

Agricultural and Farmland Protection Board Meeting
January 15, 2020
Meeting Minutes

Ag Board members present: J. Hoeffner, D. Church, S. Najac (for M. Ullrich), E. Ruscher, P. Ruskiewicz, J. Wright.

Ag Board members excused: L. DeBuck, M. Simpson, S. Soons.

Guests present: K. Apostolides – OC Farm Market Coordinator, D. DeWan – Office of Senator Jen Metzger, B. Fioravanti – OC Department of Economic Development, J. MacLeod – OC Planning, K. Morris – OC Planning, R. Schreibeis – OC Executive’s Office.

Call to order – 5:16 pm.

November Minutes

J. Wright moved to accept the November minutes as presented, P. Ruskiewicz seconded, unanimously approved.

Summary of Accounts

General discussion ensued about the summary of accounts. D. Church stated that the 2020 budget is \$27,000. He also stated that there is money being rolled over from 2018 and 2019. The funds from 2018 are for the Ag Plan implementation and the farm preservation signs. The farm preservation signs are supposed to be completed in January. The funds from 2019 are for the Ag Plan Implementation Consultant, social media advertising, OC Soil & Water equipment maintenance and upgrades, and the OC Land Trust PDR application costs. General discussion ensued. J. Wright moved to accept the ledger as presented, S. Najac seconded, unanimously approved.

Inquiries & Correspondence

The Ag Board received multiple correspondences. The Ag Board received several letters from the New York State Department of Ag & Markets for NOI’s for some solar installations, including the proposed Borrego Solar Systems, LLC 833 Pulaski Highway 2.5 MW solar array in the Town of Goshen, the proposed AES Distributed Energy / Maple Solar LLC 7.1 MW solar array in the Town of Montgomery, and the proposed Borrego Solar Systems S. Centerville 1.56 MW solar array in the Town of Wawayanda. No action taken on these letters at this time.

The Ag Board also received a letter from the New York State Department of Ag & Markets regarding the “Review of the Town of Crawford’s Zoning Code and the Administration of the Code as Applied to Farmhood Fields, LLC.” According to the letter, the farm had been issued a stop work order and a notice of violation related to the construction of a barn and feeding station on the site. In response to the stop work order and notice of violation, Ms. Valk asked the New York State Department of Ag & Markets to “examine the Town Code as it relates to scenic overlay zone requirements, site plan approval for all structures on the farm, and a 150-foot setback for structures used to stable domestic animals.” Ag and Markets plans on reviewing the Town Code to see if it is too restrictive and indicated that the Town should submit any related information that the Town wants to have considered in this review. Several Ag Board members indicated that the overlay zone requirements in the Town Code might be too restrictive in this case. Although the barn was built within the scenic overlay zone, it can’t be seen well from the road. D. Church stated that Crawford will amend its

zoning code so it won't be overly restrictive for agricultural uses and agricultural operations. He stated that the Town will reduce the setbacks for buildings housing farm animals. However, the amended code might not resolve the current issue because zoning amendments impact projects after the amendments are approved, not projects that are from before the zoning amendments. The Ag Board members agreed to wait one month to see how the State handles this issue. No action taken at this time.

The Ag Board also received a letter from the New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets regarding the waiver for the NOI filing requirements for the acquisition of land in the Town of Cornwall that is in Orange County Agricultural District # 1. This waiver involves property (SBLs 4-2-77.11, 4-2-77.2, 4-2-68.2 and 4-2-64.2) that is being transferred to the NYS Office of Parks, Recreation and Planning from the Open Space Institute Land Trust, Inc. No action taken.

New Business

Presentation on Implementation of County Ag & Farmland Protection Plan

Discussion ensued about the implementation of the County Ag & Farmland Protection Plan. B. Fiorvanti presented the progress on Priority Project 3 regarding the development of an "agricultural economics program to increase the profitability of farms." He stated that he set up his presentation to address the visions and goals of the plan and the priority projects from an economic aspect.

