



Progress Report

Agriculture and Farmland Protection Plan

Town of Wright

4/29/09

prepared by Laura Ten Eyck, Field Consultant, American Farmland Trust

Next Meeting: May 27, 2009, 7:00 PM, Wright Town Hall, Gallupville, NY

Mapping, Inventory of Agriculture, Prioritizing Agricultural Land

The committee is working on finalizing the map depicting active agricultural land in the town. Mark Stolzenburg, committee chairperson, distributed copies of the aerial photographs and maps. He assigned each committee member an area in which they are to verify whether or not parcels of land in question are being farmed. This job will be completed before, or at least by, the May meeting.

Once this process is complete Lillian Bruno, senior planner with the Schoharie County Planning Department and David Cox of the Schoharie County Cornell Cooperative Extension, will be able to gather more accurate data on the economic impact of farming in the town. The total acreage of working farmland will be used to calculate how much money these lands pay in school taxes, as an example of an economic impact benefiting the Town of Wright. The economic impact study will also provide a general overview of the minimal impact farmland has on the cost of community services as compared to residential development.

The committee also reviewed the map of agricultural land that accompanies the Town of Charlton's recently released draft agricultural and farmland protection plan. Charlton's map breaks down the agricultural land into specific categories, such as dairy, equine, etc. The committee questioned whether or not getting down to that level of detail would be useful for the Town of Wright's plan. The consensus was to continue to focus on identifying active agricultural land and then consider going into further detail if time and resources allow.

Lillian talked to the committee about a recent conversation with John Brennan of NYSDAM regarding the prioritization of agricultural land in need of protection. John stated he would send an e mail to Lillian detailing his expectations. The committee will review the subject further once John's e mail has been received and distributed.

Review of Regulations

The review of the town's land use regulations, produced by AFT, has been distributed to the committee. Committee members will read the document and be prepared to discuss it at the May meeting.

Barton Hill Watershed

The committee is in contact with the Schoharie County Health Department regarding regulations affecting land within the Barton Hill Watershed area which supplies the water for the Village of Schoharie. Activity that may cause water pollution is strictly regulated by both the county and the state. The Town of Wright does not have regulations concerning the watershed at this time but the county health department has communicated that it will be asking the town to put regulations in place at the local level. The committee plans to assess the level of agricultural activity in the area and review the county's regulations.

Schoharie County Soil and Water Conservation District

The committee is considering inviting a representative from the county soil and water district office to come and discuss soils with the committee. At John Brennan's suggestion a representative from the county soil and water conservation district will be meeting with the towns of Seward and Carlisle's joint executive agriculture and farmland protection plan committee. Soil types, the history and science behind the soil survey, the consideration of

soils during land use planning and programs available to assist farmers will be discussed. The Wright committee will make a decision on whether or not to arrange for this presentation at their May meeting.

Forestry

At their April meeting the committee decided to conduct an inventory of forests on farms that are certified by the state to receive tax abatement. The committee wants to assess the amount of forested land on farms and research government programs available to enable the land owner to receive tax abatement as well as manage their wood lots for maximum benefit.

Voting to Accept Documents

The Schoharie County Planning Department has requested that the committee consider voting to accept documents prepared in support of the development of the agriculture and farmland protection plan. Prior to the May meeting Mark will prepare a list of documents that committee has reviewed to date and the committee will vote on whether or not to accept them.

Schoharie County Website

The committee has agreed to place minutes and progress reports on the Town of Wright's page on the Schoharie County website. Laura is preparing an introduction to the town's agriculture and farmland protection plan project which will also appear on the website

Schoharie County Community Economic Development Strategic Plan

The committee is in the process of reviewing the economic development strategic plan prepared last spring by the county's Four Partners group which is comprised of the Schoharie County Chamber of Commerce, the Schoharie County Farm Bureau, Schoharie County government and SUNY Cobleskill. The plan contains several concepts for improving economic opportunities in the county for agriculture. Lillian has distributed the plan by e mail to the committee members who will review it.

Recommendations

The committee has been in deep discussion over the types of recommendations that should be made by the plan since March. They have reviewed recommendations suggested in the Farmland Protection Toolbox and conceived of and debated recommendations of their own. Laura has taken extensive notes during these conversations and will distill recommendations put forth to date in a document for the committee to review at their May meeting.

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