

**TOWN OF WRIGHT
AGRICULTURAL
COMMITTEE**

AGRICULTURAL AND FARMLAND PRESERVATION COMMITTEE

November 19, 2008

**MARK STOLZENBURG
Chair**

872-0679

VICKY MCCAFFREY

872-1295

JERI MURRAY

295-7280

ED THORNTON

295-7463

KARL WESTPHAL

872-1687

RETA YOUNGS

872-0919

JOHN SANCHIRICO

TOWN BOARD

872-9287

RAYMOND LURHMAN

872-2375

Committee members Present:

**Jeri Murray,
Mark Stolzenburg
Ed Thornton
Vicky McCaffery
Reta Youngs
Karl Wesphal
Ray Lurhman**

Also Present:

Lee Pratt, Schoharie County Planning
Laurie Ten Eyck, Field Consultant, American Farmland Trust
Jean Burton, secretary
John Sanchirico, Town Board liason

Review of Minutes of 10/22/2008. Motions to approve, 1st Ed, Karl 2ed, approved

Input from Schoharie County Cornell Cooperative Extension on impact of agriculture in the town. Lee reported that Extension staff would review the survey data and develop a statement on the economic impact on the town. Lee asked forcefully for this analysis by January meeting and he is confident that deadline will be met. It is understood that this will be an in kind service.

ID of farmland in need of protection, Map accuracy –Inaccuracy of the maps is a result of assessor's codes. Laurie asked the committee how accurate they need to be? What is margin of error? How critical is it? Vicky suggested asking landowners to come to meeting to be sure land is reflected accurately for agriculture. The category of land not accurately depicted appears to be land that is not in an agricultural district, not coded agriculture, but is used in agriculture. Agricultural District data is from 2007. The committee felt that major land/farm owners need to be notified so owners can apply for the most advantageous assessment. The committee wants to be accurate in the final report. Mark suggested getting "traveling copies" of the map to use when driving around and identifying land in use. The number of parcels that are not accurately reported is not high. Lee will make copies of a "travel map" so the committee can carry it with them. Some parcels can be decided just by committee knowledge at the next meeting.

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Regulation review progress report

Laurie reported that her review is ongoing. Laurie has reviewed local regulations. She will meet with county staff on 12/3 to learn more. She is seeking areas that are not worded in a "farmer friendly" fashion. Laurie will flag these findings for committee review and possible recommendations for revision. She noted that the earliest regulations are 1970s. In the past, since development was not encroaching, it was assumed that farming would continue and there did not appear to be a need to safeguard the farmer. Laurie will be looking at older regulations with the idea of bringing them up to date.

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Interview progress report

Laurie reported that Richard Gage is an alternate interviewee. She had not heard back from Derick DeVore, and will speak with Mr. Gage next week. Martin Tessarzik's interview was complete. She reports that those she has interviewed have been very forthcoming and engaged in process. She shared list of issues themes that recur, concerns raised. See attached list. This will be helpful as the committee formulates goals. Mark questioned the need for the committee to define a farm before formulating goals. A farm could be based on various factors: part-time, second job, net profit, keeping land in us, and others. Ed asked how Ag and Farm defines a farm. John commented that Comp Plan defines "farm". Right to Farm law (2001) has different definition. Right to Farm law is constantly updated to capture new technology and products. Mark would like all three of these definitions for the committee to review. Laurie proposed that at the next meeting the committee review regulations and she will bring all definitions from town, Ag and Markets, and county, and committee can wrestle with a definition. One more interview is left to be completed. A more comprehensive summary will be delivered to committee when interviews are completed. Karl noted that in interviews most people wanted to "preserve rural character." He questioned if they are concerned that they won't be able to do with their land what they want to? Questioning if they could subdivide their land if they wanted to. Laurie indicated that everyone on the list was interested in keeping their land in farming; there was no interest in subdividing. Mark questioned what those who rent, what do they see as their future? Laurie reported again that responders want land to continue to be farmed. Laurie emphasized that the interview list is meant to be representative. Committee members can also contribute their ideas. Laurie will email the questions used in interviews to the committee

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and members can respond via email. Laurie is open to switching last interview and/or adding one more person to interview. No decision was made in this regard. The committee appears satisfied to have additional committee input to the interview questions rather than another interview.

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Goals discussion – Laurie indicated that the word “goal” is planning lingo. Goals need to be very broad and then more specific, realistic strategies/recommendations can be developed. Karl questioned any interest or knowledge of Purchase of Development Rights grants. Laurie indicated that there is much misinformation and distrust in this regard and she did not pursue it in depth with interviewees. She indicated that the state program is very complicated. Some communities are doing a lease of development rights. Mark noted that towns give tax incentives for set periods of time to various businesses, why not with agriculture? Discussion brought out the fact that discounting taxes on portions of land shifts the tax burden to more concentrated areas.

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Goals: After a lengthy discussion two goals/strategies were suggested but not fully explored:

- Offer incentives at the town level in addition to state agricultural assessment, for landowners to keep land in agricultural production.
- Town to inform landowners and farmers of types of arrangements for leasing. Leases protect owner and renters. The issue of rental land in the town is significant and the plan should address this.

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Laurie emphasized the *LONG TERM* nature of goals set forth by committee. She suggested seeking to define 5 to 7 goals. Laurie offered how various other towns approached the task of setting goals. It was agreed that the next meeting would focus on a list of potential goals.

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Karl noted that the goal of county is to increase profitability of agriculture in county. He feels that commodity crops are not profitable and that local production of food is key for the county and the country and world. Discussion was aired on several perspectives of this issue. Jon questioned if committee has \$ to send newsletter to inform town of progress.

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To Do list for December Meeting:

- a) Look at maps for holes in agricultural use. Lee will get “travel maps.”
- b) Look at various definitions of “farm”
- c) Review interview questions and offer your own input to same questions. Laurie will email questions to the committee
- d) Choose goals. Bring list to meeting. Some can be done by email.