

Agricultural and Farmland Protection Board Meeting
March 15, 2023
Meeting Minutes

Ag Board members present: L. DeBuck, S. Soons, P. Ruskiewicz, D. Smith, A. Sorensen, P. Wiley, J. Wright.

Ag Board members excused via phone: M. Simpson.

Ag Board members excused via email: M. Ullrich.

Guests present: K. Apostolides – OC Farm Market Coordinator, J. MacLeod – OC Planning, K. Sumner – OC Soil & Water.

Call to order – 7:13.

January Minutes

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

Summary of Accounts

There were no changes to the summary account. General discussion ensued. P. Wiley moved to accept the summary of accounts as presented, J. Wright seconded, unanimously approved.

Inquiries & Correspondence

The Ag Board received a letter from the New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets regarding the final NOI “to Undertake an Action within an Agricultural District, Lightstar Renewables LLC, 354 Mt. Airy Road Solar Project in the Town of New Windsor, Orange County Agricultural District No. 1.” L. DeBuck stated that it appears that Ag & Markets made its decision without input from the Ag Board. K. Sumner stated that he had written to the State about the late notifications and the need to receive information about these projects earlier so the Ag Board has enough time to respond. K. Sumner and J. MacLeod stated that they had not received any responses to K. Sumner’s letter. P. Ruskiewicz stated that he has spoken to the Commissioner of Ag & Markets, Richard Ball, about the need for more time to respond to the letters. Richard Ball is aware of this issue and had told P. Ruskiewicz that this issue has been brought up by other counties, too. However, it appears that the State has not taken further actions to address this issue.

L. DeBuck stated that the position of the large scale solar installations is not okay. A lot of the solar installations are being put on prime agricultural soils. However, he thinks that they should be located in places that are not as important for producing food and material fiber production. There should be a list of better places to locate large solar installations. P. Ruskiewicz said that he has seen solar installations over parking lots in Sussex County, NJ. This would be a good alternative to placing it on agricultural fields. P. Wiley stated that there are not incentives to locate solar installations over parking lots, which is part of the problem. A. Sorensen stated that the Orange County Planning Department has been trying to address this issue when it is reviewing proposed projects throughout the county. He stated that the Planners are including language to encourage sponsors of proposed warehouses to put solar arrays on their rooftops through the C-Pace program. This program can offer qualifying projects a 100% tax credit to locate the solar on the rooftops. P. Wiley stated that there need to be better incentives for rooftop solar or other alternatives in order to not locate these

solar installations on agricultural land. L. DeBuck stated that maybe the Ag Board could write a position paper on this topic to try to help guide the large solar arrays to places other than on the agricultural land. The Ag Board members agreed that this was a good thing to do. L. DeBuck moved to have the Ag Board produce a position paper that addresses the placement of solar installations away from agricultural land and that addresses the late receipt of the NOIs from the State, while trying to tread lightly on the property owners rights, D. Smith seconded, unanimously approved.

The Ag Board received an e-mailed document from Cornell Cooperative Extension titled "Planning with Agrivoltaics in Mind Webinar Series Video Links." It also received an e-mail from Cornell Cooperative Extension titled "Planning with Agrivoltaics in Mind Webinar Series." General discussion ensued about this information. No action taken at this time.

New Business

Summertime Farmer / Grower Gathering

Discussion ensued about the summertime farmer / grower gathering. S. Soons stated that there should be an event where farmers can meet each other. The idea is to get agricultural people together. She said that this event could be early one morning during the 4-H / Otisville Fair, which is scheduled for July 27-30. She said that maybe there could be free food and beer or beverages for the attendees. However, she said that it would help to have someone (i.e. AFPB) put a little money in for this event. L. DeBuck stated that he is not opposed to this idea.

The Ag Board members discussed the best time for the summertime farmer / grower gathering. S. Soons said maybe 4 pm on that Thursday or Friday. J. Wright mentioned lunchtime might work better. S. Soons stated that maybe 6 pm would work better since it is dinnertime.

S. Soons stated that maybe she could get some elected officials to show up to this event. There will be a need to ask people to RSVP to the event. She will work with CCE on this farmer event. She wants to keep it simple. General discussion ensued. No action taken at this time.

