

Agricultural and Farmland Protection Board Meeting
January 16, 2019
Meeting Minutes

Ag Board members present: J. Hoeffner, D. Church, J. McCarey, P. Ruszkiewicz, D. Smith, M. Ullrich, J. Wright.

Ag Board members excused via e-mail: L. DeBuck, J. Sanford, M. Simpson.

Guests present: K. Apostolides – OC Farm Market Coordinator, M. Decker – Orange County Land Trust (OCLT), J. MacLeod – OC Planning, R. Schreibeis – OC Executive's Office, J. Touw – Wagon Wheel Farm.

Call to order – 5:21 pm.

November Minutes

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

Summary of Accounts

Discussion ensued about the summary of accounts. The Ag Board has a budget of \$27,000 for 2019. It also has \$8,000 that it rolled over from the 2018 budget for Ag Plan implementation. General discussion ensued. No further action taken at this time.

Inquiries & Correspondence

J. MacLeod stated that the Ag Board received a letter from the New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets regarding the PDR application for Kirbytown Farms, indicating that this farm was not awarded a PDR grant. General discussion ensued. No action taken.

J. MacLeod stated that the Ag Board received a second letter from the New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets regarding the PDR application for Newport Bloom Farm II. The Town of Warwick was awarded \$989,700 to permanently protect viable agricultural land on this farm. General discussion ensued. No action taken.

J. MacLeod stated that the Ag Board received a third letter from the New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets regarding the PDR application for Willow Hill Farm. The Orange County Land Trust (OCLT) was awarded \$2,000,000 to permanently protect viable agricultural land on this farm. General discussion ensued. No action taken.

D. Church stated that he received an e-mail from Virginia Kasinki with an update on the Newburgh projects that she has worked on. However, the update report would not download. Thus, D. Church stated that he will send it to the Ag Board members when he gets it. No action taken at this time.

New Business

Election of Officers

Discussion ensued about the election of the Ag Board officers for 2019. General discussion ensued. J. McCarey moved to have J. Hoeffner be the Chairman and to have L. DeBuck be the Vice Chairman, P. Ruszkiewicz seconded, unanimously approved.

PDR Applications – M. Decker

Discussion turned to the PDR applications. M. Decker stated that the Kirbytown Farm did not get selected for a PDR, but Willow Hill Farm did. He stated that Nemeth Farm is also protected now. This farm is adjacent to Windfall Farms and the conservation easement is held by OCLT. He stated that he anticipates there will be more PDR applications next year, including one farm through the Town of Warwick, 2 or 3 through OCLT, and one through the Town of Wallkill.

M. Decker stated that the 2018 Farm Bill allowed PDR applicants to donate up to 50% of the land value. He noted that the easement can be tailored to the specific project. It also allows limited mineral development; however, OCLT will not include mineral development in its easements.

M. Ullrich said the Ag Board should ask the State to pass a blanket approval to allow a transfer tax in any town in Orange County. J. McCarey said that he does not see this happening because the real estate industry is not for a transfer tax. D. Church stated that the County could make a resolution to allow a transfer tax. He said that the County Legislature would have to vote on the transfer tax and would have to go on the record supporting the transfer tax. The County could get State approval, which makes it easier for towns to create a transfer tax. However, the towns would still have to take a poll of their residents to be able to pass this tax. J. Wright moved to support the concept of the County Legislature asking the State Legislature to get a county-wide blanket approval to allow transfer taxes in Orange County, M. Ullrich seconded, roll call – J. Hoeffner – Aye, L. DeBuck – Absent, D. Church – Aye, J. McCarey – Nay, P. Ruszkiewicz – Aye, J. Sanford – Absent, M. Simpson – Absent, D. Smith – Abstain, M. Ullrich – Aye, J. Wright – Aye, motion failed. General discussion continued about getting a blanket approval for the transfer tax. J. McCarey moved to table seeking the blanket approval for the transfer tax until the Ag Plan Implementation Committee can provide further education to the Ag Board on this topic, P. Ruszkiewicz seconded, unanimously approved.

