

Farmland Protection Committee meeting Sept. 11, 2019

Meeting commenced 5:15 p.m. in town office attic.

Present: Jack Manix (chair), Noah Hoskins, Vern Grubinger, Read Miller, Elizabeth Wood.

Guests: June Levinson, Joan Weir.

Potential budget request from town for the Farmland Protection Fund was discussed. Vern noted he had developed a spreadsheet that presented the fund as a capital plan, with annual additions and expenditures. Current funds are about \$31,000. If \$15,000 is allocated to a project this year (our policy is not to expend more than half the Fund), and \$5,000 is added to the fund by the town every year, obviously the Fund could support one project with \$15,000 every 3 years.

Noah suggested that the committee be able to answer the question what is the right amount for the fund to maintain. Joan, representing VLT was asked what the average cost of farmland conservation easement projects statewide is, and she responded it's about \$500,000, and that funders such as VLT and VHCB expect local funds to cover about 20% of a project's costs. Availability of local funds makes a project more competitive for limited state and federal grants to support farmland conservation. Thus Noah suggested \$100,000 would be a good long-term target for the Fund. Vern noted that the town fund only contributed about \$15,000 and \$18,000 to the most recent projects it supported (Bunker Farm and Moore Farm). Joan noted that those funds were in addition to over \$100,000 in local donations raised for one project, and the seller's donation of over \$40,000 in the other.

It was suggested that the committee set a date to meet with the Selectboard to review the purpose of the committee, a proposed request for \$5,000 in funding this coming year, and to share that we are aware of several potential farmland parcels that may be considered for conservation in the near future. The committee plans to reach out to these owners to offer support as they make a decision about what to do with their land. We can let them know about the Fund, as well as farm success planners that can help with family decision making. Vern was charged with writing a letter that committee members could hand deliver to people to help them understand the role of the committee the Fund, and other resources available. Committee members volunteered to make visits.

It was suggested that the committee write an article for Views of Dummerston to make people aware of our role and the role of the Fund. This could also be the basis for a shorter report submitted to the annual Town Report.

Meeting adjourned 6:45 pm.

Respectfully submitted, Vern Grubinger.