

**Town of Monkton  
Agricultural & Natural Areas Committee  
MEETING MINUTES  
Thursday, May 21<sup>st</sup>, 2020, at 7:00pm  
Zoom & Phone Meeting**

**Members Attending:** Laura Farrell (Chair), Sam Burr, Jaime Schulte (Clerk – joined at 7:45pm following the Town Forest Committee meeting), Nora Woolf (Alternate), John Mejia, Susan Mahony, Whitney Leighton (Alternate)

**Members Absent:** None

**Guests:** None

**Laura called the meeting to order at 7:37pm** (following some technical challenges).

On Wednesday May 20<sup>th</sup>, 2020, Sam Burr recommended that ANAC provide each of the 2 resident small dairy farmers in Monkton with \$10,000 from the ANA Fund. This would be to the Phillips and the Layns, who are experiencing a severe sustained drop in the price of milk along with an unknown delay in any form of financial aid.

A special meeting was called for May 21<sup>st</sup>, 2020 so that a recommendation could be made before the Selectboard's May 25<sup>th</sup> meeting, if the committee moved forward with it.

This meeting was not in response to a request from any resident, but a response to a preponderance of evidence indicating the situation dairy farmers face at this time. We did receive an inquiry as to whether we were aware of any assistance for dairy farmers, but there was no request for funding through the town. This did lead to a fact-finding mission and we are compiling a list of resources, which will be distributed to local farmers ASAP.

There was a presentation of the facts...that dairy farmers are facing an unprecedented challenge in the face of COVID-19 pandemic. Milk prices have dropped \$7 per 100 weight below last years prices, dairy farmers have been asked to cut their output by 15%, and state talks are just in process, with federal funding assistance still in the formative stages – neither of these have any concrete timeline or guidelines on funding amounts or uses. This is an expensive time of year for farmers, making the timing of this pandemic-related shutdown especially unfortunate. There is limited cash coming in when there is significant operating outlay to keep operations running.

Sam recalled that there were 30 dairy farms in the 1970s, and 13 of these were out of business by the 1980s. Now Monkton has 3 dairy operations, 2 of which are owned by residents and operated solely within Monkton. A 50-cow farm is calculated to lose \$30,000 this year, so \$10,000 could make a difference to this size operation.

The committee discussed how and if the ANA Fund is an avenue to assist the two remaining dairy farmers in Monkton that sell to the conventional market. What would we call this supplement? Does it conform with the ANAC charge? Why now, why these farms in particular, could we do this at all within our charge? Could we decide to do a one-time emergency assist to dairy farmers and not produce farmers? Produce farmers have some local assistance in setting up markets through ACORN and farmers markets, which are now operating. We could make this contingent on using the money locally (i.e. wages, local contractors and supplies) to help get the local economy going again, but we have limited knowledge of how dairy farms are working these days.

Nora looked into some potential avenues of assistance and found that it did not look like they would pay out until later in the summer—July, August, Sept, Oct.

The ANA Fund should have \$97,500 after a \$40,000 check was written for the Huizenga's closing recently. A \$40,000 withdrawal for The Last Resort OPAV in the coming months will leave the fund with \$57,500. Sam proposes to spend \$20,000, which would bring the ANA Fund to \$37,500. After taxes come in the fund will go back up by \$15,000, to \$52,500, with the appropriation voted on at Town Meeting. This is low for where the fund has been in recent years, but there are presently no active ANAC projects after the Huizenga and Last Resort OPAV projects close.

We discussed some concern that this action would create a precedent for using the ANA Fund for purposes other than conservation. The support Monkton provides to conserve the working and natural landscape is not something all towns do, but it results in outstanding leverage of the taxpayer dollar to attract outside funding that helps secure the future of our rural agricultural and natural landscape. As a town we should celebrate this record and remain fully committed to that mission, but such projects usually take more than a year to complete and this unprecedented emergency calls for a more nimble response. This situation should be considered a one-time exception to the primary work of the committee.

**Sam moved that “the Town of Monkton provide \$10,000 in emergency funding from the Agricultural & Natural Areas Fund to each of the two remaining conventional Monkton dairy farms (shipping milk to the conventional market) which are owned and operated by Monkton residents, being the Layn Farm and the Phillips Farm.”** Susan seconded. There was no further discussion. **All were in favor (7-0-0).**

It was noted that we are an advisory body to the Selectboard, so the next step is to bring our recommendation to the Selectboard for a one-time disbursement from the ANA Fund. Laura will request that this item be included on the Selectboard agenda for May 25<sup>th</sup>, as it will need to be warned and input from the town heard if the Selectboard approves this recommendation. Sam Burr, and likely other members of ANAC, would like to attend the meeting to support this initiative.

### **Adjournment**

Jaime moved to adjourn. Sam seconded. All were in favor (7-0-0). Adjourned at 8:43pm.

**Respectfully submitted,**

**Jaime Schulte**  
**Clerk**