

**Agricultural and Farmland Protection Board Meeting
July 21, 2021
Meeting Minutes**

Ag Board members present: L. DeBuck, E. Ruscher, P. Ruszkiewicz, D. Smith, S. Soons, A. Sorensen, M. Ullrich.

Ag Board members excused via email: J. Hoeffner, M. Simpson, J. Wright.

Guests present: K. Apostolides – OC Farm Market Coordinator, J. MacLeod – OC Planning, K. Sumner – O.C. Soil & Water.

Call to order – 7:10 pm.

June Minutes

E. Ruscher moved to accept the June minutes as presented, P. Ruszkiewicz seconded, unanimously approved.

Summary of Accounts

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

Inquiries & Correspondence

The Ag Board received a copy of Orange County Legislature's Resolution No. 169 of 2021. This resolution is to add all of the parcels proposed for inclusion into the County Agricultural District into the district. All but one of the properties were added by a unanimous vote. The Atlantic Fibre Optic, LLC parcel was added to the district by a vote of 16 ayes, 2 Noes, and 3 absents. General discussion ensued. No action taken at this time.

New Business

Farm to School Coordinator

Discussion ensued about the farm to school coordinator. K. Apostolides stated that she accepted this job with Cornell to get local foods into local schools. She will be working with three counties, including Orange County. Currently she is in the information gathering stage. This program offers schools 30 percent more money for food if they purchase at least 30 percent of their food from New York State farms. Cornell is currently working to see where the food is coming from. Dairy is a huge part of this movement. K. Apostolides stated that she has an agricultural background while most of the other people she is working with have a nutrition background.

K. Apostolides stated that each school district has its own menu plan. L. DeBuck stated that the schools need to have their menus planned out in advance. Everything goes to bid because there is a large amount of food involved. These bids are done on an annual basis. M. Ullrich stated that Orange-Ulster BOCES bids and a lot of the school districts buy their food through BOCES. K. Apostolides stated that smaller amounts of food do not need to go to bid. She stated that some schools are also not part of the BOCES bid process and have more flexibility.

A. Sorensen asked if schools can have a preference for buying local foods in the bidding process. K. Apostolides stated that schools can have bid requirements that give a geographical preference for the source of the food. This approach can knock some of the bidders off of the bidding list. She stated that Daegle Farms is trying to get more of its vegetables and produce into the local schools.

The schools do allow students to bring their own lunches if they want to. However, CEP schools offer free lunch for all of their students. The CEP schools have a high percentage of low-income students that qualify for free or reduced-rate lunches. General discussion ensued. No action taken at this time.

Open Space Plan

Discussion turned to the Orange County Open Space Plan Update. A. Sorensen stated that the last County Open Space Plan is from 2004 and needs to be updated. The plan update is not mandated, but is it important since it is part of the County Comprehensive Plan. The update will take 24 months. The County is currently interviewing the stakeholders, such as the Open Space Institute (OSI) and the Greater Newburgh Park Conservancy. Information about this plan update will be on the internet, through a GIS Hub, in October and the public outreach will start in March. The GIS Hub (website) will include the vision statement, goals, objectives and thematic maps.

The plan will address some issues that were addressed in the 2004 plan, but will also address topics that were not an issue before, such as large-scale solar installations. The 2004 plan did include a section on agriculture that included a transfer of development rights (TDR) program. However, TDRs have not been effective in Orange County and the County needs to identify other effective programs. L. DeBuck asked if there could be a rating system to rank the parcels to protect. He stated that agricultural land would need to be highly rated for open space. A. Sorensen stated that agricultural land will have a high rating. He also stated that it appears that some PDR programs will be getting funding soon. There is federal money coming for the federal PDR program soon. There might also be state money coming for the state PDR program, too. D. Smith stated that the updated Open Space Plan needs to address issues related to warehouses used for agricultural purposes. He noted that some warehouses were developed for agricultural uses and are used to fill orders for agriculture.

The County encourages each of the Ag Board members to fill out the survey that was sent to them. The Planning Department would also like to set aside most of one Ag Board meeting to present this information and interview the Board, perhaps at the Board's September 15 meeting. The Ag Board members were interested in discussing the Open Space Plan in September. A. Sorensen noted that agriculture is a critical piece in the Open Space Plan and the Planning Department wants to get input from the Ag Board in addition to the survey. General discussion ensued. No further action taken at this time.

Wallkill River / Black Dirt Flood Protection

Discussion then ensued about the Wallkill River / Black Dirt flood protection. K. Sumner stated that the current goal is to get the flood maintenance area to expand further downstream. There have been several projects to control vegetation. However, OC Soil & Water needs permission from the property owners to extend the area to control the vegetation along the Wallkill. There are no negative impacts for $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile or more downstream from the proposed work area.

