

AGRICULTURE, PLANNING, TOURISM & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT  
COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES – JULY 20, 2021

AGRICULTURE, PLANNING, TOURISM & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE MEMBERS  
PRESENT: Fedler, Campbell, Hicks, Shaw, Skellie, Rozell

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

SUPERVISORS: Henke, O'Brien

Debra Prehoda, Clerk of the Board

Laura Oswald, Economic Development Director

Melissa Fitch, County Administrator

Al Nolette, County Treasurer

Dan Martindale, Deputy County Attorney

AGENDA AS PRESENTED IN COMMITTEE NOTICE:

- 1) Call to Order
- 2) Accept Minutes – May 25, 2021
- 3) Soil & Water Conservation District
  - A. Projects & Agricultural Amendments
- 4) Agricultural Stewardship Association
  - A. Update on PDR Programs & Projects
  - B. Update on ASA Land Conservation Plan
  - C. Update on Cambridge Community Forest
- 5) Broadband Updates
- 6) Tourism Update
- 7) Planning Updates
- 8) Stimulus Funding Potential: Broadband & Tourism
- 9) Other Business
- 10) Adjournment

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

A motion to accept the minutes of the May 25, 2021 meeting was moved by Mr. Skellie, seconded by Messrs. Rozell and Campbell, and adopted.

AGRICULTURAL STEWARDSHIP ASSOCIATION – Chris Krahling, Sr. Project Manager. addressed the following items:

- PDR Programs & Projects – Ag & Markets closed the Dairy Transitions and Farm Operations in Transitions grant programs. The current round of funding has been opened under an RFA and previous grant rounds were a competitive program but this year did away with that. Recently submitted three applications to that program with two of those from Washington County. Under the RFA they can request additional information which they were not allowed to do in past rounds. Do fully expect those two applications to be awarded: Kenyon Hill Farm, 88 acres on Plains Road, in Jackson, and Slack Hollow Farm in Argyle. The State is starting to open up some funding and continuing to apply for some other projects. The Economic Development Director stated one requirement for these grants under Ag & Markets is that the County Planning Department provide evidence in support for the need of the application. The County Planning Departments puts several hours in on these applications as well by creating this documentation and letters. They are fully supporting ASA in this effort.
- ASA Land Conservation Plan – They have hired a consultant, Karen Strong of Strong Outcomes, to draft and develop their land conservation plan for the organization and stressing farmland protection and integrating more of the working forest protection, climate change and community resiliency into that plan. Hopefully, the plan should be done by the end of this calendar year or by January 2022.

- Cambridge Community Forest near the Cambridge School – The bridge work has been completed, in the process of developing a trail system, working on having a kiosk built and signage for the property. Hopefully fully operational by fall and open to the public. .

SOIL & WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT – In the absence of Corrina Aldrich, District Director, Al Nolette, County Treasurer, addressed the following items with the committee:

- Septic Replacement Program – At a planning session on this grant agreed to roles and responsibilities. The County will send out notices to the 1,302 eligible landowners. Soil and Water will be accepting applications through September 30<sup>th</sup>. He is unsure of the review and selection process. The Economic Development Director stated the selection will be based on first come first served by verification of eligibility of application. The Treasurer stated information is available on the County website under his office and also on Soil and Water's website.

Laura Oswald, Economic Development Director, addressed the following items:

BROADBAND – Broadband survey results to date, handout attached. According to ECC, Washington County has gotten a better response rate so far than any other county in New York that they have worked with. With the survey, hoping to capture people who do not have service; most critical item. Had planned to close out the survey at the beginning of August but need more outreach to get more survey responses. The goal is to reach underserved or those that do not have any service and now planning to keep the survey open during the week of the fair. Anticipates that ECC will have a good portion of the final report done prior to the fair, they are going to map the location of all the broadband infrastructure and then overlay on top of that the area addresses of underserved and unserved residents to come up with a fair measurement of where there are going to be pockets of underserved and unserved people. Going back to grant awards, Broadband for All, it is becoming clearer that out of that \$500M in state funding a very significant portion possibly \$250M went to the pole owners not the broadband providers; the cost of pole permits and pole replacements went up 100% to 400% between 2016 and now. Owners of the poles refused to permit a provider from hanging their fiber on the pole until the broadband provider replaced those poles which had significant economic impact on the providers. In response to that there is a bill that has gone through the New York State Senate and Assembly with Assemblywoman Woener one of the sponsors called the make ready reform bill that prohibits pole owners from not issuing permits and requiring the broadband providers to replace their poles prior to issuing a permit. This bill has been passed to the Governor's desk and hopefully it will be signed. Because these costs to broadband providers have gone up 100% to 400%, any new projects that they proposed are going to reflect these increased costs which is going to make it harder for New York State to compete for federal funding because we are going to cost ourselves right out of competition; so costly to deliver projects. A federal grant opportunity, NTIA – National Telecommunications and Information Administration, that will award between \$5M and \$30M that focuses on rural unserved areas. A number of north country counties have discussed essentially putting in a joint grant application rather than compete with one another each county is identifying groups of addresses. For this grant, they are using an estimate of \$5,000 cost for the build out per resident per new hook up so possibly could get coverage for between 1 and 6,000 residents with each county submitting approximately 500 addresses. Also looking at contiguous areas and in Washington County focused on Fort Ann, Dresden, and Putnam. They have included the providers in this grant dialogue and they are also providing cost estimates. There is a 10% match and if the ask to NTIA is \$2.5M, the county match would be \$250,000. Suggesting to potentially use stimulus funding

