



Workshop Summary

April 12, Ossian Town Hall

5:00 PM – 8:00 PM

Attendees

- **Advisory Committee Members:** Tom Depuy, Dwight Knapp, David Mark, Chris Pero, Tony Scavone, Dave Walker, Jesse Weidman, John Vanheusen, Mary Ann Scharmburg, Joe Swyers
- **Consultants/Support:** Sheila Hess (CC Environment & Planning), Nathan Rudgers (Farm Credit East), Barbara Johnston (Labella), Heather Ferrero and Miranda Reid (Livingston County Planning)
- **Panelists:** William Bacon (Livingston County Economic Development), Bob Somers (NYS Ag & Markets), Dave Bojanowski (Genesee Valley Conservancy)
- **Residents/Interested Citizens:** (sign in sheet provided to town and consultant)

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1. The purpose of the Ossian Ag & Farmland Protection Workshop was to clarify the roles of diverse public and private agencies, organizations, and private businesses in supporting farming and agribusiness as well as giving an opportunity to farmers and the local farming community to express ideas, issues, concerns and priorities regarding potential agricultural economic development and farmland protection. Strategies and techniques for protection were explored and the role of agriculture in the community was discussed.
2. Sheila Hess, CC Environment & Planning, opened the workshop and gave a brief overview of the planning process. Barbara Johnston, Labella, provided an overview of the zoning regulation analysis, and Nathan Rudgers, Farm Credit East, moderated the panel presentations. The planning team invited and solicited participant comments, and facilitated roundtable discussions.
3. Next steps: The planning team is currently developing inventory reports and scheduling farm visits and interviews. The next Advisory Committee meeting will be held in August or early September to review components of the draft plan.
4. The following pages provide bulleted items that capture panelist statements, workshop participants' questions and comments, and results of round table discussions.

Advisory Committee Meeting

February 16, 2017 – Town Hall





DISCUSSION NOTES

ZONING

1. Zoning law – identify any provisions that may be unreasonably restrictive to farming. Ossian law straight forward, not restrictive – will provide recommendations to improve. NYS can review local zoning to determine if local laws reasonably restrictive.
2. Land use regulation is one thing that the Town can control in terms of agriculture

PANEL DISCUSSION

Panel Session – Key Points

1. William Bacon – Economic Development
 - a. Economic trends – food systems, manufacturing, milk, dairy
 - b. IDA is transitioning from reactive to proactive as it relates to agriculture and economic development – need input from community
 - c. COPY FROM OTHER PAGE
 - d. Small grains study – local source requirements, profitability, planning
 - e. Armstrong communication – broadband opportunities
 - f. Organics - organic wheat (large users looking for shift).
 - g. Green houses (Webster rejected, would like them to come here)
 - h. Feasibility of a centralized public market

Q/A/Discussion

- Are there craft brewers? Yes, one. Now have an incentive for breweries in Livingston County -Caledonia, Avon, Geneseo, Livonia, Dansville
- 90% content of local produced grains – how many tons demand does that create for barley?
- Significant projections for additional demand but will take a while to get there.
- Barilla Plant in Avon – durum wheat – if used local would be a tremendous boon to demand
- A lot of milk and not enough processing – so tremendous interest in processing
- Increase in soy acreage but demand for meal greater
- Varieties and specialties of grains being looked at? Breweries want specific – segregation by variety and by field. GAIN fund: It's a 1% loan fund allowing purchase of additional land as well as other capital investments.



- With seven breweries...how much employment overall? 15-25 direct jobs for people assuming slow growth rate. Indirect much higher. Agritourism and food tourism aimed at further supporting and building agribusiness.
- Do studies include people who can attest to ability to grow different grains? Grower in Genesee County has not been successful.

