

Agricultural and Farmland Protection Board Meeting
May 15, 2019
Meeting Minutes

Ag Board members present: L. DeBuck, D. Church, J. McCarey, P. Ruszkiewicz, J. Sanford, M. Simpson, D. Smith, S. Soons, M. Ullrich, J. Wright.

Guests present: B. Fioravanti – OC. Economic Development, J. MacLeod – OC Planning, N. Proyect – OC Citizens Foundation, R. Schreibeis – OC Executive’s Office, K. Sumner – OC Soil & Water.

Call to order – 5:14 pm.

April Minutes

P. Ruszkiewicz moved to accept the April minutes as presented, J. Wright seconded, unanimously approved.

Summary of Accounts

D. Church stated that the Ag Board will need to pay for the advertising for the Ag District review. He also noted that K. Apostolides’ work will need to go to bid now. General discussion ensued. J. Wright moved to accept the ledger as presented, M. Simpson seconded, unanimously approved.

Inquiries & Correspondence

J. MacLeod stated that she received an e-mail for the Ag Board including a flyer and an invitation to the Town of Minisink Heritage Days Celebration on June 1 at the Town Hall. The Town of Minisink was wondering if the Ag Board would like to have a booth at this event, as well. General discussion ensued. No action taken.

J. MacLeod stated that the Ag Board received a letter from the New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets titled “Final Notice on Intent – Notice of Intent to Undertake an Action Within and Agricultural District Finchville Turnpike, CDG Project in the Town of Mt. Hope, Orange County Agricultural District No. 2.” General discussion ensued. No action taken.

J. MacLeod stated that the Ag Board also received a letter from the New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets titled “RE: Final Notice of Intent – Undertake an Action Within an Agricultural District Jogee Road LLC, Jogee CDG Project in the Town of Middletown, Orange County Agricultural District No. 2.” General discussion ensued. No action taken.

J. MacLeod stated that the Ag Board received a bill from the Orange County Post, Inc. for an advertisement for the annual agricultural district review. The total for the bill is \$33.10. J. Wright moved to pay the \$33.10 bill to Orange County Post, Inc., J. Sanford seconded, unanimously approved.

J. MacLeod stated that the Ag Board also received a bill from the News of the Highlands, Inc. for an advertisement for the annual agricultural district review. The total for the bill is \$43.11. J. Wright moved to pay the \$43.11 bill to the News of the Highlands, Inc., J. Sanford seconded, unanimously approved.

New Business

Agricultural Economic Development

Discussion ensued about potential agricultural economic development through the County. B. Fioravanti stated that he is the Director of Orange County Economic Development and he wants to help the agricultural industry in Orange County. He stated that he has worked with municipalities on economic development and with planning and executing plans. He noted that agriculture is a critical legacy industry in the county. He would like to help keep agriculture going and help pass farming onto the next generation. He noted that there are new businesses that are related to agriculture, such as breweries, wineries, hemp growers, etc. B. Fioravanti stated that he wants feedback from the Ag Board about how to help agriculture. Some ways to help Orange County agriculture include advocating for it and coordinating resources. J. McCarey recommended that the Ag Board get a copy of the Ag Plan to B. Fioravanti.

L. DeBuck stated that farmers are very independent, but they are dependent on each other. He stated that it is important to get people to understand how many miles are on food to help the buy local movement. He said that it might cost a little more to buy local agricultural products, but that there is a premium for freshness. He also noted that supporting the buy local movement helps to keep the area green by keeping agriculture in the area and protecting open space. General discussion ensued. No action taken.

Old Business

Ag Plan Implementation – Priority Project 4

Discussion turned to the Ag Plan implementation of Priority Project 4. The goal of Priority Project 4 is to “develop a buy-local initiative to increase market opportunities for Orange County agricultural products.” M. Ullrich stated this goal is being met with “NY Taste,” which sells processed agricultural products and with “NY Grown,” which sells unprocessed produce. These products are market driven and can be sold outside of New York State. She noted that Woodbury (Town) and Dutchess County have the nearest Taste stores.

N. Proyect stated that there has been a lot of effort to encourage people to buy local products and to promote agriculture in Orange County through social media and local events. There has also been an effort to work with farmers at farmers markets to accept SNAP to increase sales of local agricultural products. Farm to School Programs have also been expanded. The Orange County Health Department worked with the city schools in Orange County to get local food into the cafeterias and to educate children and parents about healthy foods. Restaurants have also been encouraged to buy local food. Cornell Cooperative Extension has a webpage designed to match restaurants with food providers. There was also a one day expo at Pier 9 to connect businesses with other businesses and to connect restaurants with food providers and growers.

