

**Agricultural and Farmland Protection Board Meeting**  
**August 19, 2020**  
**Meeting Minutes**

Ag Board members present via conference call / TEAMS meeting: J. Hoeffner, L. DeBuck, P. Johnson, E. Ruscher, P. Ruszkiewicz, 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, M. Decker – OCLT, J. MacLeod – OC Planning, K. Morris – OC Planning.

Call to order – 7:15 pm.

**July Minutes**

P. Johnson moved to accept the July minutes as presented, M. Simpson seconded, unanimously approved.

**Summary of Accounts**

General discussion ensued about the summary of accounts. P. Johnson moved to accept the summary of accounts as presented, L. DeBuck seconded, unanimously approved.

**Inquiries & Correspondence**

J. MacLeod stated that the Ag Board received a letter from the New York State Department of Ag & Markets regarding a waiver of NOI for the “acquisition of an interest in 145.5 acres of land” for the Town of Warwick’s PDR program. This letter indicated that the NOI involves the Newport Bloom, LLC farm. General discussion ensued. E. Ruscher or A. Sorensen will look into this further and report back to the Ag Board next month. No further action taken at this time.

J. MacLeod also stated that the Ag Board received a letter from the New York State Department of Ag & Markets regarding the NOI for a proposed solar installation named “Forefront Power, FP NY Goshen Project1, LLC”. This project will be a 5.18 MW solar array in the Town of Goshen.

J. Hoeffner and L. DeBuck asked why it takes so long for the Ag Board to be informed about these projects. They were told that the current process does not require that the Ag Board be notified earlier. P. Johnson stated that he is concerned because the large-scale solar installations and warehouses are being put on the best agricultural soils. However, the Ag Board is being notified late in the review process. J. Hoeffner stated that the Ag Board should be notified upfront. E. Ruscher stated that he could reach out to the towns to get the information earlier in the review process, in general. He will also reach out to the Town of Goshen to find out what stage of review the town is at with this specific solar installation. K. Morris stated that the County Planning Department writes a comment in its GML239 reviews about the siting of large-scale solar installations. The Ag Board could be informed when the County Planning Department gets these projects. A. Sorensen said that the County Planning Department could also look at the zoning to help direct the large-scale solar installation away from agricultural soils. General discussion ensued. No further action taken at this time.

## Old Business

### Eight Year Agricultural District Review

Discussion ensued about the Eight Year Agricultural District Review. A. Sorensen stated that the Ag Board had been provided a draft report at the last board meeting. He noted that the updated draft report that had been sent to the Ag Board has a refined number of parcels that are proposed for addition to and removal from the Ag District. He noted that there were minor technical updates. There are now 7,981 parcels proposed for removal from the Ag District. He noted that there is a graph on page 11 that shows the removal parcels.

K. Morris stated that the letters to property owners were sent out. She noted that there were about 12,500 letters indicating removals, additions and district consolidations. The Planning Department got the digital versions of the letters to the mail house on Friday. There are three types of letters and three property owner lists identifying parcels being added, parcels being removed and parcels being consolidated into County Agricultural District 1. The letters went out yesterday. The public hearing is on September 3 and the letters included website information. The letters also said to contact the Planning Department regarding any concerns or questions.

Alan asked the Ag Board to reaffirm the draft report. P. Ruskiewicz moved to accept the draft Eight-Year Ag District Review Report, P. Johnson seconded, unanimously approved.

### Ag Plan Implementation Update

Discussion turned to the Ag Plan implementation update. M. Decker stated that he is updating the Ag Board about the farm protection efforts. He said that the OC Land Trust's perspective is to protect core agricultural production areas. These areas are near other protected farms, are outside of the County priority growth areas (PGAs) and have great soils.

M. Decker stated that the County Agricultural & Farmland Protection Plan reflected where the County was in 2014. A key goal was to protect farmland in the core areas. One of the action steps to do this was to examine alternative funding sources. He stated that OCLT was able to address this by getting a grant for a mapping project that identifies where active farms are located.