2. Bob Somers, NYS Ag & Markets

- a. Taxes have increased but benefit under ag exemption has decreased. There is a band aid for the program but time to look at a new type of system and how land should be valued and taxes assessed. Legislation says it can't erode more than 10% but that is steep.
- b. About 4 years ago changed to 2% increase/decrease cap but it will likely still be a constant 2% reduction each year
- c. About a 48% reduction in taxes through ag assessment down to 32% reduction and increased in taxes from fire, library, drainage, lighting – special benefit district
- d. Taxes higher in NY and need to look at how to change to benefit farmers across the state.
- e. Legislature continues to add ag markets/products (bees, woods grown mushrooms, biomass compost, equine operations) consistent amendments.
- f. We don't have parity with 480a – another large tax benefit for forest land owners
- g. Rented land – need to show them benefits of keeping land in production and renting land to farmers. 27% of land in state is rented farmland. Important segment of ag industry and need to promote leasing of that property and address new landowners as they come into the community
- h. Def: land that is owned and rented so keep all lands in ag districts even if rented to protect farm operations
- i. How can the town reach out to people in the community and newcomers
- j. Timber operations can also be included in ag definition
- k. Timber harvesting ordinances by other Towns reduced what landowners could do requiring forestry management, sediment erosion control permit, etc. Making it no longer feasible – no longer allowed if parcel meets requirements to be farm operation in ag district.
- l. 480 A difficult but good program – Need 50 contiguous acres. can reduce taxes by 80% - more important in rural areas – Ten year commitment. Good also because requires professional forest management. Program will change in future to a new 480 b program, two tiered. 480 b has a plan that is third party audited and would have to manage according FSC and FSI certification. Costly to be in and stay in program and only receive 40% reduction. Only need 25 acres and only 12 will be in timber.
- m. Think carefully on 480 a/b to see if it fits your situation.



- n. Under real property tax law – anything affixed to the ground is considered real property – even trees. An assessor could go out and evaluate timber and adjust taxes accordingly. Doing this would be detrimental to rural landscape. Assessor has sole discretion in interpreting real property evaluation.
- o. www.mywoodlot.com – good description of 480a and forms.

Q/A/Discussion

- What are the benefits to rent land to a farmer?
 - If you rent to the farmer need to know if feeding to animals or selling crop. If selling crop be sure there are records to show harvest so can prove to assessor that sale made and whole farm qualifies for ag assessment. Need at least 7 acres in production and \$10K in gross sales collectively by farmer.
 - Some people believe farmers don't pay fair share of taxes. How is that impacted by 480 a and shift to b
 - Cost of services studies will prove otherwise because farms don't require the same level of services as residential properties do. NYSDEC is looking at developing a fund for towns that have 1% taxable value reduced in 480a/b program so municipality can be reimbursed for that loss.
 - Is there any traction to getting ag assessment moved over to ag & markets?
 - Last year seemed to have a good shot – recommendation went before a committee but not successful. Department of taxation and finance would not give up responsibility. Looking at other state programs – would take a study group and commission to make case with Governor's office to make change. Far too expensive to own productive land.
3. Dave Bojanowski – Genesee Valley Conservancy – Farmland Conservationist
- a. Mission to protect natural areas, open space and farmland
 - b. Currently protect just under 17,000 acres of land (10,000 acres of farmland). Only a small part of the 200,000 acres in Livingston County
 - c. Best farmland protection is a farm that is economically viable - profitable.
 - d. Profitable farms take care of land, pay taxes, invest in community, don't parcel off land in down times
 - e. Conservation easement restricts land from development and subdivision reducing threat to farmland, they do not reduce property taxes as tax is based on current use. Maybe tax credit at state or federal level, but not local
 - f. Farmland protection requires diverse tools. Easements just one tool.
 - g. Tools to protect farmland in the County
 - h. Education – Livingston County educational tours (decision-making tour)
 - i. Livingston County Planning and Ag & Farmland Protection Board meet monthly and work hard to implement ag protection plan for County. Ag exemptions/ag



- assessments, new markets, review developments like water line and potential impact on ag, mapping, education of legislature
- j. Farm Bureau lobbying and workshops (recent: impacts of large scale solar farms)
 - k. Farmer of the Year
 - l. Famer/Neighbor Dinner
 - m. Succession Plan – many farmers don't have a plan. Livingston County assists. There are ag networks and interest/realization about how farms will pass on farm operations to another. Beneficial to community if farm can do that successfully and reduce likelihood of dividing up land.