Sponsor NUFFI Newburgh Urban Farming Fair

Discussion turned to sponsoring the NUFFI Newburgh Urban Farming Fair, which will be held on the afternoon of April 29. This is a community event designed to get people interested in farming. She said NUFFI needs money for flyers and to feed volunteers. She is seeking \$750 on their behalf. S. Soons said that she had spoken to Virginia Kasinki, who invited the Ag Board to do a site visit to their garden. L. DeBuck stated that NUFFI has a good impact on kids by getting the kids in Newburgh involved in agriculture. General discussion ensued. S. Soons moved to allocate \$750 to support the NUFFI Urban Farming Fair, P. Wiley seconded, unanimously approved.

Agricultural Plan Update RFQ

Discussion then ensued about the agricultural plan update RFQ. K. Apostolides stated that the County agricultural plan is due to be updated in 2025 and that the Ag Board should start thinking about this update. M. Ullrich stated that it would be a good idea to have everything lined up to start the Ag Plan update as soon as possible. A. Sorensen stated that Nan Stolzenburg did the last plan update.

K. Sumner stated that the plan needs to be implemented more aggressively to see the intended impacts of the plan. He said that rather than doing a whole update of the plan, there should be an update of the goals of the plan for five years from now. S. Soons stated that not many people show up to the Ag Plan Implementation Committee meeting. Therefore, there is a need to reinvigorate this

committee. K. Sumner stated that there also need to be more action items out of the meeting. He also noted that there is a need to help the Orange County Land Trust (OCLT) get more help to increase its staffing for PDRs. L. DeBuck stated that it would be good to see what has been done with the implementation. General discussion ensued. No action taken at this time.

Agricultural Plan Priority Project Update

Discussion then turned to the agricultural plan priority project update for Priority Project 8. K. Sumner stated that the County received easements on 15 of the 19 parcels in the Pellets Island Reach area. The County will stay away from the other four properties. O.C. Soil & Water will hire a contractor that will mow and remove down / "at risk" trees as needed. This work will be done outside of the time that Indiana Bats are at risk to injury or death related to tree removals.

K. Sumner stated that the floodplain bench project has completed phases 1-3. The County is now working on Phase 4, from County Route 1 to Majek farm bridge and the trees will be cut by April 1. K. Sumner stated that O.C. Soil & Water has enough money to pay for the work on the south side, but still needs money for the north side of this project. L. DeBuck asked why not take out the Majek bridge since it is not functional. K. Sumner stated that the owner of the bridge does not want to work with the County about removing the bridge. However, he said that the bridge is in such bad condition that you cannot even walk across the bridge.

K. Sumner stated that there has been more aggressive tree cutting within the federal flood control project area from the Maple Avenue bridge to the Celery Avenue rock ledge. Furthermore, the County offered funding assistance to help with the Quaker Creek clean-out project, which removed trees and woody debris from the Wawayanda Channel and the Quaker Creek to improve flood flow capacity. He also noted that the Maudra bridge approach was removed to eliminate a pinch point in the Wallkill River's floodplain. The lowering of the Celery Avenue ledge was fully designed and permitted. However, there was a lot of controversy over this project. K. Sumner stated that the permits for this project have expired and O.C. Soil & Water determined that this is not a high priority project at this time.

K. Sumner stated that a total of about \$4 million has been spent on implementing the Wallkill River drainage programs from 2013 to 2023. New York State contributed \$3 million, Orange County contributed \$350,000 and O.C. Soil & Water contributed \$650,000. These contributions do not include staff time from Orange County or O.C. Soil & Water.

K. Sumner provided a two-page table containing projects that he believes should be worked on within the next five years. General discussion ensued. No action taken at this time.

Other Business

Meat Processor Survey

J. MacLeod stated that M. Ullrich had emailed her with a draft thank you letter for the meat processor survey respondents, an updated compilation of the results of the meat processing survey (updated 3/15/23), and a list of the respondents. K. Sumner stated that he thought the thank you letter looks good. L. DeBuck stated that he would like to get the thank you letter out before the next Ag Board meeting. General discussion ensued. No further action taken at this time.

Farmers Market Updates

K. Apostolides stated that it appears that all of the farmers markets that operated last year will also be operating this year. General discussion ensued. No action taken at this time.

Meeting adjourned: 9:04 pm.