

AGRICULTURE, PLANNING, TOURISM & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES –NOVEMBER 21, 2016

AGRICULTURE, PLANNING, TOURISM & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE MEMBERS
PRESENT: Fedler, Idleman, Shay, Armstrong, Moore, Skellie

AGRICULTURE, PLANNING, TOURISM & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE MEMBERS
ABSENT: Haff

SUPERVISORS: Henke, Hicks, O'Brien, Hogan,

Debra Prehoda, Clerk of the Board

Chris DeBolt, County Administrator

Teri Ptacek, Ag Stewardship Assoc.

Public

Al Nolette, Treasurer

Laura Chadwick, Director Real Property

Renee Bouplon, Ag Stewardship Assoc.

AGENDA AS PRESENTED IN COMMITTEE NOTICE:

- 1) Call to Order
- 2) Accept Minutes – October 24, 2016
- 3) AGRICULTURE - ASA
 - A. Ag & Farmland Protection Plan Update
 - B. PDR Program Update
- 4) TOURISM
 - A. County Admin. – Renewal Tourism Web Design Services
- 5) PLANNING
- 6) Consider Resolution in Support of Bill Allowing NYS ORPTS to Pay Taxes in the Washington County WMA
- 7) Other Business
- 8) Adjournment

Chair Fedler called the meeting to order at 1:00 P.M.

A motion to accept the minutes of the October 24, 2016 meeting was moved by Ms. Idleman, seconded by Mr. Shay and adopted.

AGRICULTURE – Renee Bouplon, Agriculture Stewardship Association, addressed the following items with the committee:

- Ag & Farmland Protection Plan Update – Distributed the attached Progress Report: Washington County Agricultural and Farmland Protection Plan. Results from a survey conducted with area farmers were compiled in the attached handout, Survey of Potential Strategies for Agricultural and Farmland Protection Plan and discussed. They received one hundred three responses from farmers. They already know broadband and taxes are a concern and they are not listed. Items that scored over 70 on the survey are a high priority. The highest priority was farmers wanting a venue to provide feedback on this plan and other items. Feel it would be symbolic for the County to pass a right to farm law. The plan has been drafted and is in review by the committee. Public presentation in January and would like to present to this committee prior to that. Grant extension filed and the goal is to have the final information into the State by March. They also need to meet with the Ag & Farmland Protection Board possibly on December 13th or 15th.
- PDR Program Update – Grant announcements are due later in the month with approximately 1100 acres to be conserved. Prefers an annual PDR program verses a two-year grant cycle.
- Come Farm With Us Tour – Very successful pilot project.
- Landscapes for Landsake – Major fund raiser for the year, \$94,000 worth of art sold.

TOURISM: Chris DeBolt, County Administrator, addressed the following items with the committee:

- Renewal Tourism Web Design Services – Contracted with Sara Kelly in 2016 for continuation of tourism website and Facebook. A motion to contract with Sara Kelly for web services for 2017 in the amount of \$4800 and forward to the Finance Committee for consideration was moved Mr. Shay, seconded by Ms. Idleman and adopted.
- Tourism Maps – All edits are finished. The committee previously agreed to print 15,000 maps at a cost of \$5000. Mr. Shaw asked if we were getting to many maps. Committee concurred with printing 15,000.
- Champlain Canalway Trail – At the Baldwin Corners bridge at the north end of Kingsbury there needs to be an at grade crossing of a CP Rail line. You have to request a public hearing for the regulatory changes that are needed of that crossing. Canal Corp asked for the public hearing and a judge stated they did not have the authority so after meeting with the Kingsbury Supervisor, GPI Engineering firm, and Canal Corp, they felt the request should come from the County. He is requesting permission to submit a letter to the hearing judge asking for DOT to start the procedure. He stated no cost to the County. A motion to allow County Administrator to submit letter to proper authorities requesting hearing in relation to at grade crossing of CP Rail line for Champlain Canalway trail was moved by Mr. Moore, seconded by Mr. Skellie and adopted.

PLANNING:

- County Planning Board – The Board of Supervisors passed a resolution reducing the membership of the County Planning Board to seven members. The County Administrator stated the County Planning Board has to adopt this change to their by-laws to be effective in January. They are going to remove the inactive members.
- RFP for Planning 239 Reviews – RFP should be done by next month.