PDR Applications – J. Touw

Discussion then ensued about the anticipated PDR application for Wagon Wheel Farm, which is owned by Jason Touw. J. Touw is a full time teacher at Warwick High School and he teaches agriculture classes. He is also a full-time farmer who is growing his business. His farm is near the Village of Goshen and his business's production consists of approximately 40% hay and straw, approximately 15% pumpkins, approximately 10% to 15% sweet corn, and 30% to 35% of other farm activities. He has a high tunnel greenhouse and several hundred chickens. J. Touw stated that he would like to have his farm be a four season farm in the future.

M. Decker mentioned that the Touw's are taking out trees in successional fields to use these fields for agriculture. He said that there was supposed to be a Federal PDR round open in February, but he is not sure what the status of this PDR round will be due to the federal government shutdown. Nonetheless, he wanted to introduce the Ag Board to this project. He stated that J. Touw will be applying for a PDR and will come back to the Ag Board for a support letter once the PDR round is announced. No action taken at this time.

Old Business

Ag Plan Implementation

Discussion then turned to the Ag Plan implementation update. M. Decker stated that the Orange County Land Trust (OCLT) has been working on Priority Project 6 from the Orange County Agricultural and Farmland Protection Plan. He stated that there are more sources for funding for farmland preservation than when the Ag Plan was completed. He noted that there is also one town

that is considering establishing a PDR fund to adopt a real estate transfer tax. He noted that OCLT and OC Planning have identified clusters where preservation would help preserve the critical mass of farmland that is needed for a thriving agricultural industry. Also, the Hudson Valley Farmlink Network was established in 2014 to link farmers with landowners. However, some aspects of Priority Project 6 have not moved forward due to a lack of funding. These aspects include updating the County Open Space Fund Program application to expand the agricultural criteria to match the Ag Plan and expanding the use of funds to cover purchase of development rights, lease of development rights, transfer of development rights and lease to own programs. M. Decker also stated that it is difficult to establish local funds for a leasing of development rights program because public funding sources like NYS FPIG and USDA ALE require permanent easements.

K. Apostolides continued with the Ag Plan implementation update. She stated that the Orange County IDA is contributing \$20,000 towards the dairy study for Orange County. General discussion ensued. M. Ullrich moved to write a letter to the County Legislature requesting \$20,000 to match the Orange County IDA's contribution for the dairy study and to allocate the \$8,000 from the Ag Board's roll over from 2018 for the dairy study, J. Wright seconded, unanimously approved. K. Apostolides stated that there will be a need to get the major dairy players involved in this study. J. Wright stated that the younger generation is not doing dairy. M. Ullrich stated that there are 37 or 38 dairy farms still in business in Orange County. J. McCarey stated that the dairy farmers need to come in to say what they need.

K. Apostolides stated that the County should have another meeting with state and local politicians, as this was very helpful for the agricultural sector. M. Ullrich stated that this meeting should also invite the Farm Bureau and the Vegetable Growers Association to this meeting and to allow them to add white papers to address issues that they see in agriculture. P. Ruszkiewicz stated that the County should get all of the State politicians down to Orange County for this meeting.

K. Apostolides continued by discussing the farmers markets. She stated that there might be a new farmers market in Middletown this year. M. Ullrich stated that the property owner for the new farmers market in Middletown is not as interested now because of the paper work that needs to be done. K. Apostolides also stated that the Town of Crawford has a winter farmers market. She said that there might be a buy local store established in the future, as well. The buy local store would feature products from local farmers, local businesses and tastings. D. Church stated that the storefront would be in Pine Bush.

K. Apostolides stated that Orange County Tourism is looking to create a welcome center. She stated that Tourism needs display items for the welcome center. M. Ullrich stated that the county can include a copy of the "Portrait Snapshot." No further action at this time.

Other Business

Animal Rights

M. Ullrich stated that Cornell Cooperative Extension will be having an educational opportunity to teach the public about animal rights. She stated that there will be judges and law enforcement workers available to teach people how to tell when animals are well cared for and when they are not. They will teach the difference between abuse and production practices. She noted that some members of the public think that animals are being abused when they are not. No action taken.

FSA

M. Ullrich stated that FSA is closed due to the federal government shutdown. However, it will soon be open every second or third day.

Ag & Markets Grant

M. Decker stated that the Orange County Land Trust needs a letter of support to get a grant of up to \$50,000 to help cover the cost of PDR application appraisals. J. McCarey moved to write a support letter for OCLT to apply for the PDR application appraisal grant, seconded by J. Wright, unanimously approved.

Meeting adjourned: 7:27 pm.