

TOWN OF LOXAHATCHEE GROVES
TOWN HALL COUNCIL CHAMBERS
AGRITOURISM COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES
AUGUST 26, 2024 – 6:03 PM – 7:36 PM



Meeting Audio Available Upon Request in the Office of the Town Clerk

CALL TO ORDER

The Agritourism Committee Meeting was called to order at 6:03 on Monday, August 26th, 2024, by Sammie Brown, Town Clerk Assistant.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Town Clerk Assistant Sammie Brown asked everyone to stand for the Pledge of Allegiance.

ROLL CALL

The roll was taken by the Town Clerk Assistant, confirming a quorum was present with four committee members in attendance and one absent. Town staff in attendance were also confirmed.

Committee Members Present:

- Joseph Chammas
- Darrin Swank
- Geoff Sluggett
- Manish Sood

Absent:

- Liza Holman

Staff Present:

- Sammie Brown, Town Clerk Assistant
- Jeffrey Kurtz, Committee Liaison/Project Coordinator

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- Francine Ramaglia, Town Manager (Arrived at 6:20 P.M.)

APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA

Darrin Swank moved to approve the agenda as presented. Joseph Chammas properly seconded the motion. This passed unanimously (4-0).

REGULAR AGENDA

1. Swearing in of Committee Members

The newly appointed committee members were sworn in collectively by the Town Clerk Assistant, affirming their commitment to uphold the Constitution of the United States, the State of Florida, and the Town of Loxahatchee Groves charter.

2. Election of Officers (Chair and Vice Chair)

Town Clerk Assistant Sammie Brown called for nominations for the position of Chair.

- **Chair:** Committee Member Darrin Swank moved to appoint Committee Member Geoff Sluggett as the Agritourism Committee Chairperson. This motion was seconded by Joseph Chammas. This motion passed unanimously (4-0).

Following the selection of the Chairperson, the Town Clerk Assistant called for nominations for the position of Vice Chair.

- **Vice Chair:** Committee Chair Geoff Sluggett moved to appoint Committee Member Manish Sood as the Vice Chairperson position. This motion was seconded by Joseph Chammas. This motion passed unanimously (4-0).

The Town Clerk Assistant noted that the newly selected officers will officially assume their roles at the next meeting.

3. Sunshine Laws & Code of Ethics Presentation

Tanya Early, legal counsel, was scheduled to present on the Sunshine Laws and Code of Ethics. However, due to technical difficulties with her connection, the presentation was postponed to the next meeting.

4. Discussion & Review of Committee Responsibilities

Jeffrey Kurtz provided a recap of the previous Agritourism Committee's efforts, explaining that the current committee's purpose is to review and potentially add to the recommendations made earlier this year. The committee's charge is to assess the substantial offsite impacts of agritourism activities and develop recommendations for balancing these operations with the public's health, safety, and welfare and the tranquility of surrounding residential areas.

Jeffrey Kurtz then formally introduced himself as the Project Coordinator with a lengthy

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background in local government, primarily as an attorney. He has been involved in various town projects and serves as the committee liaison. After his introduction, Jeffrey Kurtz asked the committee members to introduce themselves.

Before the introductions by the committee members proceeded, Francine Ramaglia, the Town Manager attendance was recognized by the Town Clerk Assistant. Francine assured the committee that their recommendations would be implemented. She highlighted the importance of the committee's work in balancing the needs of agritourism with community interests and reiterated the town's commitment to following through on the committee's findings.

After Francine's remarks, the committee members proceeded with their introductions:

- **Geoff Sluggett:** Lifelong resident of Palm Beach County with extensive experience in government relations and representation of agricultural ventures.
- **Joseph Chammas:** Owner of Gratitude Garden Farm, specializing in organic farming and educational retreats.
- **Darrin Swank:** Owner of Swank Specialty Produce, focusing on agritourism events to supplement farming income.
- **Manish Sood:** Owner of 24 Carat Ranch, involved in equestrian activities and agritourism through events like goat yoga.

The committee engaged in a discussion about the impacts of agritourism businesses, particularly focusing on traffic, parking, noise, and lighting. Key points included:

- **Traffic and Parking:** The committee identified traffic circulation and parking as primary concerns, with suggestions for better internal circulation to minimize road impacts.
- **Noise and Lighting:** Committee members emphasized the importance of managing noise levels and lighting to respect the rural character of the town and the peace of neighboring residents. There was general agreement that lighting should be sufficient for safety without spilling over onto adjacent properties or roads.

Francine Ramaglia, Town Manager, addressed the committee upon her arrival at 6:20, assuring members that their recommendations would be implemented. She highlighted the importance of the committee's work in balancing the needs of agritourism with community interests and reiterated the town's commitment to following through on the committee's findings and ensured them that their recommendations would be implemented.

The committee agreed to meet on the fourth Monday of each month, with the following dates scheduled:

- **September 23, 2024**
- **October 28, 2024** (noting that Joseph Chammas will be absent)

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Next Meeting Focus:

The committee decided to focus the next meeting on discussing parking, traffic, and noise as they relate to agritourism. Additionally, staff will provide examples of agritourism regulations from other communities and a summary of relevant complaints received by the town.

The committee reached a consensus that future meetings should focus on key issues impacting the community, particularly parking, traffic, and noise management. These areas were identified as priorities for developing guidelines and best practices to ensure agritourism businesses operate responsibly while preserving the rural character of Loxahatchee Groves.

The committee also discussed the role of code enforcement in addressing any violations and suggested that agritourism operators engage in self-regulation to proactively manage potential impacts, particularly around traffic and safety. While the committee does not support overly restrictive measures on the number of visitors or cars, they agreed that traffic flow and parking should be carefully managed to avoid issues for both the town and local residents.

To further guide the committee's decisions, members requested that town staff provide a summary of complaints related to agritourism over the past 12 to 24 months, focusing on recurring concerns. Additionally, the committee agreed to review agribusiness regulations from other communities to incorporate successful practices and avoid potential pitfalls, ensuring agritourism remains a positive aspect of the town's economy and culture.

COMMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC

There were no public comments for the Monday, August 26, 2024, Agritourism Committee Meeting.

COMMENTS FROM COMMITTEE MEMBERS:

Joseph Chammas (Seat 1) – No final comments from Committee Member Joseph Chammas

Darrin Swank (Seat 2)- No Final Comments from Committee Member Darrin Swank

Geoff Sluggett (Seat 3) – No final comments from Committee Member Geoff Sluggett

Manish Sood (Seat 4) – No final comments from Committee Member Manish Sood

Liza Holman (Seat 5) – No final comments from Committee Member Liza Holman

CONFIRM NEXT REGULAR MEETING DATE:

ADJOURNMENT

On Monday, August 26th, 2024, at 7:36 the Agritourism Committee adjourned with a motion to adjourn moved by Committee Chair Geoff Sluggett. This motion was properly seconded by Committee Member Joseph Chammas.

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ATTEST:

**TOWN OF LOXAHATCHEE GROVES,
FLORIDA**

Signed by:

Sammie T. Brown

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Sammie T. Brown, FRA-RP, MEDP
Town Clerk Assistant

Signed by:

Geoff Slusgett

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Geoff Slusgett, Committee Chairperson
Agri-Tourism Committee