CONSIDER RESOLUTION IN SUPPORT OF BILL ALLOWING NYS ORPTS TO PAY TAXES IN THE WASHINGTON COUNTY WMA – Resolution attached. A motion to present a resolution in support was moved by Mr. Shay, seconded by Mr. Moore and adopted.

OTHER BUSINESS:

- Lakes to Locks Passage – Bruce Ferguson is the Secretary to the Lakes to Locks Passage Board. They received a grant a few years ago to do a few projects in the eastern part of the County. A part of that grant was to create two kiosks to be placed in the Town of Jackson and to proceed they need \$500 of matching funds. He suggested using Occupancy Tax funds. There is also monies left in the tourism contingency. A motion to take the requested funding, \$500, out of this year's Tourism contingency line was moved by Ms. Idleman, seconded by Mr. Shay and adopted.
- Draft County Right to Farm Law for the next meeting – A County right to farm law would cover the towns that have not adopted such a law. The County Administrator will ask the County Attorney to draft a County Right to Farm Law for consideration at the next meeting.

The meeting adjourned at 1:47 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,
Debra Prehoda, Clerk
Washington County Board of Supervisors

Progress Report:
Washington County Agricultural and Farmland Protection Plan
November 21, 2016

Goals

The following goals were established to help the Washington County community reach its vision and address those critical topics identified in this Plan:

- 1) Enhance the viability, diversity and sustainability of agriculture, focusing on both niche and traditional farms, value-added processing, agri-tourism, packaging, and product aggregation and distribution operations.
- 2) Promote recognition, awareness, and support of the critical roles agriculture plays in the County with the non-farm community.
- 3) Support and improve farm-support agencies and organizations, agri-infrastructure, funding, and educational opportunities to retain and grow agricultural enterprises.
- 4) Protect the land base for farming and promote environmental sustainability of farms.
- 5) Increase markets for and visibility of local and regional food and agricultural products.
- 6) Increase the number of and support to next generation farmers and agricultural entrepreneurs operating in Washington County.

Farmers Survey

There were 100 or so proposed actions from the SWOT analysis and public/farmer feedback, which were synthesized down to approximately 30. A follow-up survey to farmers was mailed in mid-August as well as distributed to farmers at the Washington County Fair so farmers could prioritize the action items. Some action items that the farming community had already made clear were a high priority/important to address such as improving internet/cellular coverage, lessening tax burden, and increasing public education related to agriculture were not included on the survey. 103 responses were received. See handout for the results.

Draft Plan

The draft Plan was completed in late October and reviewed by the steering committee in early November. Revisions are currently underway and are expected to be completed by the end of the month. In December, the design/layout of the Plan will be done. By early January, the draft Plan should be available for the public to review and provide comments. A public presentation is being planned for January.

Next Steps

1. A grant extension has been requested to ensure there is adequate time for presentations and the approvals needed prior to sending the Plan to the NYS Dept. of Ag and Markets
2. Schedule a presentation about the Plan with this committee

Washington County Survey of Potential Strategies for Agricultural and Farmland Protection Plan

Your input is very important. Please look over the list of potential actions the County can include in the updated Agricultural and Farmland Protection Plan. For each, please identify if it is a high or low priority from your perspective. Please feel free to add any other ideas or comments at the bottom. Thank you for taking the time to fill this out survey, which is due by September 12th.

