

Agricultural and Farmland Protection Board Meeting
April 26, 2023
Meeting Minutes

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

Ag Board members excused via phone: M. Simpson.

Ag Board members excused via text: R. Minkus.

Guests present: K. Apostolides – OC Farm Market Coordinator, K. Luciani – Woodbury Town Councilwoman, J. MacLeod – OC Planning, S. Pulver – Ag District Applicant.

Call to order – 7:11.

Moment of Silence

L. DeBuck stated that he would like the Ag Board to have a moment of silence to honor J. Hoeffner, who was an Ag Board member when he passed away. After the moment of silence, J. Wright stated that he was very knowledgeable about agriculture. A. Sorensen stated that he was encouraging to younger farmers. M. Ullrich stated that the obituary for J. Hoeffner reflected him very well. The Ag Board had sent flowers to the funeral home for his viewing and funeral. General discussion ensued. No action taken.

March Minutes

J. Wright moved to accept the March minutes as presented, D. Smith seconded, unanimously approved.

Summary of Accounts

The summary of accounts was updated to show the \$750 that was allocated to the NUFFI Urban Farming Fair. General discussion ensued. J. Wright moved to accept the summary of accounts as presented, P. Ruszkiewicz seconded, unanimously approved.

Inquiries & Correspondence

J. MacLeod distributed a copy of the flyer for the NUFFI Urban Farming Fair, which is scheduled for April 29. No action taken at this time.

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, 111 Owens Road Goshen, Orange County Agricultural District No. 1.” General discussion ensued.

The Ag Board also 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, 111 Owens Road Goshen Site 2, Orange County Agricultural District No. 1.” General discussion ensued.

The Ag Board also 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, Maybrook Solar 1 and Maybrook Solar 2 Solar Project, Village of Maybrook, Orange County Agricultural District No. 1.” General discussion ensued.

The Ag Board also received a letter from NYSEDA regarding the NOI “to Undertake an Action within an Agricultural District, Broadlea Road Solar 1 LLC and Vivian Lane Solar 1 LLC in the Town of Chester and Goshen.” General discussion ensued. M. Ullrich moved to write letters to the New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets and to NYSEDA acknowledging that the Ag Board received the letters regarding the NOIs, P. Wiley seconded, unanimously approved.

J. MacLeod stated that she received an e-mail from the New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets stating that NYSEDA will now be sending the Ag Boards the solar project NOIs that they receive. This will allow the Ag Boards more time to review these NOIs and to offer comments on these projects. General discussion ensued. No action taken at this time.

New Business

Annual Agricultural District Update

Discussion ensued about the annual agricultural district update. J. MacLeod stated that the Ag Board received ten agricultural district enrollment applications.

M. Ullrich stated that all of the properties that the Ag Board received applications for should be visited, other than the Hopmayer property, which will be reinstated into the agricultural district. The Ag Board members agreed that they should have at least three or four members visit the sites. They also agreed that the site visits might take two days, due to the number of applications that the board received. The Ag Board members agreed to schedule the site visits for Friday, May 5, and Tuesday, May 9. J. MacLeod will reach out to the applicants to determine which day works best for the applicants. Ideally, the site visits would be split between the two days relatively equally.

The Hopmayer property was previously in the County Agricultural District, but it was removed from the ag district during the 2020 Eight-Year Agricultural District Review. A. Sorensen and J. MacLeod both stated that this is the only application that is being reinstated into the Ag District during this annual ag district review. The rest of the parcels were not in the Ag District prior to the 2020 Eight-Year Agricultural District Review. This property (SBL 1-1-49.2) is in the Town of Crawford and contains 1.7 acres. The owner of the Hopmayer property breeds and sells poultry and waterfowl. The owner also plans to grow mushrooms on the property in the future. General discussion ensued. M. Ullrich moved to recommend that the County Legislature add the Hopmayer property to Orange County Agricultural District 1, P. Ruszkiewicz seconded, unanimously approved.

The Ag Board also discussed the Pulver property. The owner, S. Pulver, and a Woodbury Town Councilwoman, K. Luciani, were in attendance. The Pulver property consists of six contiguous parcels in the Village of Woodbury / Town of Woodbury (SBLs 202-1-12, 202-1-59.1, 202-1-60.5, 202-1-70, 202-1-72 and 202-1-79) that total approximately 55 acres.