He addressed several visions and goals in the Ag Plan that the County worked to meet. First, the Orange County Economic Development Office helped to "fully integrate agriculture into all aspects of Orange County's economic development strategy" by providing "written suggestions to OC Planning for updates to the County's economic development strategic plan (Agritourism, Farm Brewing, Hemp, etc)." Second, the County worked to "widen public support for agriculture through community education and engagement." Specifically, OC Tourism has played "a big role in promoting apple-picking, farmers markets, local Christmas trees, pumpkins, etc." and posts and shares Ag events and information on social media. Third, the County could "continue to provide farm operators with state-of-the-art training, tactical assistance and comprehensive support." He noted that "many farmers are aware of emerging technologies." However, the County "could explore possibilities of shared equipment service agreements" and "assist with access to capital for innovations and help overcome other barriers." Fourth, B. Fiorvanti indicated that Orange County works to "maintain a critical mass of farmland and ensure there is adequate supply of affordable land accessible to farmers." He noted that Orange County is "very much behind PDR programs and Orange County Planning advises towns on matters of zoning." Finally, B. Fiorvanti stated that the fifth vision/goal that Orange County has been addressing is its "support of new and next generation farmers." He noted that Orange County promotes "emerging trends that provide new revenue opportunities such as Agritourism, Farm Brewing, Hemp, etc." He also noted that Orange County IDA's CBD Accelerator "could provide countless new opportunities."

B. Fiorvanti then discussed how the County has addressed the priority projects, from an economic development perspective. First, he noted that the County worked to "promote the state of agriculture in Orange County to public officials, etc." For example, the County conducted an Elected Officials Roundtable on 9/16/19. He indicated that public education will help with the County's efforts to promote agriculture to public officials. Second, B. Fiorvanti stated that the County has worked to use "press releases, social media, and editorials on the economic impact of local Agriculture" for public education. The County has provided the public with information about Agri-tourism opportunities, marketed the farmers markets throughout the County and "written about the subject periodically." However, he noted that the County wants to do more since it has "access to a reporter who will write applicable stories if we have the subjects." He also noted that the County "could promote farmer

testimonials” aiming to “get to know who they are, what they do, and why they love Orange County and farming in Orange County.” Furthermore, the County could do an “Agri-social campaign” similar to USDA’s “know your farmer, you’re your food” campaign. This campaign would be on the County level, rather than the State level. He said that the County could also “identify an appropriate person to write an editorial or ‘My View’” story for the local newspapers. Finally, B. Fiorvanti stated that the County has been working to “develop a buy local initiative to increase market opportunities for Orange County agricultural products.” He noted that the Ag Plan Implementation Committee and Orange County Tourism “play big roles through various promotions.” However, he noted that the County could also “expand the campaign towards retail (i.e. dairy).” He stated that the County could also develop new “‘Eat local, buy local’ campaigns and promote online and in traditional media.” He mentioned printing flyers to post in restaurants to market the buy local initiative.

General discussion ensued about the information that B. Fiorvanti presented. J. Wright stated that it is important to maintain a critical mass of farmland in Orange County. He noted that if the dairy industry goes in Orange County, then agriculture goes in the county due to the loss of support services. The Ag Board members agreed that the County needs to help the dairy farmers. Also, K. Apostolides stated that the County could do a campaign identifying restaurants that use local farm product to further the buy local initiative. No action taken at this time.

Election of Officers

Discussion turned to the election of the Ag Board officers. J. Hoeffner stated that he is willing to serve as the Chairman again, if he is voted in. He also stated that he spoke to L. DeBuck since he would not be able to make it to the meeting and L. DeBuck stated that he is willing to serve as the Vice Chairman. General discussion ensued. J. Wright moved to re-appoint J. Hoeffner as the Chairman of the Ag Board, P. Ruzskiewicz seconded, unanimously approved. D. Church moved to re-appoint L. DeBuck as the Vice Chairman of the Ag Board, J. Wright seconded, unanimously approved.

2020 Meeting Schedule

Discussion then ensued about the 2020 meeting schedule. D. Church stated that the Ag Board needs to decide what meeting schedule it wants to use in 2020. In particular, he asked if the Board members still want to meet on the third Wednesday of the month, or if they want to change the day. The Ag Board members agreed that they are okay with meeting on the third Wednesday of the month and the meetings should continue on that day. Also, D. Church asked if the Ag Board want to meet at the same time every month, or does it want to go back to the summer hours in a few months. Several Board members agreed that the later meeting time works for them, others indicated that they are okay with either time. The Board members agreed to have a poll done to determine which option works best for all the Board members. If the Board returns to having the summer meeting start time, the later start time would take effect for the April meeting. Finally, D. Church proposed that the Ag Board ensure that its meetings do not go beyond 90 minutes, at least for any key topics. The Ag Board members agreed to this. No further action taken at this time.

