

**TOWN OF WRIGHT
AGRICULTURAL
COMMITTEE**

AGRICULTURAL AND FARMLAND PRESERVATION COMMITTEE

April 22, 2009

MARK STOLZENBURG
Chair

872-0679

VICKY MCCAFFREY

872-1295

JERI MURRAY

295-7280

ED THORNTON

295-7463

KARL WESTPHAL

872-1687

RETA YOUNGS

872-0919

JOHN SANCHIRICO

TOWN BOARD

872-9287

RAYMOND LURHMAN

872-2375

Committee members Present:

Mark Stolzenburg
Karl Westphal
Ray Lurhman
Reta Young

Also Present:

Laurie Ten Eyck, Field Consultant, American Farmland Trust
Jean Burton, secretary
Lillian Bruno, Schoharie County Planner
John Sancharico, town board Liaison

Review Minutes for the February 25th meeting, Motion to approve,
1st - Ray 2ed - Karl, all approved

Mapping – Mark asked Lillian and Laurie what is needed from the mapping. Laura showed an example from the town of Charlton, of the type of map that can be produced from data. The Charlton map reflected types of agricultural activity. Lillian reported that she met with David Cox who indicated mapping can be done using tax codes or by personal survey/knowledge. The committee prefers not to use tax codes to determine their map. The previous drive by survey didn't do it by parcel and by type of agricultural activity (horses, fruits, vegetables, hay sales, livestock etc.) Mark felt that in order to accurately complete such a map, farmer interviews would be necessary and too cumbersome. Reta questioned if we really need this level of detail. Consensus was not to pursue this level of detail. Mark distributed copies of the map the committee is working with and an aerial photo of the Town of Wright. Mark marked on the map a section for each committee member to survey looking primarily at land in the agricultural district. Lillian agreed that this level of detail and method would be fine and would still be useful regarding the economic impact factors with David Cox. Mark wants maps returned to him prior to next meeting.

Prioritizing Agricultural Lands – Lillian communicated with John Brennan from Ag and Markets regarding how to prioritizing agricultural land, and where are the highest-level agricultural lands. Brennan recommended priorities based on blocks of contiguous land, not by parcel.

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He suggested using the agricultural district, active farming areas, prime soils, and other criteria he will provide. Lillian will forward Brennan's email to Mark and the committee. Laura indicated that this is a new idea, to do it by blocks of land rather than by parcels. Laura encouraged the committee to consider what will work best for the Town of Wright. Some ranking needs to be done and needs to be a good fit for the Town of Wright. The Town of Wright needs some ranking to assist in screening farmers who apply for Purchase of Development Rights Grants. A purchase of development rights is the primary tool at the state level at this time. Laura recommends identifying your best farmland and farmland that is at risk of being lost. Ray expressed doubt that farmland can in reality be protected if the land cannot make money for the farmer. This is an economic reality. Laura asked that the committee review at the next meeting the actual email and any further clarification of John's ideas.

Review of Regulations – Laura distributed her summary draft of regulations, for committee to read. This will be voted on at the next meeting. This is important since the town does enforce regulations related to land use.

Voting on Acceptance of Documents Related to Development of Plan. Deliverable items for the grant need to be voted on and these votes reflected in the minutes. This is separate from votes of Town Board. Mark will develop a list of documents to be voted on.

Forestry – Lillian asked what information the committee might want regarding forestry. Laura indicated that most towns have mapped forestry but not included forestry as agriculture except for Christmas tree farms. Woodlands do play a role in agriculture. Woodlands could produce lumber and supply sawmills. Reta sees farmers as using woodlands to produce income. Laura and Lillian will explore this further in how to approach this classification of land and how this would fit into the plan. Ray pointed out there are registered tree farms in the town. Tax credits can be part of a forestry program.

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Barton Hill Watershed – Lillian contacted Schoharie County Health Dept and received a map of the watershed. It is the principal water source for village of Schoharie. Carl Chrisman from Environmental Health of Schoharie, , provided the regulations, which cover pesticides and fertilizers and other issues. Environmental Health of Schoharie wants town of Wright to adopt these regulations. Mark asked that Laura to review these regulations as she done with other town regulations. Lillian will email these regulations to everyone for future review and discussion.

Soils and Getting Input from Schoharie County Soil and Water – John Brennan suggested to Laura that the committee call for a representative from Schoharie County Soil and Water, to talk about soils. Laura asked committee if they want to do this. Mark and Reta asked what is the benefit to do this. This is a source that has not been consulted to date. Lillian will ask John what dialogue might occur and what might be learned. Inviting a representative could occur in June but a decision will be made at the May meeting. Soil and Water might suggest areas that they might provide good information, particularly related to education.

Publicizing Plan Development on Schoharie County Website - As discussed previously, the committee wants to put up progress reports and minutes on the web. Other towns are doing this. Laura suggested that she provide an intro to describe the committee and the mission. Lillian and Laura will work to complete this task.

Continued Discussion of Goals and Recommendations – In February Laura presented the AFT toolbox, which included a review of interviews, regulation reviews and possible goals and recommendations. The committee needs to decide how to proceed with it. The AFT toolbox is to be used as a framework for discussion. The committee focused conversation around goal #5 - Provide Economic Opportunities for Farmers. Ray expressed concerned about future economic reality. Reta indicated that some people will farm because they like it despite minimal economic viability. Reta pointed out farmers who also hold down other jobs. Ray's point is that farms are lost if they don't make money. At the town level changes may not be overarching but can still be supportive of farming. Laura pointed out that the town may not be able to make major changes but the town can support change at county level (need dairy processing, slaughter house, feed mill, plan in county).

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Lillian pointed out economic developers at the county level might be useful. Coordination with other towns could be beneficial. Karl, who was a member of the on County Farmland Protection Board, suggested looking at four partners report. The four partners are: the Chamber of commerce, Cobleskill College, Cooperative Extension, and the Farm Bureau. They issued a comprehensive proposal about a year ago, which contained ideas such as promoting in the county a slaughterhouse, dairy etc. The County never adopted it this report. It was noted that most conversation regarding Empire Zones doesn't include agriculture. Julie Rohand is Empire Zone coordinator.

Lillian will speak with her to see if Empire Zone funding can be used for agriculture. Lillian will get the four partners report for committee. The committee noted that the local slaughterhouse is not Federally Inspected. Many farmers travel an hour or two to take livestock to slaughter. Those facilities are overwhelmed and backed up. Economic viability for slaughterhouses is a factor. Ray pointed out that higher prices can be commanded for locally grown meat and vegetables.

Committee's role in encouraging agriculture infrastructure is to ensure that when an investor looks to start a slaughterhouse or other infrastructure that the regulations don't take them down. It was noted that a cannery was recently proposed. Farms offering people to purchase an animal and allow them to butcher the animal themselves- this is happening in Schoharie now. Laura sees the Town of Wright as prime area to develop direct marketing and these ideas might well be included in the plan.

Next meeting.... Wed. May 27, 2009, 7PM