

**TOWN OF WRIGHT
AGRICULTURAL
COMMITTEE**

AGRICULTURAL AND FARMLAND PRESERVATION COMMITTEE

September 24, 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:

Lee Pratt,
Jeri Murray,
Mark Stolzenburg
Ed Thornton

Reta Youngs
Karl Westphal
Vicky McCaffery

Absent:

Ray Lurhman

Also Present:

John Sanchirico, Town Board Liaison
Dottie Wilcox, Schoharie County Planning Assistant
Laurie Ten Eyck, Field Consultant, American Farmland Trust
Jean Burton, secretary
Sue Loden, Town Supervisor
John Brennen, NYS Dept of Agriculture

This meeting was held at the Gallupville House and the public was invited to learn more about this committee and to voice ideas about future plans for the Town of Wright related to Agriculture. Thirty-five people were in attendance in addition to committee members listed above. Brochures were available and four maps of the town were on display.

Sue Loden opened the meeting by welcoming everyone.

Mark introduced the committee members. Mark then summarized the grant \$25,000, for planning agriculture at the town level. He indicated that the grant was received and the committee began January 2008 and has been meeting monthly since then. The committee hired a consultant to aid in grant. Purpose of the plan is to devise ways the community and town can encourage agriculture in the town. Committee will then explore all these ways. The reason to meet tonight is to get feedback from members of the town, those involved in agriculture and those who are effected by it.

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Laurie introduced herself as the consultant hired by the committee. She lives in Altamont. Her father owns Indian Ladders Farm. She now works for American Farmland Trust. She also works in the town of Bethlehem on agricultural issues. New York State has a farmland protection program – funding for county level protection. Since New York is a home rule state, decisions are made on a town level. This grant is devised to help towns make these decisions. In the initial step the committee is learning what is going on in the town relating to agriculture. As part of that process Laurie will be meeting several residents on a one to one basis. She has completed some of these interviews and has several more to do. Laurie indicated that this is all part of finding out what the community thinks and what is going on in the Town of Wright. Laurie then explained a SWOT analysis. She led the group in this analysis as shown below.

Strengths

Soil quality
People help each other
People are farming
Location--proximity to urban areas and customers
Many types of agriculture
Affordable land
Cooperation between farmers
New, small farms (designer, niche)
County is pro farming
Town is of historical importance (Schoharie County, breadbasket of the revolution)
Existence of large chunks of farmland—not cut up
Dedicated farmers here for the long-term
Beauty of town due to farms
Comprehensive Plan supportive of agriculture
Town has a local right to farm law

Weaknesses

Town is attractive to people from the city who want to live here
Low cost of land another reason to move here
New residents unfamiliar with agriculture cause problems

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Many bigger farms rely on rental land which could be sold and become unavailable for agriculture

Town has no population hub to serve as market for agricultural products

Difficulty of finding labor

Taxes

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Fuel costs

Misconceptions on the part of the general public regarding agriculture

Lack of many youths interested in farming

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Opportunities

Tourism

Restaurants, Schools & Grocery Stores want to purchase local produce

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Shift to organic and grass-fed

Change in market for livestock—more sheep and goats

People want to reduce shipping costs

Local store is interested in selling local produce

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Rise of popularity of and awareness of CSAs

More opportunity for farms to cooperate and gain efficiency

Opportunity for local milk cooperative

Lots of water—opportunity for aquaculture

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Opportunity for wind power

Threats

Development (people)

Negative impacts on water quality

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Increased taxes

Increased traffic

Road Conditions

Maintaining enough agriculture to keep local agriculture suppliers in business

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Public perception (animal rights)

Locally grown food vendors are small, independent, vulnerable

Insurance costs

Lack of processing facilities (USDA inspector) ability to do small quantities

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What is Most Important for an Agriculture Plan?

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Address Taxes
Rights and protection of farmer and farm
Keep farming viable so farmers can keep farming—keep farming profitable

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Long term cooperative for insurance
Define what farming is
Vision of what everyone in town wants for the town's agriculture—something everyone can agree on even if they differ on how to do it
Public education—tours, open houses

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School program
Agriculture scholarship

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Mark outlined the next steps for the committee, indicating that the first stage is complete, a windshield survey of land use in the town. As the committee moves forward the committee and the consultant will look at all regulations in effect now, land use, subdivision etc and make recommendations in how these might be changed so as to be supportive of agriculture. Laurie will also interview several residents from a variety of backgrounds (small niche, large, renters, owners). Others are welcomed. County planning maps will be used to evaluate future direction for the town relating to soils, etc. The committee will make recommendations to the town board/community as strategies to encourage agriculture.

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Mark asked the group, how should agriculture/farm be defined? The response was it should be defined broadly. Small farms without profit may become more and more important. Some responses suggested to define a farm by items produced. Undeveloped land is important as well as open space. The group voiced that arable land should be protected.

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At Lee's invitation, Steve Rubeor, the new town assessor arrived to meet this group of people and answer questions related to assessment of agricultural property in the town. Steve is the assessor for the towns of Wright, Schoharie and Esperance. Steve described the previous assessor as unyielding in asking for documentation. Steve plans to follow state rules with common sense. Steve provided hand-outs listing documentation that could be asked for. There are various ways to document gross sales such that income tax documents are not required. Owners must provide an affidavit notarized from farmer.

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A lease must be valid and written. A five-year lease needs documents submitted every five years. Steve can be reached at 295-6571, and has regular office hours in the Schoharie town hall

VICKY MCCAFFREY
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Next committee meeting: October 22, 2008 Town Hall

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