The Ag Board asked S. Pulver if his property is currently being used for agricultural purposes. He stated that it is not at this time. It is currently a bed-and-breakfast and event site. The bed-and-breakfast has been operating for about ten years. However, he is seeking to convert his property into a farm winery. He stated that the Village’s zoning code and permitting process have limited his ability to turn his property into a farm winery. He has planted some grape plants already. However, he plans to have 30 acres of grapes for the winery. He has a site plan showing the proposed layout of the farm winery that he can share with the Ag Board. P. Ruszkiewicz reminded the other Ag Board members that the properties need to be viable for agricultural use, not necessarily to be used agriculturally now.

S. Pulver stated that he anticipates hosting two dozen events per year at the farm winery. He has weddings and community events at this property. He stated that the events host up to 100 people. However, the events usually host between 40 and 50 people. He stated that the regulation is very restrictive.

K. Luciani stated that the Town is in support of this proposed farm winery. The neighbors are also in support of the existing and proposed use of this property. This site is within a large residential neighborhood. However, K. Luciani stated that the Village of Woodbury does not seem to be in support of this proposal, and it is not clear why. M. Ullrich stated that maybe the Village is afraid of the proposal. A. Sorensen stated that the Village might also be misinformed about the proposal and the ag districts.

A. Sorensen stated that looking at the application, the property is 50+ acres with good agricultural soils. The owner intends to establish a winery in an area that could otherwise be built up further in the future. He stated that the Ag Board should be supportive of this kind of application as the property could legitimately support agricultural activities.

M. Ullrich stated that several of the other applications are borderline as to whether or not they are agricultural in nature. She said that if properties are put into the ag district and the plans do not go as intended, then the issues come back to Cornell Cooperative Extension (CCE) or to Ag & Markets. General discussion ensued. No further action taken at this time.

Farmers Market Update

Discussion turned to the farmers market update. K. Apostolides stated that the annual farmers market manager meeting took place a few weeks ago. The meeting went well. However, she stated that Ag & Markets is coming down hard on farm market vendors if they do not have everything they need to sell their products at the farmers markets.

K. Apostolides stated that Greenwood Lake has a farmers market this year. However, it has moved to a new location. She stated that the Warwick farmers market is also being held on Bank Street. However, there has been a threat of a lawsuit because the businesses in one building have complained that the farmers market is reducing its customer visits to the businesses.

K. Apostolides also stated that a new advertising idea was identified. There could be bingo cards with stickers for each farmers market to encourage people to visit more farmers markets. She said that it would cost about \$500 for these bingo cards. She stated that there could be an award or gift basket for people that fill in the entire card. M. Ullrich stated that the card could be sent to K. Apostolides or herself. She said that there should be a raffle for the completed cards. However, she said that the participants should be able to be entered into the raffle if they visit 10 of the 15 farmers markets, as it may be too difficult to visit all of the farmers markets. She said that an alternative could be if the card has 12 to 15 stickers for visits to the same farmers market. M. Ullrich recommended that the Ag Board allocate \$2100 for farmers market advertising and social media advertising. Some Ag Board members expressed concern that this is too much money for advertising. General discussion ensued. M. Ullrich moved to allocate up to \$1,000 for the bingo contest cards, prizes, and social media advertising for the farmers markets, P. Wiley seconded, unanimously approved.

AFPB Coordinator Contract Expiration

Discussion then ensued about the AFPB coordinator contract expiration. K. Apostolides stated that she still has some hours left on her current contract and can work a little beyond April. However, she wanted to see if the Ag Board would like to continue to work with it for the next year. She stated that

the job she took will now be part-time, so she can continue to work with the Ag Board if the board members want her to. A. Sorensen stated that there will be the need for another contract. However, the Ag Board can extend the contract to allow K. Apostolides to continue to serve the Ag Board. General discussion ensued. S. Soons moved to extend K. Apostolides' contract with the Ag Board for one more year, M. Ullrich seconded, unanimously approved.

Old Business

Glynwood Update / Request of Slaughterhouse Project

The discussion about the Glynwood update / request of slaughterhouse project has been postponed to the May meeting due to the rescheduling of the April Ag Board meeting. No action taken at this time.

Agricultural Plan Priority Project Update (Priority Project # 4)

Discussion then turned to the agricultural plan priority project update for Priority Project 4. K. Apostolides stated that there has been a lot of work to develop a buy local initiative. She stated that "O.C. Farms" has been branded. She stated that the farmers market and farmstand information has been updated on the website. The website is also tied into social media sites. There is reference to #ocnyfarms, as well. There will be another area on the website for events.