Update Ag Board Member Contact Information

Discussion then turned to an update of the Ag Board member contact information. J. MacLeod explained that there has been a lot of Board member turn-over in the past year and she wants to make sure that she has the most recent contact information for the Board members. She passed around a sheet with the most recent contact information that she has for the Board members and asked that they update any incorrect information. The updated information will be updated in the Excel document after the meeting. No further action taken at this time.

Eight Year Ag District Review

Discussion then ensued about the Eight-Year Ag District Review. D. Church stated that this year the County will be conducting the Eight-Year Ag District review. During this process, all the parcels in the Districts will be evaluated. Agricultural parcels can be added to the Ag Districts. However, parcels can also be removed from the Ag Districts if it is determined that there are any parcels that are not being used agriculturally (i.e. residential subdivisions and industrial parcels). While parcels can be added annually, parcels can only be removed during the eight-year review. Initially, the Orange County Planning Department and the Orange County Department of Real Property will coordinate to review the parcels that are currently in the Ag Districts. Several Ag Board members indicated that they would like to have Bob Somers come to discuss the Eight-Year Ag District Review. S. Najac stated that she would like to see the Planning Board and Zoning Board members get credits if they attend such a session. D. Church stated that he will look into this. J. MacLeod has created a rough timeline based on the current law and the last Eight-Year Ag District Review. The dates listed on this timeline need to be updated to the 2020 review and distributed to the Ag Board members.

J. MacLeod also mentioned that there was mention of merging the two Ag Districts during the last Eight-Year Review. However, this was not done since the County was too far into the review to merge the districts when this option was brought up. Thus, she wanted to remind the Ag Board of this option. D. Church stated that he needs to get the pros and cons of keeping the two districts separate versus merging the two districts. He will let the Ag Board know what he finds out about this. No further action taken at this time.

Old Business

County Ag Plan Implementation Update

Discussion then turned to the County Ag Plan implementation update. K. Apostolides stated that she is continuing to look into ways to help Orange County's dairy farmers. She stated that she discovered that the Stewart's Shops uses a large amount of milk produced in the area of its headquarters. Stewart's Shops use a model that does everything needed to produce dairy products after the company receives the milk. This includes processing the milk into various dairy products, packaging the products, making their labels, etc. She will look further into this company's model to see if Orange County could use this model to help Orange County milk.

J. Hoeffner stated that the Stap Farm received a bill for the labels that they had made for their milk. They were wondering if the Ag Board is still willing to help pay for the labels. K. Apostolides stated that she could revisit the production of the labels for Orange County dairy. She said the labels could be printed with the AFPB logo. The labels could have a generic design and include the specific farm names. However, she did mention that there has been concern about using specific business names. The labels should be available to all of the dairy farms. D. Church stated that it should be okay to help pay for these labels so long as the three farms that want dairy labels have a fair chance to get a reimbursement. K. Apostolides stated that the bill for the labels for the Stap Farm totaled \$1144.44. The Ag Board does not need to pay the entire bill, but it needs to agree on how much to pay toward each farm if it does help pay for the labels. She will come to the February meeting with estimates for the cost of the printing for the labels.

J. Hoeffner mentioned that there is a dairy study that is being done for the State of Vermont by Karp Associates from Long Island. He stated that maybe this company could do a dairy study for Orange County, or at least let Orange County get a copy so it can take a look at it to see if any recommendations might be helpful to the Orange County dairy farmers. No further action taken at this time.

Other Business

November Minutes

J. Wright mentioned that K. Sumner had discussed a dairy subsidy at the November meeting that was not included in the minutes. K. Sumner wanted to see the minutes updated to reflect this information. General discussion ensued. J. MacLeod will work with D. Church and J. Wright to get the November minutes updated and bring them to the February meeting. No further action taken at this time.

Meeting adjourned: 6:49 pm.