for the match. The grant application is due by August 17<sup>th</sup> and it is possible they might not get enough information to submit. Requesting a resolution from the County to participate in this grant application and provide a match up to \$250,000. The Treasurer stated the lost revenue figure provided does not include the state aid number which can be added and when those funds come back to the General Fund it has less restrictions and they want that money to be recirculated for general services which could include a match for a federal grant. A letter of support committing to the match will suffice. A motion to move forward with letter of support to apply for NTIA grant including county match was moved by Mr. Hicks and seconded by Mr. Campbell. Discussion. If awarded the grant, then it would require full Board approval to accept the grant and amend budget. The motion to move forward with letter of support to apply for NTIA grant including county match was moved by Mr. Hicks, seconded by Mr. Campbell, and adopted. The next application expected to come out is the USDA Reconnect. Because there is no money in New York State the only option is go for federal funds. The County Attorney approved signature of non-disclosure agreement to get data from Spectrum. More data allows them to put together a better picture of who does not have broadband service.

**PLANNING** – Arranged through the State two question and answer sessions on solar one covering northern towns and one covering southern towns. The northern session was well attended but no attendees at the southern session and plan to reschedule if there is enough interest. Right now, solar projects that are receiving NYSERDA funds and if they are projects over 30 acres in an Ag District the Office of Renewable Energy Siting (ORES) is requiring an ag mitigation payment that right now is going to Ag & Markets. County Planning Directors have been working with NYSAC to negotiate with Ag & Markets over giving some of that funding back to the County Planning Departments to potentially use in agricultural land use plans or ag planning. Mr. Hicks stated it should go to the towns. This is all still in discussions at Ag & Markets. The Planning Department has been mapping solar projects in the county and are planning to share at the County Planning Agency meeting. When ORES was created it gave them the ability to override local laws getting in the way of putting up a solar facility and this loss of local control has been a concern and several towns and non-profits in New York State have sued ORES because it turns out ORES hired a consultant who is a contractor and lobbyist for large solar companies to drafted their regulations. The lawsuit is to disallow ORES to waive local laws and basically stating that it is favoring speed over the project.

**TOURISM** – Invited tourism businesses to meet and share/provide ideas. Some ideas included: welcome packages at Airbnb indicating things you can do in the area, upgrade and changing website and having businesses get better at working with each other to promote themselves rather than waiting for someone else to do it; training and best practices.

**STIMULUS FUNDING POTENTIAL: Broadband & Tourism** – As of right now in the County's stimulus plan designated \$6M for broadband. In the Broadband for All program, we were allocated about \$24M and the State said that provided 7,300 new passes however more than 3,000 of those were Hughes Net. The \$24M plus Broadband for All program provided about 4,000 new passes in the county. The costs have skyrocketed because of the pole problems. \$6M is a lot of money but it will not solve the entire broadband problems in the county. Estimated to need at least \$30M in funding to get county coverage closer to 100%. Using the \$6M in stimulus funding is only viable if using it for a match for other federal programs or create a direct subsidy program to the providers and would need to create some sort of evaluation process and would take management. \$6M will only go a small way to get the county fully covered. The Economic Development Director stated if we are looking at 24,000 housing

units in the county and once Slic is finished about 65% of county covered. The impediment to get to the last 35% is cost and rural distances are raising the cost. There is also a NYS DOT fiber tax. Suggestion of possibly having a DPW do the trench work as a match.

Tourism - \$600,000 was set aside in the stimulus funding to help rebuild the tourism economy across the county. One thing they can do with that funding is assist with capital projects; for example, the Washington County Fairgrounds - improvements to site. The fair has applied also for other grant funding. In 2019 and 2020, the tourism budget essentially consisted of \$82,000 in General Fund funds, \$68,000 I Love NY funding (2019) and \$60,000 I Love NY funding (2020) creating a standard tourism budget of about \$150,000 and suggested with the stimulus funding adding \$200,000 for each of the three years to support additional projects.

OTHER BUSINESS: None.

The meeting adjourned at 2:15 P.M.

*Debra Prehoda, Clerk*  
*Washington County Board of Supervisors*

Washington Townships	Responses						Census		
	Business	Farm	Government	Home	Nonprofit	Other	Grand Total	Housing Units	Percent Responses to HU
Hebron	2	3		124		2	131	992	13.2%
Salem	9	5	1	122		2	139	1345	10.3%
Hampton	2	1		45			48	473	10.1%
Hartford	1	6		87			94	929	10.1%
Dresden				53		1	54	582	9.3%
Easton	3	5		74	1		83	1063	7.8%
Argyle	3	4		101		1	109	1904	5.7%
Cambridge	2	3		45			50	895	5.6%
Jackson	1	4		60			65	1172	5.5%
Greenwich	2	2		98		2	104	2182	4.8%
Granville				104			104	2858	3.6%
Fort Ann				55			55	2048	2.7%
Putnam				16			16	674	2.4%
White Creek	1			27			28	1492	1.9%
Kingsbury	7	1		80	3		91	5587	1.6%
Whitehall	1			26			27	1919	1.4%
Fort Edward			1	33	1		35	2608	1.3%
Out of County	5	3		183			191		
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1333</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>1424</b>	<b>28723</b>	<b>5.0%</b>