

Agricultural and Farmland Protection Board Meeting
May 20, 2020
Meeting Minutes

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

Guests present via conference call / TEAMS meeting: K. Apostolides – OC Farm Market Coordinator, J. MacLeod – OC Planning, K. Morris – OC Planning, R. Schreibeis – OC Executive's Office.

Call to order – 7:00 pm.

April Minutes

M. Simpson moved to accept the April minutes as presented, P. Ruskiewicz seconded, unanimously approved.

Summary of Accounts

A. Sorensen stated that the County Budget Department has cut 15% from the Planning Department's budget due to the money constraints arising from COVID-19. He noted that the County is down in its revenues due to the loss of sales taxes. The Ag Board originally had a budget of \$27,000 for this year. However, J. MacLeod stated that the budget has been cut to \$4235 for this year. She noted that a lot of this may need to be used for mailings related to the Eight-Year Agricultural District Review. The Board asked if it is possible to get the County to reimburse the AG Board for the postage related to the Eight-Year Agricultural District Review since this is a mandated project and not something that the Ag Board is asking to do. A. Sorensen said this might be an option, but he would have to look into it further. A. Sorensen also stated that this budget cut does not impact the current contract with K. Apostolides since her contract is using 2019 funds. J. Wright moved to accept the summary of accounts as presented, D. Smith seconded, unanimously approved.

Inquiries & Correspondence

The Ag Board received a letter from the New York State Department of Ag & Markets regarding the Village of Florida's request for lead agency for the Village of Florida wastewater treatment plant and distribution system project. General discussion ensued. No action taken.

The Ag Board also received a letter from the New York State Department of Ag & Markets for a final NOI for the proposed Solar Seek, Airport Road Solar project. This project consists of a 4.6 MW solar array facility located in the Town of Wawayanda. General discussion ensued. No action taken.

Old Business

Annual Agricultural District Review

Discussion ensued about the Annual Agricultural District Review. J. MacLeod stated that E. Ruscher visited both of the sites and provided information for the Ag Board members to review related to the two applications.

J. MacLeod stated that according to E. Ruscher's information packet for the Derby Road Farm, this site is part of a four lot subdivision located in the Town of Wallkill (SBLs 21-1-35.2, 21-1-35.3 and 21-

1-35.4). These parcels are being used for haying and are located near a residential subdivision. There are parcels in the Agricultural District around this site. E. Ruscher stated that some of these parcels are currently receiving a forestry tax exemption. General discussion ensued. E. Ruscher moved to recommend that the County Legislature add the Derby Road Farm parcels (SBLs 21-1-35.2, 21-1-35.3 and 21-1-35.4) to the Orange County Agricultural District, P. Ruskiewicz seconded, unanimously approved.

According to E. Ruscher's information packet for the Natural Grain LLC property, the two parcels proposed to be included in the Orange County Agricultural District are located in the Town of Montgomery (SBLs 10-1-29.21 and 15-1-97). These parcels are adjacent to two agricultural parcels that are in the Agricultural District and that are also owned by Natural Grain LLC. E. Ruscher stated that the smaller parcel (SBL 10-1-29.21) contains an access driveway to the larger parcel (SBL 15-1-97). Although he could not see the site well because it was gated, he located records indicating that the owner recently built a 4,368 square foot pole barn and a 2,800 square foot Quonset hut. The owner also installed fencing recently. He noted that the neighborhood is predominately residential with a few scattered farm operations. General discussion ensued. D. Smith moved to recommend that the County Legislature add the Natural Grain LLC parcels (SBLs 10-1-29.21 and 15-1-97) to the Orange County Agricultural District, J. Wright seconded, unanimously approved.

Eight Year Agricultural District Review

Discussion turned to the Eight Year Agricultural District Review. A. Sorensen stated that the County Planning Department is reviewing the parcels on a town by town basis. In other words, the County Planning Department is reviewing the towns one at a time. A. Sorensen stated that the County has received a list of parcels that the Town of Crawford recommends to have removed from the Agricultural District. He presented a map for the Town of Crawford showing the location of the parcels that are in the Ag District using white and red outlines. The parcels that are outlined in white are proposed to remain in the Agricultural District. The parcels outlined in red are the ones that the Town recommended removing from the Agricultural District. The parcels outlined in red shows mostly residential development.

A. Sorensen stated that the County Planning Department has also created a map for the Town of Minisink. He stated that this one is a little different that the map for Crawford, as it has different colors. He stated that the parcels that are highlighted in green and yellow are the ones that are mostly being removed because they have been developed. He stated that there are some parcels that are receiving forestry exemptions or are fallow agricultural land that is being kept in the Agricultural Districts. K. Morris asked if E. Ruscher had heard back from the Town of Minisink assessor. E. Ruscher said that he had not heard back from Minisink yet. However, he sent out a reminder to the assessors to send in their responses to our request for their suggested changes to the County Agricultural Districts by the end of this month.

