

Town of Salem Agriculture and Farm Viability Plan
Steering Committee Meeting

MINUTES

Tuesday, October 13, 7:00 – 8:30 pm
Salem Town Office
214 Main Street

Attending: John Steele, Neil Adams, Scott Fitscher, Dottie Schneider, Pat Sheldon, Chuck Alexander, Jay Bellanca, Nancy Hand Higby, Penny Saddlemire

Mapping – Scott Fitscher from NRCS:

Scott Fitscher from the Natural Resource Conservation Service provided an overview of the maps he generated to get an estimate of land involved in agriculture in Salem. As discussed previously, the committee is interested in having a map to visually highlight the importance of agriculture to the community, demonstrating agriculture's economic importance in the landscape. Map data on farmland is somewhat difficult to come by. Scott shared a map of parcels that have historically enrolled in federal farm programs – for example commodity or conservation programs provided through the Farm Bill. He indicated however, that this probably over-estimates land in agriculture as landowners may be applying for forest programs or land may leave agriculture and not notify the Farm Service Agency. The second map shared provided parcels coded by the real property tax code system as agriculture. According to this data source there were 4,100 acres in agriculture in Salem. Attendees at the meeting all thought this number was low and in looking at the map, many parcels were noted that were agricultural, but not coded as such. The committee decided the best way to get at this data was to ask the active farms in town to identify what lands they currently manage. This information will be compiled onto a base farm map entitled, "Salem Farmland" with parcel lines removed. Maps will be provided to the following farms as identified by the steering committee:

- ✓ Woody Hill
- ✓ McEachron
- ✓ Chambers
- ✓ Waitt
- ✓ Steele
- ✓ Pat and Albert Sheldon
- ✓ Atwater
- ✓ Adams
- ✓ 3-Corner Field Farm
- ✓ Underwood
- ✓ Game Farm
- ✓ Mike Nolan (identify land in Salem that he manages)
- ✓ Clark
- ✓ Gardenworks

Maps will be personally delivered with a copy of the draft recommendations and an invitation to the public meeting by Dottie and others from the steering committee. Farmers will be asked on this map to identify any land they manage, including: actively cultivated land, pasture ground, older fields that haven't been recently worked but are still "farmable" and working forest land, including sugar bush and timber stands.

Two additional large maps will be printed – one for the planning board and one for the public meeting for attendees to mark up. Smaller versions of the map will be available to attendees at the public meeting as well to capture any smaller, niche farms. Scott will provide these maps in advance of the meeting on October 26.

Discussion of revisions of draft recommendations for the plan:

Liz walked through the revised draft recommendations and actions for the plan. The draft provided was revised after the last committee meeting in September. A few suggestions were made for further revisions or clarifications:

- Goal 1, Recommendation 1: There was discussion related to the availability of state and federal funding – will there actually be funding to contribute to these projects? This was not settled, but recognized as a possible limitation to implementing this recommendation.
- Goal 1, Recommendation 3: Indicate that siting such facilities should be done carefully. Also possibly expand to provide opportunities for easier approvals of installation of renewable energy generation equipment on farm – such as solar panels.
- Goal 3, Recommendation 2: There was much discussion on what such a sign would say and who the "audience" is for such a sign. Most there agreed it was a good idea, and that details would have to be worked out during implementation of the plan.
- Goal 3, Recommendation 3: Include a statement that such education could provide important understanding of the "spectrum of issues farmers face related to land use regulations". Possibly include this thought in the last recommendation instead.
- Goal 4, Recommendation 2: Identify that there are positive economic benefits of new development as well.
- Goal 4, Recommendation 3: Expand the goal to include "landowners" as well as farmers. Also include an action step to distribute a soon-to-be released publication provided by NYS Dept of Agriculture and Markets on the programs authorized under Ag Districts Law.
- Goal 4, Recommendation 4: Include a suggestion that meetings are publicized through all local newspapers along with mailings to farmers and landowners. Change the language related to the composition of the steering committee to say "a proportional representation of farmers and ag business members." Include a suggestion to work directly with the Agricultural Commission on the development of any new or revised land use regulations prior to submission of such regulations to the Town Board for approval.

Liz will make these changes and provide a revised copy to steering committee members in advance of the public meeting. This revised draft will also be provided at the public meeting.

Planning for Public Meeting, October 26, 2009:

The agenda for the public meeting will include discussion of the draft recommendations and action steps and a discussion of the map. Dottie will inform the Town Board of the public

meeting. Pat will inform the Planning Board. Dottie will post signs in local spots advertising the meeting and will work to post a media advisory with local press. Liz will provide the media advisory to her for posting. Liz will also email the steering committee about the public meeting and encourage all members to spread the word. Location was discussed and Dottie will look into the possibility of using Proudfit Hall instead of the Courthouse for the meeting.

Other Business:

David Haight shared that Liz Brock will be leaving AFT and thus no longer working on the Salem plan. David will take over work there with the assistance of other AFT staff. He can be reached at dhaight@farmland.org or 518-581-0078 ext. 304.

Action Items:

- ✓ Scott to provide new maps to committee members for distribution to the farmers listed above and to David Haight for distribution at the public meeting.
- ✓ Dottie and other committee members to deliver large maps and draft recommendations to farmers listed above.
- ✓ Liz to revise draft recommendations for distribution to steering committee and at public meeting.
- ✓ Liz will write an agenda for the public meeting and distribute to the steering committee.
- ✓ Liz to write a media advisory about the public meeting and provide to Dottie for posting in all three local newspapers.
- ✓ Dottie to place media advisory in local papers and post signs in local spots about the meeting.
- ✓ Dottie to check with Proudfit Hall for meeting location and confirm.
- ✓ Dottie to inform Town Board of public meeting.
- ✓ Pat Sheldon to inform Planning Board of public meeting.

Next committee meeting date, Monday, November 9, 7:00 – 8:30 pm Town Office