

Columbia County Ag & Farmland Protection Board
Meeting Minutes
November 1, 2007, First Pioneer Farm Credit, Claverack, NY

The meeting was called to order by Chair Marian Dunbar at 9:36 A.M. Members present were: Larry Benson, Roland Vosburgh, Jim Waterhouse, Mallory Mort, Weir Stewart, Suzette Booy, Betty Young and Steve Hadcock.

Chair Dunbar distributed the agenda and went over it briefly (see attached). It contained items for the upcoming meeting on November 8. Since the meeting on November 8 was publicized, Chair Dunbar has not received any comments by phone or mail. Suzette volunteered for the November 8 meeting to have 3x5 cards for people to print their name and turn in to moderator if they would like to make a statement and a sign up sheet. Roland stated that it might be useful to show the AFPB website during the meeting. Steve volunteered to take minutes of both the information session and hearing. Roland mentioned that he attended the Columbia County Farm Bureau and distributed flyers to all participants and gave 15 copies of the plan to Farm Bureau Directors. Larry asked who will answer questions from people at the session. It was agreed that any AFPB member would be able to respond to audience questions. Roland reminded those present that participants at the public information session will be asked to hold questions until after the presentation.

Chair Dunbar stated that Roland commented that there were no new Section 303-b requests during the 30-day period in October to have land added to an existing Agricultural District.

Chair Dunbar then reviewed what has transpired with the Freedom of Information Law (FOIL) request by Susan Ferguson. There were actually two parcels of land that were sold to the State of NY. One parcel was owned by Peter Greer and the other by Weir Stewart. No one has received a reply from Ms Ferguson and consider the case closed for now.

Chair Dunbar asked Steve Hadcock if he had received correspondence from Columbia County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) regarding the appointment of Weir Stewart as their designee. Steve said he has not received it as of yet. Weir mentioned that he talked to Doris Cady and stated the letter is on the way.

Roland and Marian attended the October 27 Columbia County Board of Supervisors County Government Committee, which was at the request of Chairman Leo Pulcher. The purpose of attending the meeting was to discuss the draft AFP plan. Roland reported comments made by supervisors, and particularly Douglas McGivney – Supervisor from the Town of Kinderhook, who stated that the plan should emphasize farmland protection and PDR programs. Supervisors recommended that other county AFP plans should be reviewed. Marian would like to follow-up with the County Government committee and asked for ideas of what the plan should contain. Mallory asked if the simplicity of the plan was shared at the County Government Committee and how easy it would be to modify and change. Marian stated it was shared with the committee and included the process with which the current draft plan was developed. Roland shared with AFPB members a timeline showing the distribution of the draft plan since 2005. The timeline shows who or what organizations received the draft. Marian contacted Columbia County Farm Bureau for a summary of a survey that they did several years ago, and did not receive a reply. Jim offered some observations about what is happening in towns regarding open space.

The bottom line is that promoting open space helps with getting votes for election or re-election. Steve suggested the AFPB give a presentation to the whole Board of Supervisors about its function and the draft plan. Betty said it is possible and some dates were discussed. Steve volunteered to give the presentation to the Board of Supervisors monthly meeting. Roland suggested that the current PowerPoint should be revised to make it more suitable for a presentation to the Board of Supervisors (shorter and adding info on the powers and duties of the AFPB). Roland and Steve volunteered to work on the revised Board of Supervisors presentation. The members present agreed to request this presentation at the February 2008 full Board of Supervisors Meeting.

After attending the Columbia County Government Committee meeting, Roland thought that the Board of Supervisors might consider a standing agriculture committee. Roland distributed a proposal for review. The proposal would elevate the current Ag Committee from one that is purely advisory to one with authority to recommend resolutions to the full Board of Supervisors and to provide input on any county government funding for agriculture programs. Suzette asked where do we go with the proposal from here. Betty will take it to James Keegan (Chair, Board of Supervisors) for his input. Larry suggested that the proposal should be shared with county government under the auspices of AFPB and endorsed by Columbia County Farm Bureau, Planning Department and other related groups. Weir offered some changes to the proposal as written and shared them with Roland. A motion was made by Roland to have Chair Dunbar send a letter to Columbia Land Conservancy, SWCD, Hudson Valley Agriculture Development Corporation, CCE, AFT, First Pioneer Farm Credit, Keep Farming initiatives, and Farm Bureau to introduce the proposal and solicit input and seconded Larry. The motion passed.

Roland reported that he will be speaking at the Southern Columbia Keep Farming meeting on November 3, 2007 in Germantown about agriculture districts, the AFPB and agriculture concerns. Roland asked for input on ideas regarding innovative farms or farming processes that he might share during his presentation on Saturday. Several ideas were shared with him. Roland also showed switch grass pellets and talked about the biofuels meeting he attended in Dutchess County.

Suzette reported on some recent corrections to the AFPB website. Jim showed how easy it is to find the website by using a search engine such as Google. Jim showed the website on his computer and Suzette led the group through the website. Steve mentioned that any changes that are to be made to the draft AFPB plan should be sent to him and he will make the changes. After the changes are made, he will send them to Suzette for posting to the website. It was agreed that the PowerPoint presentation will be posted to the website after the public information/public hearing.

Chair Dunbar is reviewing, with the help of Roland and Suzette, which tax parcels are receiving agricultural assessment and if the parcels are accurate. Also, checking to see if parcels qualify for agricultural value assessment.

Chair Dunbar shared what she has learned from the Department of Agriculture and Markets regarding the Buckwheat Bridge Angora's request to use wind power for the purpose of agricultural production (see attached). The department determined that electrical generation by wind power is acceptable under Ag and Markets law and the town must comply. The town may not have to comply if they can demonstrate the practice (in this case the wind mill) will adversely affect public health or welfare.

Chair Dunbar asked if Roland can provide to the AFPB with information on the agricultural component

of town comprehensive plans when they are reviewed by the County Planning Board. She suggested that information about ag district law should be shared with all town attorneys. Marian asked if any towns have submitted a grant to the state for the development of a farmland protection plan. No one seems to think any were submitted.

Motion made by Larry and seconded by Mallory to accept the minutes of the October meeting as amended. The motion passed.

Chair Dunbar asked members to review 303A of state law 25AA regarding Agricultural District Review. Roland mentioned that AFPB is the only board involved in the approval of Ag District Review. Larry needs a copy of the revised 25AA.

Chair Dunbar would like election of officers at the next meeting. There may be a need for some replacements and members should be thinking of qualified candidates. The next AFPB meeting will be December 6 at First Pioneer Farm Credit. A motion was made by Roland and seconded by Larry to appoint Steve Hadcock as interim secretary of the Board. The motion passed.

Roland suggested that the AFPB should do a survey of all local governments in the county to determine if there are any farmers involved on any boards within the town. A motion was made by Roland and seconded by Mallory to this survey of local governments (sending the request to the clerks). The motion passed.

A motion was made by Weir and seconded by Larry to adjourn. The motion passed. The meeting was adjourned at 11:37.

The next meeting will be Thursday, December 6 at First Pioneer Farm Credit.

Respectfully submitted,

Stephen Hadcock