Q/A/Discussion

- What is most important component of the ag plan?
- Statement from the community about what they would like to see for ag in their community. Example – Groveland - we like it the way it is and we want to keep it that way. They used a land evaluation criteria approach (soil type, size of parcel, proximity to ag, slope) and did an overlay of most important parcels . Another example: Village of Perry comp plan – we like our rural ag entrances and our village intact and walkable. We don't want sprawl. A village policy t provided edge to get protection funds for a large farm outside village. Know what you want to keep and how you want it to look and work with consultants how to get there.



1. SWOT Brainstorming Exercise

<p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Large open fields - Low urban pressure - Forward thinkers - Progressive producers – willing to take on farms, get along - Supportive community - Strong network in agriculture - Service providers - Tax rate lowered/lower tax rate - Healthcare access - Roads well maintained - Soil resource - Willing to change/evolving - Water and access to water - Consolidation of farms - Good public relations - Potential to develop new products due to minerals in the soil 	<p>Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Full time farmers getting older - Younger farmers getting jobs off farms - No 3-phase electricity - No internet access (limited) - Limited cellular service - Marginal ground might revert - Lack of succession planning for older producers - Wildlife issues from state lands/DEC deer management issues - Distance to market - Commodity prices vs yield - Tax increases - Distance from processing plant
<p>Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Close to I-390 - Education - Perceived as a good career choice - Regionally recognized as a rich grower of different products - Possibility of niche products - Hops, small grains, wheat - Organic veggies and grains - Proximity of state lands for bee habitat - Broad band service 	<p>Threats</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Property tax issue - Special district issues - More regulations - Lessening enrollment and school district costs - Unfunded mandates (health care) - Immigration restrictions - Availability of skilled labor - Outside land purchases and their understanding of agriculture, purchasers of farms for non-ag purpose - Wind/solar farms? - Road maintenance and capacity - Some pressure from non-farmers





2. Ag economic development opportunities in Ossian:
 - Dansville processing infrastructure
 - Organics
 - Small veg farms
 - Bush blueberries
 - Local sourced-proximity issues

 - Costs associated with landownership in Ossian/Exemptions? - Property tax issues

3. Succession/New farmers?
 - Aging population – younger generation becomes part time farmers. Farmers getting bigger and smaller – this describes ag in general -no middle sized farms
 - Many property owners hold land and rent to larger operations
 - Distance to other ag operations – not a deterrent
 - Depending on terrain, conversion to trees
 - Solar? Too far from substation?
 - Expensive and cost prohibitive, fewer farmers farming larger acreages
 - Way to get into farming through families or neighbor
 - Consolidation occurs and farms often stay in families
 - Kids don't always continue to farm but choose to rent to larger farm
 - Not hard to rent or sell farmland
 - Some abandoned farms cleared and back in farming – probably at limit in Ossian
 - Some small farms = recreation/renting use.
 - Medium sized farming go away

4. Land protection tools and best management techniques?
 - Are there people who own land who don't rent it for farming?
 - No easements currently in Ossian – Land trust would work with landowners who are interested in conserving land, but Purchase of Development Rights would not be viable in this area
 - Competition among farmers
 - Property taxes associated with zoning – can zoning be improved to protect ag?
 - Deer management needed
 - If zoning were to allow industry/commercial -need to place appropriately
 - Some local farms planned for protection
 - No infrastructure, no well/septic, remote
 - Great water
 - What about local communities locally shared among residents?
 - Need planning to protect Ag
 - Tighten up regs and finish comp plan to further protect ag
 - Vision = we like it the way it is (Town of Perry)



- Future of State Land? Will it remain as is?

Q/A/Discussion:

- Will the plan result in yearly actions and reports? Plan will include recommendations and implementation with actions and timelines
- Important aspect of plan is to adopt and be clear about what projects they really want to do. What Town can do to protect and promote agriculture. At the end of the day it's the projects you take on. Keep it simple.

5. Meeting Materials

- a. Agenda
- b. Program Flyer
- c. Resource Maps
- d. Round Table Discussion Worksheet