

# CRANBERRY BOG WORKING GROUP

## MEETING MINUTES

May 13, 2019

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Members present: Luke Ascolillo, Ken Belitz, Melinda Lindquist, Alex Parra, Susan Provenzano. Helen Young

Absent: Dan Wells

Public: John Ballantine, Desiree Ball (Ag Committee), Mark Duffy (farmer), Warren Lyman, Iva Mooney (Chelmsford citizen)

Conservation Administrator: Sylvia Willard

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Meeting convened at 7:05 pm

The first activity was to approve the minutes from the December 3<sup>rd</sup> and December 17<sup>th</sup> meetings. After a single change to each the minutes were approved unanimously.

Since it had been a few months since the last committee meeting Lindquist suggested the committee take a step back and review the Cranberry Bog options. At a recent Agriculture Committee meeting there was discussion that cranberries should continue to be grown at the bog and asked the CBWG reexamine that option. The discussion began by examining a price subsidy amount that would attract a farmer to raise cranberries. Willard commented that, before the original Cranberry Bog Working Group was convened, the town had advertised widely for a farmer to cultivate cranberries in the bog. No outside farmers applied. Only Mark Duffy applied, but then due to economics decided not to. No subsidy was considered at that time.

All agreed that a cranberry farmer for the bog would need to be experienced in cranberry farming. Young proposed sending out an offer and have the farmers propose the dollar amount. The main issue with finding a farmer is most likely the current depression in cranberry prices as well as the fact Carlisle's bog is a good distance from most other bogs. All members agreed that the issue of growing cranberries had to be addressed and settled in order for the public to back any other option. Willard said she would get a proposal together and rejoin the Cape Cod Cranberry Growers Association. Lyman suggested a letter of interest might be an easier and less complicated option. Ball suggested using groups that find farmers for available land. Lindquist asked everyone their opinion. Young would like to explore the cranberry farming option. Ascolillo and Provenzano would like to explore it as long as it is quick. Parra wants to move on from cranberries. Lyman wants to explore the option in order to put it aside for good. Lindquist wants the CBWG to review the CBAC recommendation (commercial cranberry growing no longer feasible in Carlisle) or identify specific alternative and asked Lyman to summarize prior conclusions regarding cranberry growing for the next meeting. He agreed to do so.

Parra asked Duffy about Federal Production Controls. Duffy stated that cranberry growing requires major effort and investment and wondered whether the town would have any minimum it required to be produced if it subsidized the grower. Ball asked about cost versus effort and Duffy gave a bit of history. The best year produced 200,000 pounds, but then the market crashed. There is no support system especially for bogs not on the A list and Carlisle is too far from cranberry country. Group agreed to advertise again for a farmer in order to both show due diligence and see whether conditions have changed regarding interest. The committee suggested that the ad ask for financials and knowledge and prove financial backing.

Lyman mentioned that to retain water rights and agricultural status the farming must be commercial. Parra mentioned that one problem with the ad is that the commitment must be for ten to fifteen years. Ball commented that bogs on the Cape are making money and that the group needs to think outside the box to sell locally. Duffy mentioned that the harvest time was very short and there was a lot of competition during that time. Lyman also stated that wet harvested cranberries can't be sold locally as they must be processed. Dry harvested cranberries can be sold locally but harvesting is very labor intensive. Ball asked that the Agriculture Committee be put on the next meeting agenda and would ask committee member John Lavery to come speak and discuss farmer-to-consumer direct sales.

Discussion then moved on to the other options on the table for the bog: growing hay, active restoration, and passive restoration.

In regards to active restoration: Belitz would connect with Nick Nelson. Willard had scheduled an appointment with Gary Boag of Mass DEP for Thursday May 23<sup>rd</sup> at 11am to visit the bog and discuss a management plan that is acceptable to the DEP to keep the bog free of trees, and to maintain dikes, dams and waterways.

Lyman reiterated that whatever the future plan may be, it has to use the whole bog or be a mix of actions on various parts. He also suggested that the use of Bog house be put on the back burner as its future depends upon the use of the bog.

Ballantine mentioned that the cost of passive restoration is very high and must be spelled out for the public.

Belitz noted that the water rights deadline is June of 2020. If the bog is not 'cranberry ready' at that time, the town will lose half of the water rights.

Lindquist asked about public outreach activities. Ballantine mentioned that the cranberry growing issue had to be put to rest and that a well prepared statement on cranberry growing should be available at any public meeting.

During public input Mooney mentioned that Chelmsford has hired a consultant to examine the dams in the Chelmsford part of the bog. Also that Zoo New England has traps set to do a species count.

Next meeting: June 3, 2019 at 7 pm  
Meeting ended at 8:40 pm