N. Proyect stated that there has also been an effort to provide year-round assistance to farmers. For example, technical education has been expanded to farmers on a year-round basis. Also, some year-round farmers markets have been established in Orange County, including the Museum Village winter farmers market and the Pine Island winter farmers market.

L. DeBuck noted the dairy crisis and stated that New York City is close enough to us to buy local milk. He stated that the New York City schools should put New York milk in its schools. N. Proyect stated that it is possible to see if there is a way to make this happen. M. Ullrich stated that some schools can spend up to 30% of their funds to buy New York products. She said that a bid requirement can

talk about quality of the product. S. Soons asked if the carbon footprint can be considered in the bid requirements. M. Ullrich stated that this can be worked into the bid requirements. She also stated that it might help the buy local approach for schools if math is used to prove that buying local food will result in long term savings. D. Church stated that Senator Metzger might require locally sourced food for schools to get state financing. General discussion ensued. No action taken at this time.

Other Business

Tire Removal Project

Discussion then ensued about the tire removal project. K. Sumner stated that OC Soil & Water will be taking tires off farms in Orange County once the farms have the alternative coverings for the silage pits in place. The removal of the tires should start next week. He noted that it will cost a total of \$150,000 to remove the remaining tires from the farms. Some farmers already have the tires in piles to be removed from the farms. This project should be mostly done by the start of next year. K. Sumner stated that some Counties might be able to get money from the state to help cover the cost of removing the tires. If so, Orange County could try to get some money back to reimburse the cost of removing the tires. No further action taken.

Judy Rife Recognition Certificate

Discussion then turned to the fact that Judy Rife, a reporter that addresses agricultural issues in the area, was recently recognized for her work at a dinner. K. Sumner agreed that she does a good job. M. Ullrich asked if it is possible to have the Orange County Legislature recognize her for her work, as well. L. DeBuck recommended that the Ag Board give her a certificate of appreciation. M. Ullrich moved to present Judy Rife with a certificate of appreciation and provide a press release for a lifetime of reporting on agricultural issues, J. Wright seconded, unanimously approved.

Dairy Farm Survivability

Discussion then ensued about the difficulty for dairy farms to survive in Orange County. K. Sumner stated that the tire removal project is only a band-aid. It will not solve the viability problems that the dairy farms are facing. He said it would be helpful to see the lands that are used for agricultural activity and dairy farms mapped. He said that identifying information should not be included. However, the Ag Board members agreed that having it mapped could result in the potential for identifying information to be obtained since the mapped parcels could be identified and the property owners can be looked up. However, at this time about 30,000 acres of land is being leased by dairy farmers in Orange County. Approximately 13,000 acres of that land is used for cropland. There are 33 dairy farms left in the county now. Although seven dairy farms went out of business last year, the land has not been sold yet. K. Sumner stated that it is important to come up with ways to help the dairy industry now because if we wait another two to four years then the remaining dairy farms will be gone. D. Church mentioned that one option is to explore what can be done to reduce taxes to help agriculture. K. Sumner said that another option is to get the dairy farmers to grow beef cattle. D. Church questioned what the county would look like if the dairy farms go away. R. Schreibeis stated that a map would help the County Legislators to visualize what the impact would be and help to get them to act. No further action taken at this time.

Solar on Agricultural Land Letter

J. McCarey stated that several municipalities stated that they did not receive a letter regarding not locating solar projects on agricultural land listed in the USDA classes 1-4. The Ag Board will resend this letter.

Agricultural Transfer Tax

The Ag Board members discussed the idea of writing a letter supporting an agricultural transfer tax in Orange County. J. Wright moved to write a letter of support for an agricultural transfer tax in Orange County, J. Sanford seconded, roll call – J. Hoeffner – Absent, L. DeBuck – Aye, D. Church – Abstain, J. McCarey – Nay, P. Ruskiewicz – Aye, J. Sanford – Aye, M. Simpson – Aye, D. Smith – Aye, S. Soons – Aye, M. Ullrich – Abstain, J. Wright – Aye; motion carried.

Ag Board Member Status

J. Sanford stated that he would like to resign from the Ag Board to allow room for a new member, as his term is up at the end of the month. D. Church stated that J. Sanford will need to send in a resignation letter or serve until another person is appointed. The Ag Board members identified Phil Johnson as a potential replacement for J. Sanford. No further action taken at this time.

Meeting adjourned: 7:41 pm.