



**Town of Ridgefield**  
**Board of Selectman Public Hearing Minutes**  
**UNAPPROVED**

**September 1 2021 at 7.30pm**

Please note – these minutes are not verbatim.

**Present:** Rudy Marconi, Bob Hebert, Sean Connelly, Maureen Kozlark

**Absent:** Barbara Manners

**Public Hearing**

The public hearing was called to order at 7:30pm to discuss the lease of land between the Town of Ridgefield and Whitney Freeman on McKeon Farm.

Jim Coyle, a member of the Conservation Commission, gave an overview of the lease and a recap on the changes from the last lease. Mr. Coyle also talked about some of the reasons behind the Commission's unanimous support of renewing the lease.

Ms. Kozlark suggested that the word "may" on page 3 of the lease be changed to a stronger word such as "shall" and questioned why the conservation commission is paying for the signs that will be posted with contact information for the farm. Ms. Kozlark said that in her opinion, she feels the sheep count should be kept at 70 and not increased to 85.

David Whitehouse, who resides at 328 Ridgebury Rd, commented that he is not opposed to having sheep on the property, however the number of sheep has significantly grown which is concerning. He spoke about his disappointment in the lack of communication regarding the yearly licenses that have allowed for the sheep count to grow from the initial 30 to the current 70. Mr. Whitehouse discussed the noticeably negative impact the increase in sheep has had to the property and neighborhood. He asked that the terminology of the lease be updated so that the number of sheep cannot be increased passed the agreed upon number in the renewed lease without approval from the public.

The President of Fairfield County Farm Bureau, Pete Sepe, who resides at 83 Toddy Hill Rd in Sandy Hook, spoke in support of Whitney Freeman and talked about her exceptional

management of Henny Penny Farm. He discussed the reasons why the farm has been a positive use of the land and feels it can handle more sheep.

John Katz spoke about his support of the farm and the renewal of the lease. Because Ridgefield grew up as an agricultural community, Tom believes it should remain that way. He encouraged anyone who has not yet been to the farm to visit it and see all the remarkable things Ms. Freeman has done.

Laura Mulligan, who resides at 136 Lounsbury Rd, has been working at the Hickories for the past 10 years. Ms. Mulligan shared her support of Henny Penny Farm and talked about the improvements that have been made to the land since Ms. Freeman took it over. Ms. Mulligan also shared her concerns for putting restrictions on the farm and how that could affect the future farmers.

Karl Mischenko, who resides at 19 Partridge Drive, talked about the joy that his kids get from visiting the farm and the reasons why he supports keeping it.

Karen Pray, who resides at 300 Ridgebury Rd, asked if there would be any provisions written into the lease that will prevent the new number of 85 sheep from increasing in a year. Mr. Marconi answered that if terms of this 5 year lease are approved, any changes would have to come before the public.

Penelope Kemp, who lives at Henny Penny Farm located at 673 Ridgebury Rd, spoke about the value of agriculture and education that Henny Penny Farm provides. She spoke about her educational gain from the farm and her full support for renewing the lease.

Dwayne Escola, who resides at 52 Catoonah Street, shared his support for Henny Penny Farm and talked about many of the positive agricultural benefits for the land as well as the recent article in the New York Times highlighting Ridgefield for its arts, music and open space.

Cecilia Beger, who resides at 48 Bridal Trail, is the founder of Cornerstone Home and Gardens. This is her 4<sup>th</sup> year leasing land on McKeon Farm. Ms. Berger commented on the amazing things Ms. Freeman has done with the farm and the many ways she contributes to the community.

Ron Paultauf shared his support for Ms. Freeman and the farm and commented that it would be a shame to let her go.

Rebecca Kuijstermans, who resides at 56 East Ridge Rd, spoke about her move to Ridgefield

from the UK. She shared the positive experience she's had with Ms. Freeman and Henny Penny Farm and feels it would be a detriment to the Town if they did not let the Ms. Freeman stay.

Kurt Car, who lives at 62 Prospect Ridge, asked that the Board consider all the facts and think about what the value is that the Town provides and the value of what Ms. Freeman provides. He was neither for nor against the lease, but provided documents with information and asked that the Board consider all the facts.

Whitney Freeman commented on the increase of sheep over the past five years. The reason for the growth from 30 to 70 sheep is due to the increase in land being used by Henny Penny Farm. The acreage increased from 10 acres to 16 acres. There was a need for more sheep in order to maintain the land. Ms. Freeman also talked about the reason behind the new number of 85 and assured everyone that the sheep count would not grow past that due to space limitations on the property.

Mr. Katz made a clarification about an earlier public comment regarding a statement made by Ms. Manners at a previous BOS meeting. He wanted it to be clear that Ms. Manners did not state if she was for or against the lease, but only that she felt the issue should be brought before the public.

The Town Meeting will be held on September 22, 2021 at 7:30 PM.

Mr. Marconi closed the Public Hearing