

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

Ag Board members present via conference call: J. Hoeffner, L. DeBuck, E. Ruscher, P. Ruszkiewicz, M. Simpson, D. Smith, S. Soons, A. Sorensen, J. Wright.

Guests present via conference call: K. Apostolides – OC Farm Market Coordinator, J. MacLeod – OC Planning, K. Morris – OC Planning, A. Reed – OC Legislative Office.

Call to order – 7:30 pm.

February Minutes

D. Smith moved to accept the February minutes as presented, M. Simpson seconded, unanimously approved.

Summary of Accounts

General discussion ensued about the summary of accounts. D. Smith moved to accept the ledger as presented, P. Ruszkiewicz seconded, unanimously approved.

Inquiries & Correspondence

The Ag Board received a letter from the New York State Department of Ag & Markets for an NOI for the proposed Lower Road II CDG Project 2.0 MW solar array in the Town of Wawayanda. No action taken on these letters at this time.

Old Business

OC Dairy Inquiry and VT Dairy Study

Discussion ensued about the Orange County dairy inquiry and the Vermont dairy study. The Ag Board members agreed that the Vermont dairy study is irrelevant to Orange County dairy based on the current issues and disruption to the Orange County dairy industry. The Board members agreed that there is a lot of chaos at this time and there are farmers that are dumping their milk because the milk is not being picked up. The Board members also agreed that there is not a lack of demand for milk because the local grocery stores are having trouble keeping milk and dairy products on their shelves. The Ag Board members agreed that they cannot do marketing at this time due to the current spending limits set by the County, which is only allowing for emergency spending and payment of outstanding contracts. No action taken at this time.

Eight Year and Annual Agricultural District Review

Discussion turned to the Eight Year and Annual Agricultural District Reviews. A. Sorensen stated that the County Legislature has made a resolution to extend the review time for the Eight Year Agricultural District Review in response to the current limitations on government operations due to COVID-19. Originally, municipalities and the public had until April 15 to seek addition to and/or removal of parcels from the Agricultural Districts. However, the Legislature is now allowing municipalities and the public to seek addition to and/or removal from the Agricultural Districts from June 1 to June 30. As a result of the expanded municipal review period, the County has an updated timeline. E. Ruscher stated that he did not get much feedback from the municipal assessors regarding the Eight-Year Agricultural

District Review. A. Reed stated that the Ag Board will have to approve the final report before it goes to the Legislature. This will probably happen in late July.

A. Sorensen stated that the County is looking to consolidate the two Agricultural Districts into one district. He asked if there was a consensus of the Ag Board members to go forward with the consolidation of the two Agricultural Districts. This consolidation would make reviews in the future easier since some municipalities are split between the two districts. The Ag Board members agreed to the consolidation of the Agricultural Districts. The landowners with properties in Orange County Agricultural District 2 will need to be notified about the district number change with a postcard. A. Sorensen also stated that landowners whose property is proposed to be added to or removed from an Agricultural District will also be notified with a postcard. K. Morris has created a methodology for the removal of properties that will remove built out commercial properties and residential parcels that are less than 7 acres. She, J. MacLeod and V. Fernandez-Rogers, from the County Planning Department, will be starting the mapping for this soon.

J. MacLeod stated that there were four applications for the Annual Agricultural District Review. Two of these applications contained properties that are already in an Agricultural District. Thus, no more review of these properties was needed. The other two applications contained land that is not currently in an Ag District. The first application was for the Derby Road Farm, in the Town of Wallkill. This farm has three parcels (SBLs 21-1-35.2, 21-1-35.3 and 21-1-35.4) with a total of 125 acres. Of the 125 acres, 25 acres is used for hay crops. E. Ruscher stated that he can do some more research on this site and report back to the Ag Board at next month's meeting since the Board members will not be able to do the site visits it normally does with the Annual Agricultural District Reviews.

The second application was for Natural Grain, LLC. This application contains two parcels in the Town of Newburgh (SBLs 25-1-32 and 28-5-10) and two parcels in the Town of Montgomery (SBLs 10-1-29.21 and 15-1-97) with a total of 309.6 acres. The two parcels in the Town of Newburgh are already in Orange County Agricultural District 1; therefore, no further review of these parcels is needed. However, the two parcels in the Town of Montgomery are not currently within a County Agricultural District and need to be reviewed. Together, these two parcels contain 42.7 acres. J. MacLeod stated that due to a discrepancy in the GIS program, the municipal boundary indicates that one of the Montgomery parcels is in Newburgh. However, she did research and verified that this parcel is in the Town of Montgomery. J. Hoeffner stated that he knows this site and can provide the Ag Board more information about it at the next meeting. No action taken at this time.

New Business

Mini-grant Program for Design Services and Printed Materials

Discussion then ensued about the mini-grant program for design services and printed materials. K. Apostolides stated that the mini-grant program could be used for the extension of the label printing. The farmers can apply to get help paying for printing the labels and potentially get reimbursed for part of the cost. K. Apostolides stated that the Ag Board could investigate helping with the cost to produce promotional cards for farmers. However, the Ag Board cannot allocate money for this at this time since the County is only paying for emergency printing, not non-emergency printing jobs, due to a loss of revenue. A. Reed stated that any new spending must be justified and approved by Harry Porr at this time. The Ag Board members agreed to hold off on the mini-grants and the labels. No further action taken at this time.

Other Business

Buy Local Movement

Discussion then turned to the buy local movement. K. Apostolides stated that people have been reaching out to her more now than ever to find out where they can buy produce and food products directly from farms. She recommended that the Ag Board consider putting together ads directing people where to go and what farms are open for people to pick up food. It is possible to use some of the money that the Ag Board had previously set aside for internet advertising. S. Soons stated that her farm is allowing for curbside pick up when costumers pay for food with a credit card over the phone. She said she has a lot more business than normal for this time of year. J. Hoeffner agreed that there is more demand for local agricultural products. A. Reed indicated that the County Legislature could make a resolution asking Orange County residents to support the buy local initiative. K. Apostolides will help with the language and get it to A. Reed. No further action at this time.

Golf Courses

Discussion then ensued about the directive from the State Governor regarding the closing of golf courses. L. DeBuck questioned why County and Municipal golf courses are still open while private golf courses have to close. He noted that this is not fair to the private golf courses. P. Ruskiewicz stated that he is not clear on why this unfair approach is happening, but it might have something to do with the fact that the county and municipal golf courses are often located within larger park systems. However, he noted that if people using these golf courses do not use social distancing, the county and municipal golf courses will also be likely to be forced to be closed. General discussion ensued. No action taken.

Meeting adjourned: 8:09 pm.