

**MEETING MINUTES
EAST AMWELL AGRICULTURAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE
SEPTEMBER 17, 2018; EAST AMWELL MUNICIPAL BUILDING, 1070 ROUTE 202, RINGOES, NJ**

CALL TO ORDER & OPEN PUBLIC MEETING NOTICE

The meeting of the East Amwell Agricultural Advisory Committee began at 7:35 p m. Notice of this meeting was published in the April 26, 2018, issue of the Hunterdon County Democrat, with an agenda filed in the Township Clerk’s Office, sent to the Hunterdon County Democrat, and the agenda posted on the municipal bulletin board.

2018 ATTENDANCE

Agricultural Advisory Committee Member	1/15/18	2/19/18	3/22/18	4/16/18	5/23/18	6/18/18	7/16/18	8/20/18	9/17/18	10/15/18	11/19/18	12/17/18
Kit Crisafulli	X	X			X	Cancelled	Cancelled	Cancelled				
Ann del Campo	X		X	X	X				X			
Rob Garrett	X	X	X	X	X				X			
John Perehyns												
Candice Wiggum	X	X	X	X	X				X			

Others present: Sharon Brighthaupt as recording secretary

CALL TO ORDER

RECOGNITION OF THE PUBLIC

The meeting was open to the public for comments. Candice Wiggum recognized a member of the public present. He identified himself as Matt Wilkenson owner and occupant of a home and has lived on Cider Mill Road for ten years. He stated he moved to East Amwell for the opportunity to provide an agrarian experience for his children. He stated he came with four chickens. After arriving he purchased two sheep and a couple turkeys, and someone gave him a pot belly pig. His property is almost four acres. He loves gardening and saw it as a positive to combine the gardening along with the animals. After about one and one-half months of his move, he received a cease and desist letter from the then zoning officer Mr. McMannis. It stated if not complied with by getting rid of all the animals, there would be a \$100 per day fine. He stated the letter was the result of a complaint from a direct neighbor who did not like the animals in the neighborhood. He was faced with the dilemma of selling his home only purchased a month earlier, or find some alternative. He made an appeal that cost him \$2,000. He appeared before the board of adjustment seeking a variance. The result was he received a document from the Township Attorney, then Trish Waterbury. The document states the property in question is grandfathered into an agricultural use ordinance. According to their interpretation of the document at the time, there is no limit on the number of animals allowed, but farm buildings are not allowed. By farm buildings I thought that meant large buildings, I was pleased with this outcome. Soon after I contacted Mr. McMannis and asked if I was allowed to have a shed. He replied I could have an eight by eight shed and did not need a permit for this type of non-permanent structure. Through his position and recognition as a teacher he talked about and promoted his way of life to others, all the while speaking positive about East Amwell. Ann del Campo mentioned she has known Matt for a number of years and had only positive things to say about him and his teaching. Recently the neighbor who complained ten years ago has placed his home on the market for sale. The neighbor has contacted Ms. Parsons

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and complained that Matt Wilkenson has sheds on his property for which he did not get permits to build. Ms. Parsons was the former secretary for Mr. McMannis. She is now the zoning officer. She is consulting with a Mr. Miller (a zoning officer for another local town), her advisor who has now stopped communicating with her and she is now unable to get a determination on what to do with Matt Wilkinson's problem. She now tells him she does not know what to do and she has contacted Banish for advice.

Matt Wilkinson's understanding at this time Ms Parsons is: He will need to get a survey of the property and then apply for a variance. This is an expensive option and he does not have the funds needed. Since their interpretation that any structure is a farm building, he did not want trouble and has begun to tear down the sheds, having half of them currently removed. Unfortunately, this leaves the animals with no shelter and he will have no way to store the needed hay and food. He received a letter today indicating all structures must be removed as they were built without approval. His understanding was that he did have approval and no permit was required from his earlier conversation with Mr. Mannis. The letter states he can keep the storage shed where he keeps his tractor and log splitter, and a patio area that she previously told him had to come out. He had already torn out the patio area before the letter arrived. It states he is not allowed to have a permanent chicken coop. His current chicken coop is sitting on cinder blocks and her letter states it can't stay. He also has a movable tractor coop that she said is not allowed. He does not see either of these as permanent structures.

