

PLANNING ADVISORY BOARD
Wednesday, January 27, 2010
COOPERATIVE EXTENSION
615 WILLOW AVENUE

MINUTES

Members Present – Mina Amundsen, Martha Armstrong, Dick Coogan, Rick Couture, Fernando de Aragon, Dooley Kiefer (Associate), Gay Nicholson, Peter Penniman, Monika Roth, Andy Zepp

Members Excused -- John Gutenberger, Fred Wilcox

Members Absent -- Dave Herrick, Pam Mackesey, John Spence, Scott Whitham

Others Present – Scott Doyle (Planning Dept.), Joan Jurkowich (TCPD), Ed Marx (Commissioner of Planning & PW), Leslie Schill (TCPD), Kathy Wilsea (TCPD)

Call to Order – The meeting was called to order at 9:05 AM by the Chair, Fernando de Aragon.

Changes to the Agenda – Due to lack of a quorum at this time, items will be taken out of order.

Agricultural Resource Focus Areas – Scott Doyle began the presentation by explaining the draft plan will be ready for public comment in a couple weeks. AFRA is the second part of the Conservation Plan; the first part was on the fourteen Natural Features Focus Areas. In 2009, staff conducted outreach meetings with farmers in the six ARFAs. They heard in the meetings that these are the main ag areas, but there are also important areas outside the ARFAs. Leslie Schill provided information on the Northeast ARFA, which is the largest, has the greatest acreage in farm operations, and has the greatest number of dairy farms. NE has also experienced the largest total loss of acreage from 1969 to 2007 (4,607 acres). Critical issues are farmland protection, development pressure, and the large areas that are owner operated and have adjacent rented ag land. Proposed Action will include protection for a large farm in the center of the Town of Groton, identification of small parcels for diversity, and identification of intense development pressure.

North Lansing/West Groton – This is the second largest area, with prime soil in 43% of the acreage. It has large operations, both owned and rented, with a 20 acre jump in active ag acreage since 1995. It also has experienced the largest development increase, showing there was much vacant acreage in the past. Scott reviewed the critical issues of water resources, development pressure, vehicular conflicts, and organic dairies. Proposed actions include enhancing stream buffers on farms, supporting development in South Lansing outside the ARFA while increasing development regulation within the ARFA, evaluating traffic conflicts, and mapping of active and inactive ag land to identify potential cropland for dairies. The idea of a farmers' energy cooperative has been discussed for this ARFA. Several subdivisions exist and are planned in this area, breaking up access and increasing conflict of vehicular traffic. Monika Roth said farmers from Cayuga County are renting land here, which competes with the possibility of Tompkins County farmers purchasing additional land. Rick Couture asked if discussion at the meetings included business operations, such as sale of their products. Scott said that was part of the discussions. Andy Zepp asked if the value of the land as residential property is likely to draw sellers in these areas, and Scott and Leslie concurred that this is much of the development pressure. Mina Amundson commented that, unfortunately, farmland is perceived as “undeveloped” land. Ed Marx said in order for the Purchase of Development Rights programs to have value, we need to watch zoning. Zoning can block development pressure and disqualify farms from PDR. Andy said there are lots of quirks in valuation throughout the region, and many methods for balancing planning/zoning with pressure of development.

Northwest – Leslie pointed out this ARFA is the only one in three municipalities. It has the highest number of farm operations, some of which are new. Inactive ag land is being pulled back into production, which can provide quick organic certifications and feed for dairies. This ARFA also has a high percentage of owner operations, and potential for wind energy, especially near Connecticut Hill. Critical issues are natural systems management (streams, wood lots, deer & turkeys), inconsistent land use regulations among the three municipalities, and vehicular conflicts. Proposed actions include PDR outreach in Enfield and Ulysses, ag assessment and lease

agreement outreach to existing and new farmers, enhancement of vegetative buffers on farms, and evaluation of traffic conflicts on secondary roads.

Newfield – Scott said there are now more horses than cows in the Newfield ARFAs. These ARFAs are the smallest, but the two are distinctly different. Benjamin Hill has only 1% prime soil, the smallest average farm size among the AFRAS, and lots of rental activity. Pony Hollow has the largest average farm size among the ARFAs, being comprised of only two owner-operated farms. Critical issues include farmland protection (which will include municipal discussion), coordination of leases so farmers are not in peril of being put out of business quickly if the property owners sell, and land use regulations. Proposed actions include promotion of use of conservation easements of PDR on the Pony Hollow farms, assisting in stabilizing land leases, encouraging the Town to identify protection areas in the comprehensive planning process, and identifying marginal lands for potential for biomass production.

Sixmile Creek Valley – This ARFA runs along Route 79 in the towns of Dryden and Caroline. It has had the highest rate of loss, having lost 25% of its ag land from 1969 – 2007, the greatest parity between rental and owned acreage, and the highest rate of leased land of the ARFAs. Critical issues include transition of farm operations, farmland protection, and land use regulation. Proposed actions include assisting in stabilizing land lease agreements, exploration of protection for largest active owner-operated farm in the ARFA, further codifying ag standards for subdivision regulations in the Town of Caroline, and exploring access to Route 79 as it pertains to development of destination farms or farm tour stops.

In summarizing, Scott and Leslie provided these “snapshots”: The number of dairy farms is receding, but still is the largest share of farmland. Farmers are more likely to be part-time. A significant portion of farmland that was being worked forty years ago is no longer in ag use, but Leslie noted much of it was marginal land. An increasing amount of farmland is leased, in which case the farmer does not take on the tax burden. Non-traditional activities and practices include organic and hobby/niche, and sustainable techniques are redefining farming.

