

**COLUMBIA COUNTY
AGRICULTURE AND FARMLAND PROTECTION BOARD MEETING
November 2, 2006**

The meeting of the AFPB was called to order at 9:30 am by Chairman Marian Dunbar at First Pioneer Farm Credit. Those also present were: Roland Vosburgh, Joel Allen, Suzette Booy, Betty Young, and Jim Waterhouse. Regrets were received from J. Lawrence Benson.

The minutes of the October 5th meeting were reviewed. It was stated that John Myers was not ever chairman of the AFPB. He had served as vice chair. Also Betty indicated that the Skoda Farm will have 200 head, not the 500 as previously reported. The minutes were accepted as corrected.

Chairman Dunbar announced that the Cooperative Extension Association Annual Meeting will be held at Kozel's tomorrow night, Nov. 3rd at 6:30 and the "Future of Farming in the Hudson Valley" conference will be at Columbia Greene Community College on Saturday, Nov. 4th, 8:30 to 3. She was planning to attend as are Roland, Joel, and Betty.

Joel reported on the semi-annual Agricultural Roundtable Cornell Cooperative Extension hosted on Friday, October 20th, attended by 20 individuals representing 15 agencies, boards, committees, and groups in the county, including AFPB. All made brief oral reports on their work and upcoming plans.

Chairman Dunbar asked about the possibility of AFPB and staff using the GIS systems at SWCD or the County Health Dept. for agricultural district reviews. Suzette indicated there was some incompatibility problems between those systems and the county Real Property CAD system, but that we could pursue it to see what could be done. Both Joel and Roland admitted, however, that while a number of counties have reported using GIS in their district review process, neither of them were experts in GIS technology. Some additional information will be needed from Agr. and Markets.

Roland reminded us that Ag & Markets Law Sec. 303-b authorizes landowners to make a request to the county legislative body to include predominantly viable agricultural land within an existing state certified agricultural district. In Columbia County the annual 30-day application period runs from October 1 through October 30.

He reported that for 2006, two applications were received by the Clerk of the Board of Supervisors. These applications are to be considered by the AFPB.

1) DAVIS APPLICATION

The owners, Baruch and Roberta Davis, request that two parcels they own (one in the Town of Austerlitz and one in the Town of Hillsdale) be added to Columbia County Ag District No. 8. The parcel in Austerlitz (105.-1-3) is 84.7 acres and the parcel in Hillsdale (105.-1-5) is 40 acres in size and are located on Schoolhouse Road. The property is presently utilized for livestock by a farmer based in the Town of Ghent (Dean).

A site visit, conducted by Roland R. Vosburgh on 20 October 2006, confirmed the agricultural use of the property. Approximately 28 acres are utilized for grazing on the two parcels and the remainder is forested. There are a total of three home sites on the two parcels. Ag District maps were consulted and it was confirmed that the parcel is closest in proximity to the existing boundary of Ag District No. 8 (see attached map). The parcels were rented in the past to a dairy operation nearby (McComb). The owners have made recent investments in the property to accommodate livestock including new fencing and plans to restore the fertility of the fields beginning in 2007.

2) BRYAN-BROWN APPLICATION

The owner, Marc Bryan-Brown, requests that two parcels he owns in the Town of Greenport be added to Columbia County Ag District No. 7. These parcels (Greenport 129.-2-02 and 129.-2-10) were previously included in Ag District No. 7 but were removed during the last eight year review because of no apparent farming activity. Mr. Bryan-Brown purchased the property 10 years ago and plans a vegetable operation focusing on garlic production under the name "Hudson Garlic." The two parcels are located on the east side of Middle Road and total 38.5 acres. A site visit was conducted by Roland R. Vosburgh on 26 October 2006 and confirmed the agricultural use of the property. Commercial production of garlic started in 2006 with 300 pounds harvested. The owner would like to expand to 1000-1500 pounds per year. There is evidence of old orchard on the parcel and the rest consists of open areas (grass) and brush areas. The parcel contains a residence and outbuildings.

The AFPB discussion noted that the two requests consists predominantly of viable agricultural land and the inclusion of such land would serve the public interest by assisting in maintaining a viable agricultural industry within the two ag districts and Columbia County. It was also noted that it has not been the Board's policy to exclude farmer or landowner residential parcels from an ag district. Therefore, the AFPB voted unanimously to support the inclusion of the Davis property in Ag District No. 8 and the Bryan-Brown property in Ag District No. 7 and further to recommend that the Columbia County Board of Supervisors approve the inclusion of the Davis property within Ag District No. 8 and the Bryan-Brown property within Ag District No. 7. Motion was made by Betty and seconded. Roland added that the public hearing for these two requests will be held at 401 State St., Hudson, upstairs classroom, on Tuesday, Dec. 12th at 7pm.

Chairman Dunbar reminded those present of the two upcoming public hearings hosted by Roland and Joel for Agricultural Districts 1 and 2. The Hearing for District 1 of Hillsdale, Copake, Ancram, et. al. will be held at the Copake Town Hall at 7pm on Tuesday, November 14th. The Hearing for District 2 of Kinderhook and Stuyvesant, et. al. will be held at the Stuyvesant Town Hall at 7pm on Thursday, November 16th. She encourages all AFPB members to attend and support these hearing. Roland added that all property owners effected (added or deleted) were notified by mail of that action and the public hearings. These letters generated a lot of phone calls and questions.

Joel reported on a discussion he had with a greenhouse business/landowner at the Farm Bureau annual dinner meeting on the topic of receiving an agricultural value assessment (AVA) on land used in the hort business. The local town assessor had been denying the landowner's application saying he wasn't eligible. Joel made some contacts and learned that such a business was eligible if they met certain criteria such as production space void of retail space. He reported this back to the business owner and encouraged him to pursue it.

Roland distributed copies of articles: "Consequences of Conservation Easements" and "Living In Fear" which discuss some of the downside for property owners from conservation easements.

He went on to explain the Tax Credit Law effecting 2006 taxes. These will be a tax shift with NYS dollars. Also the AFT article on "Conservation Tax Incentives" dated 2004. Meets certain criteria such as has public benefit and is done by accredited appraisers. Roland also reported that the Dept. of State will do a training session for County Planning Boards on Nov. 30th on "Quality Community Tools."

Joel was reminded to do a letter for SWCD asking them to designate Weir Stewart as their representative of their Board Chairman to the AFPB.

Chairman Dunbar and Suzette discussed the possibility of attending a training session of County Assessors to talk about agricultural land use and tax issues. Suzette suggested the January 10, 2007 meeting. Also suggested inviting Mark Twentyman of the State ORPS office to attend. Suzette will arrange and we can talk more about this at our Jan. 4th meeting.

Suzette reported on the work being done by Sherri Royce of the county data processing dept. on setting up a place for the AFPB on the county web site. This will also include the PLAN. It is a work in progress and still being updated, but is open at <http://www.columbiacountyny.com/CCAFPB/> Still a number of mistakes there, but at least we have a site and it is up. Don't want to publicize this yet - till the mistakes are corrected.

Suzette reported that the resolution we discussed last month regarding a research project being pursued by the state associations of Real Property Directors and Assessors, has been withdrawn. No further discussion or action is necessary.

Someone raised the question if a landowner can receive an agricultural value assessment on property already receiving a Conservation Easement. Most thought you can, but no one was sure.

With no further business, the Board agreed not to meet in December, but to meet again on January 4, 2007 at First Pioneer Farm Credit at 9:30am.

The meeting was adjourned at 12 noon.

Respectfully submitted,
Joel W. Allen, secretary