The committee had some discussion to try to advise Mr. Wilkenson on what he should do next. Ann del Campo stated if you are allowed to have animals, it is humane to provide shelter for them. Rob Garrett suggested the best advice at this time is for Mr. Wilkenson to appeal to the planning/zoning/board with the determination from the Township Committee of ten years earlier with the grandfathered information. Candice Wiggum agreed Mr. Wilkenson should request guidance from the township planning/zoning board.

PRESENTATION OF THE MAY 23, 2018 MINUTES

Candice Wiggum asked if there are any changes or exceptions to the May 23, 2018 minutes. None being heard, she asked for a motion to accept. Rob Garrett made a motion seconded by Ann del Campo. All in favor.

OLD BUSINESS

Deer Management: Candice Wiggum reported she recently met with the coalition which includes: Friends of Hopewell Valley, Sourland Advisory Board, a representative from Mercer Park and Bryan Kuban (hunter), Jody Powers from Fish and Wildlife. They are preparing a questionnaire for management hunters. Their goal is to identify management hunters, gather data on the numbers from the recent past, and analyze collected data comparing it to data reported to Fish and Wildlife. After assembling the list it will be made available to farmers or other large organizations that may want people who are approved for using management hunters. Also, they are working on assembling a coalition of farmers with contiguous properties to bring them together to plan drives, and assisting with depredation licensing. To raise cash there a project under way to design a license plate to increase awareness of *Hunters Helping the Hungry*.

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Rob Garrett asked if *Hunters Helping the Hungry* has been able to ensure they have enough funding for the upcoming season. Candice Wiggum reported they are seeking donations from local organizations.

Discussion about how the AG Committee might assist with spreading the word about where hunters can take the deer for processing. Candice Wiggum suggested it should be on the AG Committee website, Rob Garrett suggested a flyer should be distributed to the hunters when they apply for and are granted licenses.

The recent spotlight count of deer in Hunterdon County concluded there are about one-hundred twenty deer per square mile which translates to approximately thirty-five hundred in East Amwell. In order to allow the forests to regenerate to a healthy state, the number per square mile should be about forty. The deer population is resilient and even in Hopewell Township where there has been an organized program for quite some time progress at reducing the population has been limited.

Candice Wiggum shared some statistics about diseases like ticks and a wasting disease currently found in Pennsylvania that is destroying the deer population there, and animal caused car accidents increasing year over year.

Rob Garrett and Candice Wiggum met with the Amwell Valley Trail Association to solicit their assistance by providing a representative on the committee. They are seeking to expand their outreach to the landowners and assist with control of the deer population.

Ann del Campo brought a copy of an article to share with the other committee members entitled: *Montgomery's Agrarian Heritage Showcased in "Farming in the Millstone Valley"*.

REPORT ON AGRICULTURE IN THE TOWNSHIP

Candice Wiggum recognized Rob Garret for an update on progress on Agriculture in the Township. He said he had been in touch with the township assessor and found that some of the numbers he had on the spreadsheets he has been using are not accurate. He is working on updating with newer data.

NEW BUSINESS

Farmer emergencies – Candice Wiggum recognized the sign-up sheet Ann del Campo placed in the Township Office. She suggested this collected information should be posted on the website to expand on ways for farmers who might be experiencing difficult situations could solicit or offer some assistance.

CORRESPONDENCE

None was noted.

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OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

The meeting was open to the public for comment. Mr. Wilkenson was present and he thanked the committee for their advice. Rob Garrett made a motion to adjourn, seconded by Ann del Campo, and carried unanimously to close to the public.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, motion by Rob Garrett, seconded by Ann del Campo, and carried unanimously to adjourn the meeting at 9:00 p.m.

The next meeting is scheduled for October 15, 2018 at 7:30 PM.

/s/ Sharon L. Brighthaupt

Sharon L. Brighthaupt, Recording Secretary