He mentioned that the Ag Board should be aware that some Towns have kept property in the County Agricultural Districts even if it was developed. The Ag District is meant to protect right-to-farm rights for farmers. However, having neighboring residential land in the Agricultural Districts does not help with right-to-farm rights. He noted that some of these municipalities have kept developed land in the Ag Districts for 16 or more years. Thus, some of the maps will show a significant reduction in land in the Agricultural Districts. However, the aim is to have the reduction of land in the Agricultural District focus on developed land that is unlikely to be farmed.

A. Sorensen stated that the bigger picture for the Orange County Agricultural District is to increase the percentage of active agricultural land. He stated that the target is to have 50% of the land in the County Agricultural Districts be in agricultural production. However, the current County Agricultural

Districts have a much lower percentage in agricultural production at this time. Thus, the County is proposing to remove residentially developed land to get the percentage closer to the 50% goal. The Ag Board asked if it is possible to obtain the acreage of the land that is proposed to be removed from the County Agricultural Districts. A. Sorensen said that this is possible using the GIS mapping program, going forward.

J. Hoeffner stated that the County should be very careful about the size of the parcels proposed to be removed from the Agricultural District. He noted that it is very hard to get back into the Agricultural District. He recommended that the County keep the land in the Agricultural District if it is vacant. M. Ullrich stated that the County needs to keep in mind that the little farms are frequently having trouble with their neighbors. K. Morris stated that the deadline for the completion of these maps is June 30. J. Hoeffner asked if the AFPB can coordinate with the County Attorney about the proposed maps and proposed Ag District changes. A. Sorensen stated that he will keep A. Reed (County Attorney) involved with this process. No further action taken at this time.

Ag Plan Implementation Update / Farmers Markets' Update

Discussion then ensued about the Ag Plan implementation update / farmers markets' update. K. Apostolides stated that there is an effort to get the farmers markets opened, with additional safety precautions due to COVID-19. She noted that most of the farmers markets are opening soon, if they have not already. However, she is not sure if the Washingtonville farmers market will be opening. She noted that the Warwick farmers market has already opened and a lot of the vendors were sold out by noon. The Cornwall farmers market opened this week and the Goshen farmers market will be opening next week. Anyone going to the farmers markets have to wear a mask, keep 6 feet away from others, and pre-order their food.

M. Ullrich noted that the farmers markets have fewer people at them than the grocery store. She also stated that due to the new restrictions, only the farmer and the purchaser will be able to come in contact with the food. Thus, there won't be a lot of people from the public touching the food. General discussion ensued. No action taken at this time.

Orange County Dairy Industry

Discussion then turned to the Orange County dairy industry. The Ag Board indicated that the farmers that had to dump their milk in their fields due to COVID-19 will be getting some money for their loss. It is not clear how much they will be able to get at this time, though. Research is also being done to address the animal product processing and storage / refrigerated storage for animal products. There is a potential for farmers to get some money to rent storage space for a few years. General discussion ensued. No action taken at this time.

New Business

Farmers Market Advertising

Discussion then ensued about the farmers market advertising. K. Apostolides stated that she has posted ads and a video to Facebook. The video addresses what the farmers markets will look like due to safety measures taken in response to COVID-19. She also indicated that she has put up some ads about the farmers markets on Instagram. The advertising tells the public where to get agricultural products. General discussion ensued. No further action taken at this time.

Other Business

Bill Johnson's Passing

J. Wright stated that Bill Johnson had passed away recently. He wanted to make sure that all of the Ag Board members are aware of this. J. Hoeffner stated that he already sent a fruit basket to the Johnson family on behalf of the Ag Board. He said he will take any donation, but he does not expect it. The Ag Board members agreed that the Board should write a letter to the family. J. MacLeod will write it and get it sent to the family. No further action taken at this time.

Open Space Plan

L. DeBuck asked if the letter of support for the open space plan was ever sent. K. Morris stated that the funding for the grant that the County was applying for has been suspended. Thus, the County is in a holding pattern on this application. She stated that the application is ready, but the County is not applying since the funding has been suspended. She noted that Orange County's 2004 Open Space Plan is the oldest plan of the County's plans that are referred to in the County Comprehensive Plan. Thus, it needs to be updated.

L. DeBuck expressed concern about how agriculture will be portrayed in the open space plan. He is concerned about a potential disconnect about what exactly open space is. He stated that farmers don't see farmland as open space; they see it as part of a working landscape. However, he agreed that the open space plan needs to make an effort to keep open vistas open, including those that contain agricultural land. A. Sorensen stated that the County will take a hard look at what agricultural land is when it updates its open space plan. K. Morris stated that the AFPB would be included in the agricultural portion of the open space plan update. L. DeBuck recommended having people out to farms to get a better feel for what farming and agricultural land is. General discussion ensued. No action taken at this time.

Meeting adjourned: 8:30 pm.