

**Agricultural and Farmland Protection Board Meeting**  
**May 19, 2021**  
**Meeting Minutes**

Ag Board members present via conference call / TEAMS meeting: L. DeBuck, E. Ruscher, P. Ruskiewicz, D. Smith, S. Soons, A. Sorensen, M. Ullrich, J. Wright.

Guests present via conference call / TEAMS meeting: B. Abraham – OC Legislative Office, K. Apostolides – OC Farm Market Coordinator, M. A. Johnson – HVADC, J. MacLeod – OC Planning.

Call to order – 7:10 pm.

**April Minutes**

S. Soons pointed out a minor edit on the top of page 3 within the Support Letter for Greenway Grant Application for County Open Space Plan Update section. She noted that the sentence that says, “One of those categories focuses and agriculture” should say “One of those categories focuses on agriculture”. General discussion ensued. J. Wright moved to accept the April minutes with the above minor edit, D. Smith seconded, unanimously approved.

**Summary of Accounts**

J. MacLeod stated that there are no changes to the summary of accounts. J. Wright moved to accept the summary of accounts as presented, D. Smith seconded, unanimously approved.

**Inquiries & Correspondence**

J. MacLeod and A. Sorensen stated that they did not receive any inquiries or correspondences this month. No action taken.

**New Business**

**HVADC Revolving Loan**

Discussion ensued about the HVADC revolving loan. M.A. Johnson stated that HVADC has helped farmers over the years by offering technical assistance, such as marketing, legal counsel, financial assistance and and strategic planning for farm businesses. HVADC is currently starting a Revolving Loan Fund (RLF) program using money from a \$2.6 million grant it received through the CARES Act. The lending area includes Albany, Columbia, Dutchess, Greene, Orange, Rensselaer, Sullivan, Ulster, Warren and Washington Counties. The loan money can go to several counties. M. A. Johnson stated that to be eligible borrowers could be for for-profit, start-up, woman owned, persons of color owned or low-income owner businesses. Businesses can also apply for the loan for business expansion and business retention. The RLF loan program targets the following sectors: farms, value-added producers, food distribution, food manufacturers, food aggregators and craft beverage. The loan is at a rate of prime + 1 and is for a duration of 5, 7 or 10 years. There is up to \$500,000 that can be loaned out for this program and HVADC has already allocated \$300,000 for three projects. One of the applicants is a craft brewery that used the loan for equipment. The second applicant is a food business that is relocating to a larger location. The third applicant is a brandy distillery. M.A. Johnson stated that this is the first revolving loan in this part of the Hudson Valley in 15 years. A press release is being prepared regarding this grant. M.A. Johnson stated that she could have it sent to the Ag Boards.

L. DeBuck asked what happens if someone is delinquent on the loan. M.A. Johnson stated that this is a very rare occurrence with the revolving loans that she has worked with. She said that these loans are not set up to be predatory loans. However, the loans are set up to try to be flexible and match what the business can handle. A. Sorensen stated the in his experience agricultural revolving loans have the best outcome.

M.A. Johnson also stated that the Economic Development Administration (EDA) also has other loans to help farmers and small businesses. There is an emergency fund that allows farmers to borrow up to \$25,000 for up to five years. There is also an equipment loan. M.A. Johnson stated that the EDA loans have more strings that the state loans.

## **Old Business**

### **Annual Agricultural District Review**

Discussion turned to the annual agricultural district review. Several Ag Board members had a site visit to the Atlantic Fibre Optic, LLC property (Goshen SBL 18-2-10), as the Ag Board members has agreed that a site visit was needed during the April meeting. The present Ag Board members were L. Debuck, S. Soons, M. Ullrich and J MacLeod (for A. Sorensen). This property had previously been in the Ag District. However, it was removed during the 2020 Eight-Year Ag District Review. Due to extenuating circumstances, the property owner was not able to respond to the notices he received related to the proposal to remove his property from the Ag District in 2020.

The property has a small field, equine related uses and a pet crematorium. The applicant also plans on raising pheasants on this site if he can get it back into the Ag District. M. Ullrich stated that the property owner had indicated that he was concerned about potential complaints from the neighboring property owner if he were to raise pheasants. However, the owner clearly understood the limits of protections that being in the Ag District could afford him. For example, he understood that being in the Ag District would not lower his taxes or protect him from having more animals than the site could handle. M. Ullrich was not clear why the Town is against including this property in the Ag District.

