

Town of Salem Agriculture and Farm Viability Plan
Steering Committee Meeting

MEETING NOTES

Monday, September 14, 7:00 – 8:30 pm
Salem Town Office
214 Main Street

Attending: Neil Adams, Chuck Alexander, Steve Alexander, Liz Brock, Eileen Ryan, Dottie Schneider, Pat Sheldon, John Steele.

Update on Farmer Meeting, held 8/19/09:

The Committee discussed the Farmer Meeting held at Sheldon's Farmstand on 8/19. All agreed that the turn out for this meeting was good, with many of the large farms in town represented. Committee members expressed disappointment that there was not much discussion or questions regarding the draft recommendations. It was suggested that farmers were listening, taking in the information, but withholding their reactions apart from voicing their concerns over the agricultural economy, milk prices and their wish for help in promoting agriculture in order to help farms stay viable. The meeting was rushed by the loss of light and it was the first time landowners were hearing the information. A second public meeting on the revised recommendations might encourage more dialogue on the issues. Farmers present at the committee meeting suggested more should be done to encourage farmer participation, including phone calls and letters to landowners regarding public meetings and steering committee meetings. Judy Flagg, Town Board member took minutes and the Steering Committee will seek to post these online with all other meeting notes from this process.

Review revised recommendations:

Liz provided copies of a revised version of the recommendations. Initial revisions were made based on discussion at the Farmer Meeting in August. Liz asked for additional feedback from the farmers and landowners present at the meeting based on their thoughts and also what they'd heard after the Farmer Meeting.

Much of the discussion revolved around Goal #4. It was suggested that the goal be reworded to better describe its mission. The first recommendation needs to be clarified as to who would be on the Agricultural Advisory Committee. In Recommendation 1, it was suggested that farmer representation should be based on a percentage of the land in agriculture in the community, rather than a set number of representatives. In Recommendation 2, it was suggested that the changes to the subdivision code were not necessary and posed a perceived threat to landowner's rights. Liz indicated this section could be cut from the list if it was not needed. Recommendation 4 was similarly suggested as unnecessary as the Agricultural Stewardship Association currently does landowner education and is in contact with landowners in Salem on a regular basis. Recommendation 5 needs to be edited to better describe the content below the recommendation and the last sentence will be struck from the recommendation altogether.

Under the first goal, Pat indicated her approval of the efforts to support the rail infrastructure and full funding for Cooperative Extension. On Recommendation 3 under the first goal, regarding alternative energy generation, the major issue with this will be location of such new facilities.

Liz will make edits to the recommendations as indicated above and provide a second draft prior to the steering committee meeting in October.

Review revised farm map:

Liz shared the most recent version of the agricultural map with committee members and guests present. This iteration of the map was done by Scott Fitscher, NRCS Washington County, and shows assessor codes overlaid on an aerial photograph. The map was difficult to read and needs road names to help identify parcels easier. Liz will work with Scott to make corrections to this map prior to the public meeting in October. Pat indicated it would be useful if a large version of this map could be provided to the Planning Board. There was agreement that finding out exactly what percentage of land in Salem is agricultural would be very helpful in this process.

Continued outreach plan:

It was suggested that the complete revised draft recommendations be sent to landowners, farmers and the Town Board/Planning Board with a letter inviting them to the public meeting in October. It would also be helpful to include a blank page inviting written comments on the draft that can be submitted at the public meeting, or questions that can be mailed in prior to it. In addition, this mailing could include a copy of the draft parcel map requesting landowners to identify parcels involved in agriculture. The map could also be provided at the public meeting with a request that edits are mailed in.

A third public meeting was scheduled for **Monday, October 26 from 7:00 – 9:00 pm** at the Salem Courthouse. The revised draft recommendations for the plan will be discussed at this meeting. Signs should be hung in public spaces around town, including Sheldon's Farmstand as suggested by Pat. Direct outreach and word of mouth should be used as much as possible to get the word out about this meeting.

Extension of contract with NYSDAM:

Liz indicated that Salem's contract with NYSDAM was due to expire in February 2010 and suggested that at this stage it might be useful to seek a contract extension. The planning process will continue as scheduled, however it was decided to apply for the extension to ensure the process was not rushed. Liz will forward the required paperwork for filing this extension to Dottie and Steve.

Other items of discussion:

Also discussed was the issue of the current state of agricultural land. The plan should take into account the conversion/reversion of farmland. Former farmland that has grown up may be converted back into active farmland, while existing fields may be taken out of production

and allowed to grow to brush in the future. Opportunities should exist for all farmland, whether currently in production or not.

There was discussion regarding the challenges/threats to farm businesses that new development could bring. The three farmers present at the meeting questioned what challenges those might be and whether in fact any challenges would be presented at all. The example of danger to slow moving tractors was given along with the suggestion that new neighboring landowners might object to farming. A list of the potential threats to farmland from conversion to other uses should be included as part of the plan.

In addition, there was constructive dialogue about the day-to-day economic realities of farming between the farmers and non-farmer members of the steering committee.

Action Items:

- ✓ Liz to edit recommendations and provide a draft to the Steering Committee prior to the October steering committee meeting.
- ✓ Liz to work with Scott Fitscher to edit the map.
- ✓ Dottie to secure meeting space in the Courthouse for the public meeting in October.
- ✓ Dottie to post flyers regarding public meeting at key local locations.
- ✓ Dottie to secure meeting minutes from the Farmer Meeting from Town Board member Judy Flagg to post on website.
- ✓ Liz to organize a mailing of the draft recommendations to the Town Board, Planning Board and local landowners and farmers. They can also be posted online so all community members can have access.
- ✓ Committee members to do phone call outreach to landowners regarding October public meeting and October steering committee meeting.
- ✓ Liz to provide contract extension information to Dottie and Steve.

Next Steering Committee date: Tuesday, October 13, 7:00 – 8:30 pm.