The currently proposed project involves work within four towns, Minisink, Warwick, Wawayanda and Goshen. Minisink, Warwick and Wawayanda are in support of this project. However, Goshen has not been in support of this project. OC Soil & Water has been trying to get this project done for 10 years, but it keeps falling apart at the OC Law Department. Therefore, there has been discussions

about getting a private lawyer to get the project completed. K. Sumner is not sure how to proceed given the current situation. However, he stated that it would be best if the Town of Goshen could be convinced that this project is good for the County and for the farmers. He noted that the best way to get Goshen on board with this project might be to get the support of the Town of Goshen landowners in the project area. L. DeBuck asked if there is still concern about the impacts on the landfill downstream of the project area. K. Sumner stated that there may be some concern; however, ACOE came for a half day to evaluate the situation and was okay with the proposed project. M. Ullrich stated that the County owns a large parcel in the Town of Goshen in this area and asked if this could help. Since the large parcel is owned by the County and the County is a higher level of government than the Town of Goshen, the County could proceed with the project on its parcel. K. Sumner indicated that there are about 20 parcels in the Town of Goshen in the proposed project and some of these parcels have the same owners. He asked if any of the Ag Board members know these property owners, perhaps they could talk to the owners to get their support of this project. E. Ruscher also mentioned that maybe if there are any stretches that have been completed with positive results, then OC Soil & Water could get positive letters from these property owners.

K. Sumner stated that he also cannot move forward very much on this project until the area that OC Soil & Water is currently working on gets finished. He has received an award letter, but he is waiting on the \$400,000 that had been allocated for this project. A. Sorensen stated that the program that Soil & Water received the money through moves painfully slowly. L. DeBuck asked if there is a way to get this moving along. A. Sorensen said that ideally a letter would move things along. However, sometimes this program moves slowly because they do not always have the money as quickly as they had planned. General discussion ensued. No further action taken at this time.

Old Business

Pulaski Highway Culvert Issues

Discussion then turned to the Pulaski Highway culvert issues. K. Sumner stated that the County is trying to get a study to see how much it will cost to lower the subject culverts along Pulaski Highway. However, he stated that the study will be very expensive and the farmers would push back on the study. K. Sumner stated that there are five culverts that need to be replaced, a six-foot metal culvert, a three-foot culvert, and three twenty-four-inch culverts. The ditches will also need to be dredged.

L. DeBuck stated that the County Department of Public Works (OCDPW) replaced a culvert next to Skinner's Lane a few years ago because it had collapsed and there was no study for this replacement. However, the culvert replacement at Skinner's Lane was replaced in an emergency situation. General discussion ensued. No action taken at this time.

Farmers Market Update

Discussion then ensued about the farmers markets. K. Apostolides stated that all of the farmers markets are open now. The Middletown farmers market has moved and there is a lot of construction in the area of the new location. She noticed that the Latino population is not going to the Middletown farmers market now. M. Ullrich stated that there is a need for a bus to get people from Otisville to the Port Jervis or Middletown farmers markets. K. Apostolides stated that the Goshen farmers market is located at the government center. This market does not have a dedicated farmers market manager this year and its day has been shortened to 9-5. S. Soons said that she heard that the Warwick farmers market is doing well.

K. Apostolides stated that she has been working with Strauss News to get weekly articles in their newspapers about the farmers markets. Farmers Market Week is the first week of August and K.

Apostolides will work to get a press release out about this. The WIC and senior coupons are being distributed. Some senior coupons are going to senior centers to help reach the senior population. General discussion ensued. No action taken at this time.

Potential Ag Board Members

Discussion then turned to the potential Ag Board members. K. Apostolides stated that Chris Vreeland turned down the offer to join the Ag Board. Rick Minkus and Blane Allen were also in the top three candidates for the position. The Ag Board members agreed that Rick Minkus would be a good fit. The Ag Board members agreed to have K. Apostolides reach out to Rick Minkus and Blane Allen to see if they are interested. If they are not, she will reach out to the second group of three candidates, which included Jeff & Jenny Crist and Kasha Bialas. She will get the Ag Board an update at the next meeting. No further action taken at this time.

Public Officials Meeting

Discussion then ensued about the public officials meeting. K. Apostolides stated that she did not think there would be any new politicians attending the meeting. P. Ruskiewicz said the Senator Martucci is a new politician. However, M. Ullrich stated that a representative for Senator Martucci was at the public official meeting last year since he was running for office.

M. Ullrich stated that the public officials meeting should discuss how the food system broke during the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic. There were break downs in food processing and food transportation. This meeting should talk about what Orange County needs to be more resilient with its food system. The Ag Board should invite politicians from Albany and New York City in an effort to get them in the room. S. Soons stated that this meeting should have a macro overview of the problem, as well as micro scale impacts. M. Ullrich asked how to fix this problem. A. Sorensen stated that legislation is needed to address the food system problems.

L. DeBuck stated that the public officials meeting should also address solar. M. Ullrich and S. Soons could work on this to present. General discussion ensued. No further action taken at this time.

Other Business

Cornell Cooperative Extension Staffing

M. Ullrich stated that Cornell Cooperative Extension has two vacant positions at the moment. Therefore, the staff is very busy right now. She just wanted the Ag Board members to be aware of this in case there are any inquiries that are not answered quickly. General discussion ensued. No action taken.

Giant Hogweed

M. Ullrich stated that giant hogweed (or pigweed) has been spotted in the County. She said that this is a very destructive plant that is resistant to pesticides. Giant hogweed grows to be eight to nine feet tall. Cornell Cooperative Extension is trying to figure out where this giant hogweed is located within the County to see if it is localized or if it is in multiple places. General discussion ensued. No action taken.

Meeting adjourned: 9:20 pm.