M. Ullrich stated that the Orange County Tourism's website is not very user friendly. To get to the farms on the website, you have to navigate through several layers of the website. Furthermore, the farms page does not include pictures of a lot of the farms, which is sad. She stated that O.C. Tourism could do a better job of advertising the farms in Orange County on its website.

K. Apostolides stated that there has been an effort to create a buy-local initiative. She said that Facebook gets about 350 visits per week. Instagram has 2720 followers and has gained about 1000 followers since 2022. There have been social media ads and posts for holiday farmers markets, regular farmers markets, farm stands, etc. K. Apostolides has also worked with O.C. Tourism and the County Executive's office to promote other buy-local efforts, as well.

K. Apostolides stated that she has some additional advertising objectives for 2023. For example, she will seek digital ad funding to drive more people to the website and to get more visibility for the farmers markets and Orange County agriculture. She will also seek to have a scavenger hunt event.

The Farm-to-School Program has had some success recently. K. Apostolides stated that Orange County milk is going into all of the big Orange County schools now. Some Orange County schools are also participating in New York Thursdays, including Goshen schools, Middletown schools, and Chester schools. There is also a program that uses 30% of a school's food budget to buy New York products. Furthermore, some schools are buying local food. These schools include Goshen School District, Greenwood Lake School District, Pine Bush School District, Newburgh School District, and Kiryas Joel School District.

K. Apostolides stated that there has also been an effort to reach out to restaurant owners to encourage them to use locally produced food. Hudson Valley AgriBusiness Development Corporation (HVADC) has updated its Hudson Valley Bounty website. Furthermore, Cornell Cooperative Extension (CCE) provides technical assistance to restaurants on a one-on-one basis.

There have also been efforts to work with other institutions to get them to buy locally. These efforts have worked with municipalities and jails.

Furthermore, there has been an effort to expand the buy local initiative to other seasons. For example, Pine Island has started a winter farmers market. General discussion ensued. No action taken at this time.

Other Business

New Ag Board Member

Discussion then ensued about appointing a new Ag Board member. L. DeBuck mentioned that maybe G. Stap would like to become a new Ag Board member. He is a dairy farmer and he attended many meetings toward the end of J. Hoeffner's service to the Ag Board. M. Ullrich stated that she could reach out to G. Stap to see if he is willing to serve as a member of the Ag Board. General discussion ensued. No action taken at this time.

Summertime Farmer Gathering

Discussion turned to the summertime farmer gathering. The farmer gathering will be held on Sunday, July 30, at the Otisville Fair / 4-H Fair. This will probably be at about 1 pm. The fair will also have animal shows and CCE will have a tent with agricultural information. General discussion ensued. No action taken.

COVID Aid for Farm Workers

M. Ullrich stated that there is currently a program for farm workers and employees to repay for COVID expenses. This allows for a reimbursement of up to \$500, but an application needs to be filed soon. General discussion ensued. No action taken at this time.

Meat Survey Thank You Letter

M. Ullrich stated that she updated the draft of the thank you letter for the participants of the meat survey. She added a line to the letter and wanted input from the Ag Board before the letter gets sent out. The Ag Board members agreed that the letter looks good and should be sent out. No further action was taken at this time.

Artifact Hunt

L. DeBuck stated that the Drowned Lands Historical Society is holding an artifact hunt in Pine Island on Thursday, June 29, from 6 pm to 9 pm. This event will be held at Liberty Corners Road and is open to the public, including children. General discussion ensued. No action taken.

Black Dirt Feast

L. DeBuck stated that the Pine Island Chamber of Commerce will be holding the Black Dirt Feast on August 18. The tickets are \$150 each and they sell out quickly. He stated that this dinner is under a long tent with great views of the Black Dirts. This event is a fundraiser for the Chamber of Commerce, supporting three scholarships for \$1500 each for students in the Warwick school system. General discussion ensued. No action taken.

Perennial Weed Event

M. Ullrich stated that CCE will be offering a class that will address perennial weeds on June 20 at 12pm at Wagon Wheel Farm. General discussion ensued. No action taken.

Onion Meeting

M. Ullrich stated that CCE will be holding a meeting about onions on July 6 at lunchtime. This meeting will be held at the Pine Island Legion. General discussion ensued. No action taken.

Meeting adjourned: 9:24 pm.