L. DeBuck stated that the back of this property borders the Ag District. A. Sorensen stated that the property is across from the quarry on Quarry Road, in Goshen. General discussion ensued. S. Soons moved to recommend that the County Legislature add / reinstate the Atlantic Fibre Optic, LLC property to Orange County Agricultural District 1, L. DeBuck seconded, unanimously approved.

A. Sorensen stated that one of the County Legislature Committee meetings has already been held. At that time, several legislators stated that they felt that the Cotter property (Cornwall SBL 29-1-13.1) should be added to the Ag District even though the Ag Board had voted to not add it to the Ag District. The legislators stated that they believed that the site would be viable for agriculture. Furthermore, they would want to see agricultural activity at this site, rather than a residential subdivision. Therefore, they are asking the Ag Board to reconsider their recommendation. J. MacLeod stated that this property is bordered by a property that is in the Ag District south of this property. General discussion ensued. J. Wright moved to recommend that the County Legislature add the Cotter property to Orange County Agricultural District 1, E. Ruscher seconded, unanimously approved.

### **Farmers Market Update**

Discussion then ensued about the farmers markets. K. Apostolides stated that the farmers markets are opening soon. The Middletown Farmers Market is expanding, as well. She noted that some of the COVID-19 restrictions are being lifted. Furthermore, there are composters that are being shown at some farmers markets.

K. Apostolides showed the Ag Board a list of marketing activities that it has supported in the past and the costs to do such activities. The marketing activities include advertising in local newspapers, producing canvas bags advertising the farmers markets, producing rack cards, providing a brochure with a fold out map, advertising on social media (Facebook, Instagram and YouTube), and providing farm specific assistance. The Ag Board had discussed potentially allocating up to \$750 for internet advertising at the last meeting but did not vote on this. Based on the prices that K. Apostolides presented, \$750 would not get much advertising.

For the best results, K. Apostolides indicated that the Ag Board should use a combination of approaches for reach out. S. Soons stated that the aim of the advertising is to get the most amount of money to the farmers markets, and therefore, the most money to the farmers. She said that the Ag Board should look at the low hanging fruit to get the best results, given the limited budget. K. Apostolides stated that Facebook and Instagram advertising could be used, combined with printing a small amount of farm market rack cards.

S. Soons stated that advertising on the Ag & Markets website is not helpful since it only lists two farmers markets on their website for the use of public assistance coupons. However, the majority of the farmers markets in Orange County allow for the use of SNAP.

L. DeBuck said that the Ag Board should do free advertising in the local newspapers for the farmers markets. K. Apostolides stated that she can write and email and/or article to get into the local newspapers. She will run the details of the email and/or article past A. Sorensen before contacting the newspapers.

The Ag Board also get a printed list of the farmers markets for the FMNP recipients. A. Sorensen will look into the cost of printing through the County. Maybe it could be run through the Health Department since it will only be distributed to the FMNP recipients. General discussion ensued. J. Wright moved to allocate up to \$1500 for social media advertising and FMNP rack cards, D. Smith seconded, unanimously approved.

## **Other Business**

### **County Culverts**

P. Ruskiewicz stated that he was contacted by Mark Rogowski regarding an issue with some of the culverts under Pulaski Highway. P. Ruskiewicz stated that the culverts need to be lowered to improve drainage in that area. This issue will be discussed with the Orange County Department of Public Works (OCDPW) at a meeting tomorrow. However, he is asking for a support letter from the Ag Board to have the culverts lowered. General discussion ensued. P. Ruskiewicz moved to write a support letter asking the Orange County DPW to look into the drainage issues resulting from the culverts that are too high and to improve the drainage for the farmers on Pulaski Highway, unanimously approved.

### **Ag Board Member**

The Ag Board indicated that it needs to get another board member. The Board still needs a resignation letter from Phil Johnson. J. MacLeod and A. Sorensen will draft a resignation letter and get it to Phil so he can sign it. No further action taken at this time.

Meeting adjourned: 8:51 pm.