Proposed Action for Plan	High Priority	Low Priority	Unsure, More Info Needed
1. Create a long-term working group and organizational structure to implement this plan and the goals/actions listed below.	64	15	17
2. Explore the feasibility of hiring a professional coordinator for that working group.	21	33	36
3. Hold periodic round table meetings with farmers and that working group to provide feedback on Plan priorities, status of programs, emerging trends and new challenges.	81	9	7
4. Develop an Ag Business Retention and Expansion program to promote expansion of existing farms and attract new ones via business management planning, technical training, data on emerging markets, funding assistance for new or expanded farms	60	26	16
5. Create a grant writing effort to help farmers fund their business retention and expansion plans.	63	24	14
6. Enhance support to existing ag-related agencies and organizations ¹ (see list below for examples) so that they can participate fully in this effort.	65	20	11
7. Work closely with Farm Credit East and other ag-friendly lenders to support the capital needs of farmers.	73	20	11
8. Make agriculture an important part of the Washington County Local Development Corporation's (LDC) direction through additional capital resources, revolving loan or microloans, incentives for young and new farmers, etc.	78	13	8
9. Work with other Hudson River Valley counties to increase meat and protein processing capacity.	56	32	11
10. Create a shared use facility for cold storage, freezer and flash freeze equipment.	39	37	23
11. Cost share or find other ways to support farmers with on-farm investments oriented to high tunnels, wash stations, fencing, and other assistance to meet Food Safety Modernization Act Certification and other food safety requirements.	46	36	12
12. Explore the feasibility of a food hub to promote the aggregation, distribution and transportation of local agricultural products.	58	26	15
13. Promote small grain growing and processing in Washington County.	46	37	13
14. Bring dairy stakeholders together to determine the interest in and economic potential for specialty dairy processing for value-added products.	53	32	16
15. Bring fiber growers together to determine the interest in and economic potential for expanding commercial dyeing, weaving and knitting infrastructure.	31	55	13
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¹ Includes Cornell Cooperative Extension, Soil and Water Conservation District, Natural Resource Conservation Service, Farm Service Agency, Agricultural Stewardship Association, Washington Co. Local Development Corp, SUNY Adirondack, Hudson Valley Agri-business Dev. Corp.

**Washington County
Survey of Potential Strategies for Agricultural and Farmland Protection Plan**

Proposed Action for Plan	High Priority	Low Priority	Unsure, More Info Needed
16. Undertake feasibility study for emerging markets such as beef, small grains, hemp, etc.	47	39	13
17. Explore a shared methane digester to be placed in an area with a concentration of dairy farms.	33	50	20
18. Work with SUNY Adirondack to develop an ag-workforce enhancement program.	67	20	9
19. Create and implement a comprehensive marketing strategy to attract new farmers, consumers, and ag-business.	60	24	11
20. Work with retail outlets/restaurants/food services to promote local produce .	74	21	3
21. Support farm to institution programs.	35	21	17
22. Enhance support to county ag-tourism programs to promote expansion of existing, and establishment of new opportunities including the Washington County Fair as well as the cheese, fiber, maple, craft beverage and others.	57	37	9
23. Hold periodic farm tours for all elected officials and representatives in the County.	59	34	6
24. Find new ways to promote and support agricultural and forestry education in the schools .	74	18	6
25. Offer internship and mentoring opportunities.	65	23	7
26. Offer business and management training, planning, and start-up funding options for the next generation of farmers.	72	17	8
27. Seek funding for implementation of transition and estate planning programs.	50	30	16
28. Increase the acreage of conserved farmlands and ensure their future use for farming through use of purchased or donated conservation easements.	72	20	7
29. Encourage the County and/or Towns to adopt a Right To Farm law .	78	12	6
30. Provide land use planning assistance to towns and create education initiatives to improve farm-friendliness and promote ag.	78	11	9

Please add other comments or ideas:

103 completed surveys received as of 09-30-16

If you would like to be entered into a \$100 drawing for a gift certificate to a local restaurant of your choice, please give your name and contact information:

Name _____

Address _____

Phone Number _____ Email: _____

PLEASE RETURN THIS SURVEY BY dropping it off or mailing it **BY SEPTEMBER 12th** to:
 ASA at **2531 State Route 40, Greenwich, NY 12834**, or scan and email to renee@agstewardship.org.
 You can also stop by ASA's booth in the County Bountu building at the Washington County Fair.

RESOLUTION NUMBER _____ OF 2016
SUPPORT OF ADOPTION OF BILL ALLOWING NYS ORPTS TO PAY TAXES
IN THE WASHINGTON COUNTY WMA

WHEREAS:

The Town of Fort Edward wishes to conserve its rural character, maintain and balance its tax base, provide opportunities for land owners to continue in farming activities and environmentally appropriate development, conserve wildlife habitat, and welcome new environmentally friendly economic activities to the Town, and

WHEREAS:

Certain agricultural lands in Washington County have been identified in the New York Open Space Conservation Plan, 2006 as a critical component of the state's efforts to conserve open space, providing agricultural products, scenic open space and vital wildlife habitat, (page 181, resolution 15 and page 314, project #134 and page 292, project #64 protect wildlife habitat in the river corridor.) and;

