

COLUMBIA COUNTY
AGRICULTURE AND FARMLAND PROTECTION BOARD MEETING
July 26, 2007

The meeting of the AFPB was called to order at 7:05 pm by Chairman Marian Dunbar at First Pioneer Farm Credit. Those also present were: Roland Vosburgh, Joel Allen, J. Lawrence Benson, Mallory Mort, Suzette Booy, Betty Young, and Jim Waterhouse. Calling with regrets were Chuck Colaruotolo Jr., Weir Stewart, Tom Jacque, and Steve Hadcock. Also attending was Marissa Codey, Sr. Project Engineer for the Columbia Land Conservancy (CLC).

Chairman Dunbar invited Marissa to present their PDR proposal for the J. Lawrence and Barbara C. Benson Shaker View Farm in the Town of New Lebanon. This is a 202 acre proposal, out of the 237 acre Benson dairy farm. The farm was initially purchased in 1965, is currently operated by the Benson daughter and son-in-law. Was previously selected as a Dairy of Distinction. The Board reviewed the PDR/conservation easement application prepared by CLC. The current owners, are not sure how much longer the farm will remain an active dairy operation, but want to insure it remains open and available for agriculture when and if it is not. "If the PDR insures my ability to farm, then I can rent or sell it for the same," said Larry.

We learned that the Town of New Lebanon will act on this proposal at their August 13th meeting, after which, we will receive a copy of their approval letter, if they so approve it.

After some lengthy discussion including the review of all the attached documents and maps, Jim moved the application be approved as presented. AFPB Board member, J. Lawrence Benson, one of the principles in the PDR application, excused himself from the voting. Chairman Dunbar called for a vote of those present and the motion was approved unanimously without Benson voting.

Joel:

-distributed copies of the latest (July 2007) version (as amended through January 1, 2007) of Circular 1150 , Article 25AA - Agricultural Districts, from the NYS Dept. of Agr. and Mkts. (NYS DAM).

- circulated a card of thanks he received from the family of Dee Dee Stewart for the sympathy card he sent on our behalf

Due to technical difficulties, Roland and Jim were unable to show a DRAFT of the power point presentation Steve Hadcock and Roland put together to show at the public hearing on the DRAFT Agricultural Plan scheduled for November 8th. Roland did, however, go through page by page, the paper copy he had. There were several comments made about possible changes which Roland made note of including a suggestion that the background scene on each "slide" should reflect the diversity of our county's agriculture and not all be dairy. Roland agreed to share these suggestions with Steve. Jim commented that at a recent meeting he learned that many of the Farmland Plans across the state are being considered for updates, and ours to be on a web site, will allow for this quite easily.

Jim reported on the CLC Strategic Planning work session he attended a short time ago. He said the purpose was “to make CLC more presentable to the county’s agricultural community.” While CLC’s new executive director welcomed everyone there, he did leave turning the program over to the consultant facilitator engaged by CLC. He said NO CLC personnel were present. He found it to be very productive. And speaking of CLC, Roland distributed copies of an email he recently sent to Peter Paden, new Executive Director of the CLC, regarding the Report 4 conclusion that he circulated to us later.

Suzette:

- reported the approval of an amendment (Bill Summary S03253) that capped the agricultural value assessment (AVA) figures at 10% - increase or decrease. This was signed by the Governor June 4th effective July 9, 2007. A 34% increase in the AVA ceiling values was realized and incorporated into the 2007 tax figures, but someone felt this size increase should not happen and an amendment was made to cap the annual change (up or down) at 10%. The savings by farmers for 2007, therefore, will be greater than initially thought. Suzette says all the real property figures are being corrected and will be presented to the full Board of Supervisors for approval.
- reported that an amendment (Bill Summary S04454) to Section 483 of the Real Property Tax Law will include buildings for honey and bees wax production within the real property tax exemption for buildings essential to the operation of agr and hort lands.
- reported on an amendment (Bill Summary S01046) that waives the deadline for filing an AVA application due to the occurrence of a natural disaster or the destruction of farm structures.

Jim mentioned that he was involved in a conversation at a recent Agr. and Markets meeting that the Dept. was seeking suggestions as to how they could financially help the fruit industry in the state via loans for expansion and/or development. Joel indicated there were numerous possibilities for such here in the Hudson Valley and would share this with his Extension co-workers in Hudson. Jim suggested we follow up directly with Jerry Cosgrove at NYSDAM.

Roland:

- reported on and distributed copies of a May 16, 2007 reply he received from John Brennan, a relatively new Farmland Protection Specialist at NYSDAM, to his January 2006 letter. It was in regards to the role of the county AFPB in the municipal planning grant program. In essence, any Town Farmland Protection PLAN needs to come to the AFPB for their approval before going to the NYSDAM commissioner.
- called our attention to an amendment to the Laws of New York 2007, Chapter 13, regarding changes in Agr. District reviews that repeal certain provisions that require in essence, the in-depth review and data gathering of agr lands in districts during the anniversary review process. This was effective for those districts not yet involved in a review and for Columbia, that would include districts 7, 8, 9, and 10. Three, 4, 5 and 6 are currently underway.
- reported on the Wind Farm Tour he recently attended sponsored by Assemblyman Peter Lopez; an all day bus trip involving 120 residents from the Lopez district. Very interesting and informative! He found all the sites (two in Madison County and one in Lewis County) they visited to be un-offensive. In fact, at one stop a local farmer said these turbines were “harvesting the wind” thus a “wind farm.” Joel added that Cornell Cooperative Extension has a 35 page booklet: “Wind Energy Development in NYS: Issues for Landowners” that can be useful to those interested in, contemplating, and/or concerned about the installation of a wind farm. Chairman

Dunbar made reference to a copy of a letter she received from NYSDAM regarding a wind turbine being proposed by a farmer in the Town of Gallatin. NYSDAM found that such a device was acceptable for agricultural situations, although, it has been reported the Town is not supportive of it.

- distributed copies of the conclusion in a December 2006 report he found to be of interest and applicable to the AFPB: "A National View of Agricultural Easement Programs: Measuring Success in Protecting Farmland - Report 4", from a joint project of the AFT and Agricultural Issues Center at the University of California. He said it found that agricultural easements "current successes and future were uncertain."

-distributed copies of an article from the FOREIGN AFFAIRS newsletter titled: "How Biofuels Could Starve the Poor" suggesting that our move to the use of biofuels will have major repercussions on the poor in the world.

Chairman Dunbar reminded the Board that this is Joel's last official AFPB meeting as a representative of Cornell Cooperative Extension. He will be retiring from CCE after nearly 38 years

with the organization, 27 of which have been in Columbia County. Joel announced that Steve Hadcock would be taking his place on the Board. Cake, beverages, a card of retirement, and best wishes and congratulations were shared with Joel.

Chairman Dunbar stated that she would like to implement an informal newsletter/communication piece for the AFPB members highlighting some of the information (stuff) that comes across her desk as the AFPB Chair. She will work with Steve and Roland to see that this happens. She also distributed sets of material that had been previously received that she thought we should look at again. Included was a copy of the NYSDAM Commissioner's Planning Grants approval process/score sheet; Sound Agricultural Practices Guidelines and their Review Procedure - Section 308; and a list of the Functions of the County AFPB She also distributed copies of a press release from AFT on "New York Bills to Create Working Farmland Tax Credit, Cut Property Taxes, and Stabilize Farmland Loss."

The Board agreed to meet next on September 6th at 9:30 AM at First Pioneer Farm Credit, as we continue to prepare for the November 8th public hearing on our proposed AFPB Plan.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:30pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Joel W. Allen, secretary.