

The Town of Great Barrington Agricultural Commission Meeting

Remote meeting held via Zoom on Wednesday June 11, 2025

Agenda Topic #1: Meeting called to order at: 7:06 pm

Members present: Vivian Orłowski (acting as chair), Krysia Kurzyca, Andrea Panaritis, Chris Wiltshire

Media present: Eileen Mooney (THE NEWSletter)

Agenda Topic #2: Funding for Multicultural BRIDGE nonprofit community program: Pollinator and Vegetable Garden Project at Solidarity House in Great Barrington

– Vivian reported on the following request for funding by Multicultural BRIDGE indicating their appreciation for the Agricultural Commission's previous funding irrigation support in Fiscal Year 2024. This work was accomplished at their Solidarity Farm & Garden Program on land provided by Great Barrington Fairgrounds. For the current Fiscal Year 2025, BRIDGE's Solidarity Farm & Garden program seeks to enhance growing food for the broader diverse community. They requested Agricultural Commission \$1,850 funding for their community vegetable and pollinator garden project on the land at their new Solidarity House. Solidarity House is on Route 7 (965 Main Street, Great Barrington) with a total of 1.4 acres extending back to the Housatonic River. In the backyard they are working on developing 6 raised beds and are clearing the land from invasive Japanese Knotweed. Along with growing vegetables, they will also grow edible and medicinal herbs plus pollinator-friendly flowers along the sides and front of Solidarity House including developing pollinator-friendly groundcover plantings instead of grass lawns.

– Vivian reviewed the details of the \$1,850 funding request including major items: \$375 Hemlock Lumber for raised beds, \$700 soil testing due to possible previous toxic exposure, \$500 Resettlement Solidarity Steward Stipends for Youth Training on Landscaping and Food Growing—by NOFA/Mass plus food processing skills with UMass Produce Safety Course Certification. This project is already receiving community support from others including Greenagers, Wards Nursery & Garden Center, Taft Farms and Gideon's Garden, Berkshire Conservation District, Massachusetts Dept. of Agricultural Resources, Berkshire Agricultural Ventures, Mike Mugridge Willow Tree Project and NOFA/Mass (Northeast Organic Farming Association/Mass Chapter).

– Krysia raised questions about the activities of Solidarity House, its qualified commercial kitchen, and who in the community can qualify for gardening and kitchen access.

– Vivian related BRIDGE CEO Gwendolyn VanSant's invitations to all of us to visit Solidarity House Project and Solidarity Farm & Gardens and attend events there.

– Chris emphasized the need for such farming and gardening projects to include diverse members of the community.

– Andrea noted that such projects also serve as models to improve climate resilience.

– Andrea made a Motion: The Agricultural Commission allocates BRIDGE \$1,850 for the project outlined in our preparatory information summarized and discussed at this meeting.

– Krysia seconded the motion.

– The roll call vote was unanimous with 4:0 votes in favor.

Agenda Topic #3: Northeast Organic Farming Association (NOFA/Mass) - membership dues renewal

– Vivian summarized the Agricultural Commission's consistent long-term annual membership in NOFA/Mass. Their educational and technical assistance benefits for our activities and community organizations. Recently this included their "MassQuito" policy project helping our collaboration with the Board of Health on public health Mosquito policy.

– Andrea made a Motion: We allocate \$150 for our annual membership in NOFA/Mass for the reasons outlined in our preparatory materials.

- Krysia seconded the motion.
- The roll call vote was unanimously in favor 4:0 votes.

Agenda Topic #4: Agricultural Commission Member Comments

- Krysia raised the question about the future of the Agricultural Commission since we don't have an elected chair now and have been meeting less frequently than our previous seasonal meetings.
- Andrea said that Krysia's question is important. We need new members.
- Chris agreed with Krysia and Andrea and hoped that we'll attract new members.
- Vivian agreed that our outreach to potential new members should include those with background and interest in farming and gardening.

Agenda Topic #5: Citizen Speak and Media time

- Comments from Eileen about the need for the Agricultural Commission to follow up by posting meeting minutes.

Agenda Topic #6: Adjournment

- Meeting adjourned by acclamation at 8:09 pm.