Countywide actions will include development of a PDR priority list; encouragement of appropriate municipal regulation tools through comprehensive planning, zoning, and density regulations; coordination of cross-county agriculture planning; support of more coordinated farmland leasing; enhancement of vegetative buffers; identification of corridors with equipment usage; development of alternative models to family succession; drafting hunting leases models; and providing information on foreclosure. Tools for protection will include municipal regulations, ag assessment, ag districts, ag zoning, right-to-farm laws, infrastructure planning, subdivision regulations; using specific ag protection tools like TDR, PDR and land banking; and establishing criteria for ag protection. Opportunities were identified for organics, renewable energy, and value added products. PAB members will be notified when the final draft plan is up on the Planning Department website, and comments will be welcome.

Andy asked if transfer of development rights is feasible. Scott said there has been some conversation in the region, and some models exist in the state. Leslie said the Route 96 Corridor Study identified an area in the Town of Ithaca that needs a buffer between developed areas and agriculture. Peter Penniman asked what can be done from an economic aspect, and suggested discussion at another time on economic viability of agriculture, as it is part of the Tompkins County Economic Development Plan. Scott said this is part of the bigger Ag Plan. Monika Roth said Cooperative Extension is seeking NYS funding for the Ag Plan update. Mina Amundsen said there was mention of vineyards and Cornell University as pressures. Leslie said that was because, over the long term, some properties have been donated to CU. Andy Zepp said sale of chunks of ag land are attractive to sellers, and he can envision further fragmentation, such as Ellis Hollow spilling into farms in the Town of Caroline. Gay Nicholson asked about the status of analysis of biomass, and Ed Marx said all marginal land could be used for biomass. Dooley Kiefer asked about the long-term possibility of prime land being returned from development to agriculture use, and Leslie said that is very unlikely.

Election of Officers – Martha Armstrong reported that Fernando de Aragon and Peter Penniman are willing to continue a second year as chair and vice chair, respectively. Martha moved to appoint them, which was seconded by Andy and passed by unanimous voice vote.

2010 Planning Department Work Program – Joan Jurkovich reviewed the goals and objectives that are high priority items. They include the five-year update of the Comp Plan, implementation of the Housing Fund, completion of development of the EGGE 10-year goals, completion of the ARFA and Development Focus Areas plans, analysis and possible combination of the Flood Hazard Mitigation grant program and the stream corridor program, and continuation of administration items. She pointed out the last two items on page 10 will not proceed in 2010. Andy Zepp felt the Development Focus Areas plan is very important, as it affects everything else. Ed Marx said we are close to the end of the water/sewer study and that will transition into the Development Focus Areas. There was discussion on phases of presenting that to the public and how to get the public and municipalities to understand the material. Ed said PAB will help greatly on this issue. Gay said the leadership of TCPD on energy issues has been necessary in our community.

Commissioner's Report – Ed Marx announced all departments will go through a review process with County Administration this year. TCPD's work program won't be easy to match to this process due to the range of programs and projects. ■ In Housing Fund work, six project proposals were received and will be reviewed by the review committee. Projects came in for both the trust and affordability funds. ■ Comments were submitted by TCPD to DEC on the gas drilling draft supplemental GEIS. This, and responding to stimulus funding opportunities, took up a lot of staff time. Ed will serve on a panel on gas drilling sponsored by NYS Association of Counties. The American Planning Association is putting together a position paper on gas drilling. ■ Last night, Ed watched a program on network television news about confined animal feeding operations, which he found of interest. Andy Zepp said info is also on the front page of today's newspaper. Andy is familiar with Rebecca Schneider's work on tracking migration of eColi from farms to the lake.

Approval of Minutes from December 2, 2009 – Minutes moved by Dick Coogan, seconded by Gay Nicholson, and accepted by unanimous voice vote. Dooley Kiefer would like separation of the topics in the Commissioner's Report.

Announcements – Gay Nicholson said the beta version of the Finger Lakes Climate Fund should be ready Friday. Also, the Marcellus Challenge, which collects pledges to reduce fuel use, plans a 3/3 workshop. They are trying to draw on the energy of the Marcellus Shale meetings and move discussion to what can be done in terms of home improvements. Andy Zepp pointed out the Governor's budget has a 34% cut in environmental programs, which is not proportional in comparison with other programs. Fernando said the Ride Share on-line program may be in place in May. This can be used for a single trip or long-term ridesharing. Dooley urged members to support a Complete County Census!

Adjournment – The meeting was adjourned at 10:40 AM.

Respectfully submitted,
Kathy Wilsea, Secretary, Tompkins County Planning Department
Minutes adopted by PAB on March 24, 2010.

Membership:

Mina Amundsen, At-Large
Martha Armstrong, Economic Dev.
Dick Coogan, Local Planning (non-urban)
Rick Couture, Education
Fernando de Aragon, Transportation
John Gutenberger, Education
Dave Herrick, Facilities/Infrastructure
Dooley Kiefer, Associate Member

Pam Mackesey, Planning Committee
Gay Nicholson, At-Large
Peter Penniman, Business
Monika Roth, Agriculture
John Spence, Housing
Scott Whitham, Cultural & Historic Pres.
Fred Wilcox, Local Planning (urban)
Andy Zepp, Land Pres./Public Land Mgmt.