WHEREAS:

The Washington County Grasslands (covering parts of the towns of Fort Edward, Argyle and Kingsbury) supports 10 of 11 species of grassland birds listed as "Species of Greatest Conservation Need, whose numbers are in sharp decline in the country and in New York State, and;

WHEREAS:

New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYDEC) has identified these specific farmland areas of Washington County as a special grassland bird focus area, making the area eligible for federal and state Open Space and Landowner Incentive Program funds to encourage land owners to manage these lands to conserve grassland birds while remaining in active farming, and;

WHEREAS:

The NYSDEC plan identifies core grassland habitats used by bird species that could be protected by state fee purchase or conservation easement land acquisition, and also identifies surrounding private agricultural land as buffer areas on which farm management practices should be encouraged and continued, modified by agreement with the state to protect grassland bird and other wildlife habitat as appropriate. Town participation in the unique grassland bird habitat protection plan to conserve farmland could have financial benefit for individual landowners, help to maintain tax revenue for the Town; help to protect the Town's scenic resources and wildlife habitat, encourage ecotourism and nature education and;

WHEREAS:

The Town of Fort Edward, passed Resolution No. 89 of 2007, (12/31/2007) entitled "Washington County Grassland Habitat Protection Plan" as a priority project under statewide farmland protection in the New York State Open Space Conservation Plan and; conceptually the Town supports implementation of the Plan through and acquisition from "willing sellers" and;

WHEREAS:

It is anticipated based on proposed bill language that taxes on all properties classified as a WMA (Wildlife Management Area) will be paid by the New York State Office of Real Property Taxation once legislation has been adopted. Senator Betty Little and Assemblywoman Carrie Woerner have introduced bills to amend the real property law making certain state lands in the towns of Argyle, Fort Edward and Kingsbury, in the county of Washington, subject to taxation for all purposes. Senator Little's bill was adopted unanimously by the NYS Senate in June of 2016 (S6343). Assemblywoman Woerner's bill did not make it out of committee before the session ended; the Assemblywoman will plan to reintroduce and advocate for a bill to be adopted next session(A8663); and,

WHEREAS:

The Fort Edward Town Board supports these measures to allow NYSDEC to pay taxes through ORPTS; both on existing owed properties as well as on the properties they wish to acquire; and, (SEE ATTACHED DOCUMENTATION); and

WHEREAS:

Friends of the Washington County Grasslands IBA is a locally based not-for-profit organization working to conserve land in Washington County (mailing address P.O. Box 82, Fort Edward, New York 12828); and,

WHEREAS:

Friends of the IBA's mission is to protect endangered, threatened and at risk grassland birds and to conserve their habitat; and,

WHEREAS: THE State of New York, through the Department of Environmental Conservation, has an agreement to acquire approximately 180 acres of critical grassland bird habitat from landowner, Merrilyn Pulver, ("willing seller"), hereinafter, referred to as the Pulver Property, to create a Wildlife Management Area which is supportive of the mission of Friends of the IBA, and

WHEREAS:

NYSORPTS (Office of Real Property Taxation Services) cannot pay taxes for WMA properties until a bill has been adopted by both houses and approved by the Governor; and, the economic vitality of the Town could be impacted by the removal of the property from the tax rolls, and

WHEREAS:

Friends of the IBA recognizes that the vitality of the town is an important goal for its elected leaders and wishes to support this endeavor,

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED:

The Town Board of the Town of Fort Edward would like to make it know that they are in support of the above referenced legislation and that the Town requests that a bill is adopted in order that the State is able to pay all taxes for the "Pulver Property" (currently yearly taxes (approximately \$3804,39); and be it further **RESOLVED** that in addition to the above support, the Town passes this resolution in support of a bill being adopted that will also cover the existing land taxes for properties owned by NYSDEC (currently totaling approximately \$10,920.04); and be it further

RESOLVED that this resolution is intended to show the support the Town has for such legislation, the IBA initiatives and for such bill to to be passed in the Senate and the House and to further support seeing such legislation come to fruition in order that the State is able to pay future taxes on such proposed properties;

however, this resolution is in not to be considered to be an agreement with the IBA or related parties of the Pluver property.