

COLUMBIA COUNTY
AGRICULTURE AND FARMLAND PROTECTION BOARD MEETING
October 5, 2006

The meeting of the AFPB was called to order at 9:35 am by Chairman Marian Dunbar at First Pioneer Farm Credit. Those also present were: Roland Vosburgh, Joel Allen, Weir Stewart, Suzette Booy, Betty Young, J. Lawrence Benson and Mallory Mort. Regrets from J. Waterhouse.

Chairman Dunbar welcomed our newest member, Larry Benson.

The minutes of the June 1st meeting were accepted as presented.

Joel reported on the upcoming semi-annual Agricultural Roundtable to be hosted by Cornell Cooperative Extension of Columbia County on Friday, October 20th, at the Extension Center meeting hall from 9:30 to 12 noon. He explained that those boards, committees, agencies, and organizations that work with the county's agricultural industry are invited to share highlights of their past six months and what's coming up. This is a good networking opportunity and helps avoid duplication among and between groups. He said that usually 16 to 20 people attend representing 12 to 16 different groups.

Chairman Dunbar asked Joel to update the Board on the efforts of putting the AFPB and its DRAFT Plan on the county web site "for all to see." Thanks to the efforts of Suzette Booy and Sherry Royce in the County Data Processing Dept., plans are underway to include our work under Departments at the county's web site. There we will include our membership roster, the mission and objectives of the AFPB, which Roland has prepared, our minutes once approved and a copy of the proposed DRAFT Plan. It was agreed to include only approved minutes at this site once it is up and running. Joel indicated that it is a work-in-progress and not yet for public view. Suzette circulated a copy of the web site cover page.

Suzette presented to the AFPB, a proposed Resolution from the NYS Assessors Association and the NYS Association of County Directors of Real Property Tax Services. This is to support state funding for a study on Alternative Methods of Real Property Valuation of Agricultural and Rural Vacant Parcels. This to be conducted by Nelson Bills and Joe Francis at Cornell University. Suzette reported that some assessors and Real Property Directors across New York State feel the current agricultural value assessment process is "broken" and needs to be fixed or replaced. But she emphasized that this Resolution does not suggest a specific replacement for the AVA. Roland stated that he did not agree with including the last "Be Further Resolved" that stated the new methodology recommended by the parties included in the Grant "shall" be adopted. He moved not approving this Resolution with that statement included. Motion was seconded and carried unanimously. Joel added that Steve Hadcock of Cornell Cooperative Extension suggested we clarify that the 3.5 billion dollars used in the first Whereas, be identified with "production" agriculture since the figure would be much larger if they were including the food and agriculture system. "Production" agriculture is referred to in the second Whereas. It was agreed this would be recommended to those proposing this Resolution. It was further agreed that the value of land is surpassing the farmer's ability to afford it based on current agricultural production (crops and methods). There is a concern that we use a fair and equitable valuation system for agr. land. Larry asked if land being sold from a farmer to a farmer will be compared with or included with land being sold to non-farmers, suggesting the values (sales) would be greatly different. Suzette reported that she thought the grant being pursued with this Resolution was for around \$60,000. The results of the study would be a "state wide farm and agr. land arm's length (valid sale) data base." Joel volunteered to follow up with Nelson Bills at Cornell regarding the land sales comparisons to be used. We also asked if the present system was actually broken or not being applied/utilized correctly or equitably???

It was moved by Joel to write a letter to the proposers of this Resolution stating our objection to the last Be Further Resolved asking that it be omitted; suggesting they include "Production" agriculture in the first Whereas; and to ask about the land sales that would be studied: farmer to farmer, farmer to non-farmer or both/all. The motion was seconded and approved unanimously.

Roland gave an update on the Agricultural Districts Review currently underway with his office, Cornell Cooperative Extension, and Real Property Tax Services cooperating. Public hearings have been set for Agr. Districts 1 and 2: Nov. 14th at 7pm at Copake Town Hall for #1 and Nov. 16, 7pm at Stuyvesant Town Hall for #2. Roland and Joel will conduct the public hearings. Roland indicated that in the past, many questions come in by phone before the hearing resulting in

few actually attending the public hearings. Roland also stated that notices need only be mailed to those whose properties are being added or omitted. We hope to send out worksheets to landowners in Districts 3 and 4 soon and we have just been notified of the 8 year anniversary review for Districts 5 and 6. Yes, we are backlogged, but added that the Districts remain in effect "as is" through the review process.

Roland also reported that he has not had the time to identify changes that we could recommend to the Legislature that would make this Review process easier, faster, more accurate, more efficient, etc. We do know a county GIS system would certainly help us. Suzette did state that with some efforts and help from Roland, she could get all parcels in a district labeled/coded and then the assessors would only have to keep them updated. This would help the review process considerably.

Roland reported that we have had some interest over the past couple of years in the Section 303B amendment to Article 25 AA allowing for a 30 day sign up period once a year - October in Columbia County. We have had one applicant each of the two years it has been available. We have two applicants this year. A report will be presented to the AFPB at their November meeting for action and then to the Board of Supervisors. Joel and Roland will conduct the public hearing for these at 401 State Street on Dec. 12th. The recommendation will eventually go to NYS Dept. of Agr. and Mkts.

Roland reported that he has not had a reply from Bob Somers at NYSDA&M regarding his questions about the role of the AFPB in Towns adopting their own Farmland Protection Plans. He did learn that his questions were referred to Dept. Legal Counsel, but since no one seems to be working on Town Farmland Plans regulations, there is no hurry to clarify the law.

Roland made us aware of the recent amendment to Article 25AA that defines Agri-Tourism. He also told us about the conference at CGCC on Nov. 4th from 8:30am to 3pm: "Planning a Future for Farms in the Hudson Valley." While the planning committee membership and sponsorship appears to be extensive, both CCE of Columbia County and the Planning Dept. were not consulted as to interest or for planning, yet it will be in our backyard. Roland did state that he learned CCE of Columbia County was included by way of a staff person from CCE Greene Co. representing both Associations and that Todd Erling of Columbia Hudson Partnership admitted to being responsible for getting this conference here in Columbia County.

Chairman Dunbar reported she contacted NYS DA&M and requested a copy of their bi-annual report to the Governor on Agr. Districts in NYS, but learned the last one they did was in 1996. She hopes to receive a copy of that one. She further discussed the aspect of the AFPB law that makes reference to "active farmers" on the Board suggesting that those involved in agriculture in some way should be considered good members. And speaking of membership, Joel informed Weir that he would attempt to get a letter from the Columbia County SWCD requesting that they designate Weir as their designee/representative of their Board chairman, again as stated by the law.

Chairman Dunbar then conducted a round table of those present. Mallory passed. Betty reported that Gerry Simons was not doing well. Also Rich Skoda is rebuilding a dairy herd and hopes to have 500 cows. Larry had some questions about when and how often the Board meets. He also stated that he and his family are currently in conversation with CLC regarding a PDR effort on his land in New Lebanon. Weir reported that State Parks and Rec. bought his last 300 acres. All buildings, concrete pads, and lagoons have been demolished. Joel reported that John Myers, former AFPB member and chair, is recovering nicely at home after a major car crash in July.

Roland stated that Patrice, of his office, will be gathering info on the town comprehensive plans as requested by Marian. Also, Joel apologized for forgetting to bring with him the map of protected lands in Columbia County prepared by CLC. He will get this to Marian.

We agreed to meet next at 9:30 am on Nov. 2nd at First Pioneer Farm Credit, if available. We adjourned at 11:50am.

Respectfully submitted,
Joel W. Allen, secretary