

Town of Salem Agriculture and Farm Viability Plan
Steering Committee Meeting

MINUTES

Monday, March 9, 7:00 – 9:00 pm
Salem Town Office
214 Main Street

Present: Nancy Hand Higby, Steve Alexander, Eileen Ryan, Robert Laukaitis, Karen Weinberg, Dottie Schneider, Chris DeBolt, Jack Daniels, Seth McEachron, Herb Perkins

Stakeholder Interviews:

Liz provided a draft outline of the interviews performed to date (8 in total). She has 2 more scheduled. She will call Phyllis Underwood again to try to schedule a meeting. She will also reach out to Al Kleine as several committee members and interview candidates have suggested him as a key stakeholder in the town. Liz will provide a draft stakeholder interview summary to the Steering Committee prior to the meeting in April.

Mapping of Farmland:

Chris DeBolt provided an overview of how the Assessor map presented at a previous meeting was generated with assistance from the Office of Real Property Services. He explained some of the common reasons for mis-coding of land; if a parcel has a house on it, even if the land is in active agricultural use, it may be classified as residential. Or if land is in hay or fallow, it is often coded as vacant. Chris said we are welcome to provide edits to this map in order to create a master land use map for the Town of Salem, but that these changes will not change the assessment on the land identified as incorrect. The committee began the process of correcting the map using local knowledge. Chris took these edits back with him and will have ORPS correct the map. He will bring the corrected map with an aerial photograph as it's base to the next meeting to continue the correction process with the committee and any guests present.

Brainstorming Goals for the Plan:

Liz led a brainstorming process to begin to develop goals for the plan. The committee came up with the ideas listed below. Karen Weinberg suggested changing the name of the plan given that most farmers in town were not interested in permanent land protection tools and that the title of a Farmland Protection plan would turn them away from wanting to be involved. She said that the best way to keep farmland active was to make farming profitable. She indicated that many of the traditional land use planning tools don't make sense for Salem and that our efforts should be focused on tools that support farm viability. Chris DeBolt suggested that many of the tools related to farm viability worked best at the County scale, given they have more resources to work with than the towns. Liz said she would look for examples of towns working to support farm viability and bring them to the next meeting.

Brainstormed concepts for goals: (edited only for clarity)

- ✓ Secure land and infrastructure that farming depends on
- ✓ Agricultural support businesses are critical for viability of agriculture in town. Recognize the value of the support businesses located in Salem as a hub that all of Washington County agriculture depends upon
- ✓ Renovate rail infrastructure – having rail system saves farmers in Washington County money. Businesses like Cargill and Carovail can ship products cheaper by rail than by truck, passing those savings on to the farmers
- ✓ Provide information on farm succession plans and make resources available to farmers to create them. Succession can be outside the family as well.
- ✓ Keep land available for farming
- ✓ Make “small” agriculture more viable in town.
- ✓ Encourage markets locally (closer than NYC) and encourage consumers to buy local
- ✓ Protect the value of the land for farmers. PDR is not a viable tool for many farmers
- ✓ Promote farm viability. Keep farmers in farming – make it a profitable occupation. **(Identified as what should be the number one goal of the plan)**
- ✓ Deal with rising taxes
- ✓ Education new landowners on leasing options. Connect landowners with farmers and vice versa.
- ✓ Will AMD produce pressures on land, drive up land values and create development pressure that pushes agriculture out? What do we do about that potential threat?

Next Public Meeting:

The next public input meeting was scheduled for April 28 at 7:00 at the Courthouse. Dottie to reserve the use of the Courthouse for the meeting. Liz will provide content for a press release about the meeting and send to Dottie for placement in the local papers. Liz will also distribute the press release to all stakeholders interviewed to continue their involvement in the plan. Agenda for this meeting includes: reviewing Master Land Use map and discussion of draft goals for plan.

Next committee meeting date: April 13, 2009, 7:00 – 9:00, Town Office

Agenda items to include:

1. Develop draft goals for the plan to present to public for comment
2. Continue map review
3. Discuss toolbox to meet goals.

Action Items:

1. AFT to finish interviews and provide draft interview summary to committee by April 13 meeting.
2. Chris DeBolt to update map and provide new copy at the April 13 meeting.
3. AFT to write press release on public meeting and provide to Dottie by April 6.
4. Dottie to work with Town staff to place press release with all local papers serving Salem.
5. AFT to send the press release to all interviewees.