

**MEETING MINUTES**  
**SALEM COMPREHENSIVE PLAN COMMITTEE**  
**March 17, 2008**  
**7 p.m. Town Hall**

Attendees: Dorothy Schneider, Chuck Alexander, Joseph Childs, Bill Eberle, Bruce Ferguson, Rob Laukaitis, Brigid Nosal, Pat Phillips, Eileen Ryan, Anita Witten

Others: Janet Donoghue, Edward Donoghue, Al Cormier

Guest speaker: Chris DeBolt, Washington County Planning

There will be three places where the public can access the documents and information produced and gathered by the planning committee. These are: the Town Hall, the Courthouse and the Bancroft Library. Chuck provided three copies of the Village Developmental Plan to be included with the documents.

The meeting began with a presentation by Chris DeBolt from the Washington County Planning Office. Chris has been in his current position for 2.5 months. He stated that prior to our meeting he toured the Town and Village with Bill Eberle. Chris stated that the County is available to provide support for our development of a farmland protection plan and/or the Comprehensive plan. He said he reviewed information on the Town that the County currently has on file. It should be noted that the County does NOT have a record of the Town's Right to Farm Law. He stated that the Town Clerk should forward this type of Legislation to the County when it is passed by the Town Officials.

Chris suggested that we review the Cambridge Comprehensive Plan which is in the review process. He stated he could provide information on what Cambridge did and didn't look at when developing their plan. He also suggested the "Guide to Local Planning for Agriculture in NY" would be helpful to the group. The Committee has some copies of this Guide available to us.

Chris said the County had an Agricultural and Farm plan that was completed in 1996. He stated we might want to adhere to this plan. When asked if we were required to follow the County plan and not have conflicting goals and objectives, Chris stated that we were not required to stay within the County plan and since it was old we may find that we do have some areas where our plan may not follow their plan. Chris stated that the County's plan land use laws promoted subdividing. The plan also addressed passing Right to Farm Laws, zoning, concentrating development and growth, discouraged low-density development, focusing efforts on agriculture economic development (an example would be the Battenkill Kitchen) and the plan did not just focus on development rights programs.

He went on to discuss the high multiplier industries where costs are significant to transport products. He stated that for a dairy community a company like Cabot that requires a high demand for the dairy products would be a good fit to the area.

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Chris also suggested that the County could help identify the critical mass for farming in the County. This type of information could help the planning process when looking at the type of business we would like to attract our area. He suggested that looking at businesses that would enhance the food to market process. For example he mentioned how Canadian companies have recently started to look at opening facilities in the US to help keep transportation costs down by processing the foods closer to where they are grown. He said this type of business growth may be an option for our area.

Chris also discussed the Agricultural Stewardship Association's (ASA) purchase development rights (PDR) program as a method of farmland protection. He did caution that this program generally requires that there be some development pressure on the area before ASA will commit resources. He stated that looking just at Salem would not be efficient for ASA but that we could work with ASA on the bigger picture and we could focus on Salem farms. He stated that the county must be the one to apply to the State for other purchase rights programs. At this time there seemed to be a general consensus that purchase rights programs do not have funds easily available to us.

Chris stated he could help with some mapping and GIS at the county level. He passed around some maps where he used coloring to differentiate between different land use parcels in the Town. These maps were developed from assessor information which is based on property tax designations and not formal zoning. Using the assessor information can be misleading since it is based on a tax designation. Chris noted that Salem seemed to have a high concentration of dairy farms.

Dottie asked Chris if he could provide the number of farms with the Town. Chris stated that based on the assessor information he could find out the number of parcels that are listed as agriculture use based on the gross sale of the "farm" of \$10,000 or more. These parcels may also include land that is leased to a farmer. He cautioned again that this information may not provide an accurate number of farms. He said the last agricultural census data was from 2002. He stated he could get the information for the Town of Salem from that census which may provide a better number for farms within the Town. He said the new census data will not be available until 2009.

He said that the County planning Department could provide the committee with guidance, different tools for gathering information, assist with data that is available including the new soil layer of GIS and plot maps. He said to contact him to request data and that he could do the legwork to get data concise and in a format to facilitate analyzing the data.

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Chris also said that if the Town decides to do some zoning that we should be careful not to make it so specific that the zoning would prevent something like a farmer having a farm stand on his property. He said that land use should be farm friendly.

Other issues that were touched on included whether farms needed building permits, rights for farmers on common drives. Pat mentioned that some farm fields once had several access points and now some are down to one access point and there is a concern that the needs of farmers may be overlooked when it comes to accessing the farmlands.

The next topic of discussion was the workshop attended by Dottie and Joseph regarding the grant. Dottie had a folder of information and forms that we will need to use for administering the grant. She said the funds have been available to us since February 27<sup>th</sup>. To get the funds we need to submit a voucher to the State and the funds will be deposited into the Town's account. We can get up to 25% as an advance payment.

Dottie and Nancy have completed a scope of services for the planned RFP. Eileen volunteered to review the scope and put together the rest of the RFP for the committee's approval. Eileen will contact John Brennan from the State Dept. of Agriculture and Markets to determine if the RFP must be as formal as the State RFPs or can be less formal since the State has very stringent requirements. The RFP will be forwarded to the committee during the month for approval.

Chris said we would provide us with a list of planners that we could use as a mailing list for sending out the RFP.

The last topic was the Village General Developmental Plan. At the last meeting Nancy requested that everyone read the plan and provide feedback to Joseph. Joseph stated that he received some feedback. He said that the Village Board approved the plan and he is prepared to send it to the County for their review. The Committee concluded that the plan did not conflict with the Committee's agenda but they did not feel it was appropriate to give "approval" to the plan, as it was a Village plan and not a joint Town/Village plan and since the Village Board approve it Joseph should move forward with it.

Action items:

Eileen: contact Ag and Markets and prepare the RFP

All: review the RFP

The next meeting is scheduled for **Monday, April 21 at 7 p.m. at the Town Hall.**