M. Decker indicated that many farms have been preserved recently. He stated that since the 2019 update, three farms have been preserved. These farms are the Oprandy Farm, Sycamore, and the Topp Farm, which were preserved by the Town of Warwick, the Town of Wallkill and OCLT, respectively. Since 2014 there have been eight farms preserved in Warwick, one in the Hudson Highlands and one in Wallkill. He noted that there a total of almost 8,000 acres of protected farmland through the entire County.

There are also three farms that are proposed to be closed on in the next year. The Town of Warwick will be closing on the Newport Bloom farm. OCLT will be closing on Wagonwheel Farm and Willow Hill Farm.

However, M. Decker stated that there is limited funding to preserve farms in Orange County. He stated that it is hard to get money on the state and federal level. He also stated that the state PDR round from May is on hold. General discussion ensued. No action taken.

### Farmers Market Update

Discussion then ensued about the farmers market update. K. Apostolides stated that the farmers markets are doing well. She noted that people are cooperating with the COVID-19 safety protocols,

for the most part. she stated that the fresh connect coupons are not being handed out at the farmers markets this year.

L. DeBuck asked if someone comes into an indoor market, can the farmer require that they wear a mask. K. Apostolides stated that the American Disability Act provides a medical exemption that allows disabled people to not wear a mask. However, the farmer can offer an alternative.

L. DeBuck also asked if customers can bag their own produce and how pumpkins are being handled. J. Hoeffner stated that the farmers are bagging everything and that most people are cooperative. M. Ullrich stated that stores allow people to touch the produce. Farm markets are bagging the produce for the customers. She said that there is also less of a concern about pumpkins and similar products that are not going to be eaten or that are going to be cooked. K. Apostolides stated that pumpkin patches will be allowed to operate at a 33% capacity. M. Ullrich asked how this can be calculated if you did not have a capacity before COVID-19 started. She noted that if the people in the fields are spread out, people should be okay. However, hayrides will not be okay this year because people are packed close to each other on the hayrides. M. Ullrich stated that corn mazes could be an issue, too, because people would come in close contact with each other. J. Hoeffner stated that the u-pick operations are not having any issues with COVID-19 at this time.

J. Wright stated that his farm has altered its fall plans in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. There will be no hayrides this year. There will be three pumpkin patches, rather than two. Also, he will have two corn mazes with 6' wide isles, rather than one corn maze with 4' wide isles. General discussion ensued. No action taken.

### Public Officials Meeting

Discussion then turned to the proposed public officials meeting. K. Apostolides indicated that the hearing could be held on September 15 or September 17 from 9-11 or 10-12. These times and dates work for the key politicians that will be invited. She wanted the Ag Board members to indicate works best for them. P. Johnson stated that the 15<sup>th</sup> would be better for him. Several Ag Board members agreed. Thus, the meeting will be set for September 15<sup>th</sup>. The meeting will be held at the Cornell Cooperative Extension (CCE) park in Otisville. P. Ruszkiewicz stated that the County is still doing many meetings virtually. However, he noted that people can be spread out well at the CCE Park, so meeting in person should be okay. Hand sanitizer will be provided at the site of the meeting. K. Apostolides stated that she has a draft white paper that discusses agricultural issues and suggested solutions. The Ag Board members agrees that this meeting should include a discussion about the Real Estate Transfer Tax. General discussion ensued. No further action taken at this time.

### Other Business

#### Orange County Real Estate

S. Soons stated that the Orange County real estate market had seen a huge increase in activity in response to the current COVID-19 pandemic. She stated that a lot of people are moving up from New York City. She believes that this increased real estate activity has just started and will get worse. The Ag Board members agreed that this will impact agriculture in Orange County due to the anticipated development pressure. General discussion ensued. No action taken at this time.

Meeting adjourned: 8:53 pm.