepted as a stable, long term approach to growing and supporting and using the Fund.

It was suggested that if asked at town meeting, a committee member could say that while we requested \$5,000, we recognize it is a tough budget year so we accept the Selectboard's allocation of \$2,500 to the fund. We appreciate the town's support for farmland protection, and we believe it will need to be increased in the future to provide the town with the necessary flexibility to respond to farmland protection projects that may need quick action and will likely be more expensive than in the past. Over the next year will be working on a plan for the Fund to present to the Selectboard that will include an increase in town support and a private fundraising effort.

A dissenting view was presented, that since there is a lot of momentum for supporting the Fund, the committee should maintain its request for \$5,000 this year.

A motion was made by Jack Manix to support the proposed allocation of \$2,500 to the Fund this year. Seconded by Read Miller. Approved by a vote of 4-1.

Noah Hoskins expressed his interest in joining the Farmland Protection Committee, and members were enthusiastic about this. The Chair will send an email to the Selectboard asking them to invite Noah to join the committee.

The committee decided to hold regular (at least quarterly) meetings in order to be more effective. The next meeting should be in late March. Noah agreed to inquire whether Joan Weir (or another land trust representative if she is not available) could meet with the committee to provide information on what how other towns are managing their farmland funds and to provide perspective on the role that these funds may play in future efforts to protect farmland in the state. We will schedule our next meeting around Joan's availability.

Meeting adjourned 6:50 pm.

Respectfully submitted, Vern Grubinger.