

Plainfield Agricultural Commission Meeting – May 7, 2020, 7:00 PM through Zoom.

Present: Anna Hanchett, Bi-sek Hsiao, Ed Stockman, Sadie Stull, and Anne Williamson

I. Small Communities Planning Grant

Judy Williams has asked us to write a letter of support for a Small Communities Planning Grant. The grant is for developing an Open Space and Recreation Plan for Plainfield and will be submitted by CJ Lammers, Assistant Director at the Conway School of Landscape Design. The emphasis of the grant is the creation of a habitat friendly design for pollinators and birds. *Anne has agreed to write a draft of the letter by tomorrow morning for the Commission to review.*

II. Petition to Oppose Unrestricted Mosquito Spraying in Massachusetts

Marty Dagoberto alerted us to a current bill authorizing unrestricted mosquito spraying in Massachusetts encouraging us to oppose the bill. *We have all signed or will sign the petition, and Anna and Ed will draft and send a letter to the Joint Committee on Public Health registering our concern.*

III. Massachusetts Joint Testimony regarding Neonics Review

Our Commission has been asked to sign a letter endorsing joint testimony regarding a state review of neonicotinoid insecticides. The report provides a case for passage of the Mass. Pollinator Protection Act, H763. The letter provides further recommendations for actions to be taken by the Department of Agriculture. *Anna will sign the letter on behalf of our Commission.*

IV. Farmers' Markets, Mobile Market and Local Foods

Anna suggested that this would be a perfect time to publicize the safety of local foods to our community. After a spirited, thoughtful discussion, Bi-sek and Sadie offered to write an article for the *Plainfield Post*. Subjects to be covered include: publicity for the local mobile markets, the safety of food grown here, local farmers' markets, and local farms. *Bi-sek will be doing the bulk of the research on local farms, farmers' markets, and farmers while Sadie will be conducting an interview with Seva Water about the Mobile Market.*

V. What is the role of the Agricultural Commission? Are we a resource for the community?

These questions were asked by Bi-sek leading to an enthusiastic discussion with all agreeing that we should be available to answer gardening questions. Ed noted that he is already acting as a resource in the community. Bi-sek suggested that perhaps we could be more pro-active than we have in the past. A number of suggestions were made regarding how including having a presence on the Raspberry Hill website. There is a tab *Ask a Gardener* on the Raspberry Hill site, suggested by our Commission a couple of years ago, which we could use to publicize ourselves as a resource. *For now, Bi-sek will write an article for the upcoming Plainfield Post about the Commission and how we can help with gardening questions.*

Tuesday, May 12th at 4:00 PM is the deadline for the next *Plainfield Post*.

VI. Small Pollinator Garden at the Post Office

We need to begin our Spring work on the garden soon. Bi-sek offered to help. We agreed that a small flowering tree (perhaps something small in the cherry/prunus family) planted in the north end would be appropriate. Funds are available in our budget. *Anna will check with the Plainfield Tree Alliance for agreement; Anna will also check with Paula at the town hall to see how much money we have.*

VII. Compost

The evening's discussion ended with compost. The *Raspberry Hill* gardens are in sore need of it. There is none to be found these days. This led to a discussion of how we might create a town compost facility and/or educate our community on how households could be making compost. Sadie and Bi-sek will be talking about prospects and process before the next meeting, possibly joined by Anna. We will use the Post to publicize the compost project when it is formulated as well as other means of communication. More discussion will follow at our next meeting

VIII. Next Meeting

There was a unanimous decision to meet on the first Thursday of June – June 4th.

Meeting adjourned at 8:15 PM
Respectfully submitted by Anne Williamson

Addenda to Minutes:

Letter supporting small communities planning

May 8, 2020

Nathaniel Thomas
RE: ENV 20 DCS 07 – Small Communities
Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs
100 Cambridge Street – Suite 900
Boston, MA 02114

RE: #BD-20-1042-ENV-ENV01-46447

Dear Mr. Thomas:

We, the members of the Plainfield Agricultural Commission, are writing to support the submission of a Small Communities Planning Grant for the Town of Plainfield, MA. This grant

will be used to update our Open Space and Recreation Plan. The Project Manager, Judy Williams, is Chair of our Conservation Commission, and we as individuals and as a commission work regularly with her on town projects.

Most importantly, members of our commission, Judy Williams, and many other community members have assisted in forming a Plainfield Tree Alliance. This active non-profit was formed in April 2018 as a response to the removal of approximately 1000 trees by EverSource, our electricity provider. The organization has tasked itself with “inventorying, replacing, and maintaining street trees with an eye to creating a resilient, beautiful, and pollinator friendly landscape”. This planning grant fits perfectly into what we are already doing. Having a plan for the work we hope to do is a necessary first step.

Additionally, Plainfield is imbued with community spirit. It is also situated in a potential natural preserve for native pollinators and birds. Once abundant, populations of native insects and birds in our Massachusetts hill towns show a steep decline. This project aims at mitigating this loss. The plan for our open space will encourage community members to come together to replace street trees with pollinator friendly trees and shrubs. The resulting planting from this plan will showcase the importance of a resilient landscape in this time of environmental crises.

In sum, not only do the members of this Agricultural Commission strongly support this application, we will assist in all ways possible to create the landscape resulting from the plan. Thank you for your attention to this submission for a Small Communities Planning grant.

Members of the Plainfield Agriculture Commission,

Anna Hanchett, Chair – anna@mandafarm.com, 25 Pleasant St., Plainfield, MA 01070
Bi-sek Hsiao
Ed Stockman
Sadie Stull
Anne Williamson

Arbovirus letter sent from our Agricultural Commission

Senator Joanne M. Comerford, Chair
Joint Committee on Public Health
24 Beacon Street, Room 413-C
Boston, MA 02133

RE: PUBLIC HEALTH TESTIMONY

Opposition to H.4650 “An Act to Mitigate Arbovirus in the Commonwealth”

Dear Senator Comerford:

We, the members of the Plainfield Agricultural Commission, oppose H.4650 “An Act to Mitigate Arbovirus in the Commonwealth” as written. The lack of oversight and limitations is dangerous and frightening. If passed as written this law could return us to the past when chemicals were used indiscriminately with disastrous results on environmental and human health. We have allowed many chemicals more recently developed to be widely used with few limitations. The damaging effects are only now being recognized and their deleterious results have devastated the environment. We cannot make the mistake of unfettered usage yet again. This law could change our environment for decades and set a precedent for yet more unrestricted use of dangerous chemicals.

1. It gives no parameters for frequency, amount, or geographical area as guidelines for the spraying. Apparently the only person needed to give permission and direction for spraying is the Commissioner of Public Health. It does not mandate consultation with a variety of experts nor important departments of the state or localities whose purview would be affected by spraying. And there is no mandated time for review of the effect or necessity of the spraying, nor renewal date.
2. The existing Pesticide Control Act is already quite lenient. (It does not prohibit the use of some of our most dangerous chemicals such as neonicotinoids, glyphosate, and 2-4D.) The proposed legislation would apparently give the Commissioner authority to allow all sorts of chemicals, even those now prohibited by the Pesticide Control Act, to be used in unknown quantities without oversight of the effects on people or the environment.
3. We in Plainfield have already experienced the adverse effects of the lack of notification of proposed aerial spraying when the substance is not restricted. Some of our residents experienced serious health effects when they were not prepared to leave their homes during spraying of an adjacent field.
4. This bill gives no opportunity for anyone, especially farmers whose whole operation could be contaminated, to object to the spraying. There is no provision for exclusion zones, public comment, anything. This is an exceedingly dangerous precedent to set.
5. We in Plainfield have been working as a town to enhance pollinator habitat. This uncontrolled spraying could negate our efforts. These sprays would also be harmful to all other parts of the environment from food sources for other species to water, soil, and air quality. With the precipitous drop in keystone insect and bird populations in the last decades, in no small part due to pesticide use, this is the worst time for introduction of such an imprecise bill.
6. “*A aegypti*, the principal vector [of arboviruses], is mainly found in the tropics and subtropics...Overcrowding facilitates transmission via urban aedes mosquitoes, further compounded by man-made larval habitats, suggesting that the unprecedented urbanization in tropical low-income countries in the past 50 years is the principal driver of *A aegypti*-borne diseases.” [The Lancet, journal of Infectious Diseases, 2017] This would indicate that spraying, if done, should be in selected places where mosquitoes breed, and testing should be done prior to spraying to see if the virus is present in those mosquito populations. Blanket spraying of all areas of the state, which would apparently be allowed under this bill, could cause

widespread harm to untargeted populations of living things and leave damaging residue in both land and water.

We encourage you to work closely with the many groups offering criticism of this legislation to craft a much more precise, less damaging bill which will keep the arbovirus in check while not doing harm to untargeted populations and geographic areas. Thank you.

Sincerely,

the Plainfield Agricultural Commission, Anna Hanchett chair
Bi-sek Hsiao, Edward Stockman, Sarah Stull, Anne Williamson

cc: Senator Nick Collins, Vice Chair
Representative John J. Mahoney, Chair
Representative Chynah Tyler, Vice Chair
Representative Natalie Blais
Senator Adam Hinds