

SALEM COMPREHENSIVE PLAN COMMITTEE

MEETING MINUTES

JUNE 16, 2008

6:30 P.M. Town Hall

Attendees: Dottie Schneider, Nancy Hand Higby, Joseph Childs, Steve Alexander, Anita Witten, Brigid Nosal, Rob Laukaitis, Eileen Ryan

The meeting consisted of three interviews of the following consultants: Community Planning, American Farmland Trust and Behan Associates. Each candidate gave a brief overview of their proposal that was submitted in May in response to the Farmland Protection Plan RFP.

Community Planning: Nan Stolzenburg

Nan began by stating the Farmland Protection Plan should answer three questions:

- 1) What are the current conditions? What issues are facing the farmers of our community today?
- 2) What is wanted for the future of agriculture in our community?
- 3) How do we get to where we want to be?

Nan stated that a database of information about the community would be created using all available sources. Public input would be obtained focusing on the agriculture business community which would include interviews of key people that the committee would identify. Recommendations in the plan would then flow from what the community wants to accomplish. A toolbox (not just one tool would be developed including available grants, programs and education regarding farmland protection. The Plan would reflect a set up for the future to support agriculture within the community.

Community Planning would facilitate the adoption process which includes local board adoption, the county Farmland board adoption and approval by the Commissioner of Agriculture and Markets (Ag & Mrkts). This farmland protection plan could be a stand-alone plan or incorporated into the Comprehensive Plan. If we choose to incorporate it into the Comprehensive plan and second adoption process and public hearing would be required. Any new plan or update to a comprehensive plan requires a public hearing, approval by the County planning board and a SEQRA review.

Community planning would help develop a map to show priority farms and farmland based on criteria developed during the plan process. This prioritization would be used by the community when applying for grants and easements. One possible model for a developing priority farmland is the USDA LESA model.

Steve asked if Community Planning would use the County resources for mapping. Nan stated that for consistency it may be best to get the raw data from the county and Community Planning would use that

data to develop the maps. She stated a full comprehensive plan is not feasible with the amount of the grant but the Farmland Protection Plan would be a big component of a Comprehensive Plan.

Community Planning could start in September which better coincides with the farming schedule and that it is extremely important to get the farmers involved. Nan stated that noontime meetings offering lunch, nighttime meetings or even going out to the barns would be ways to get the farmers involved.

Community Planning is flexible on the price depending on the amount of work the Committee would do and cutting back in other areas. The final deliverables would be given to us in hardcopy and electronically.

American Farmland Trust – David Haight

American Farmland Trust (AFT) was started by farmers about 30 years ago. New York has had an office since 1990. AFT does a lot of State and Federal policy work on farm bills, organizes conferences, helps organize local support of farming and works with towns to find ways that towns can locally support their farmers. For example one Town changed zoning laws which allowed for the easier production of milk. AFT has completed 8 county farmland plans, helped purchase development rights in Jefferson County, helped complete town level protection and comprehensive plans and has many contacts to identify best practices.

AFT stated that they anticipate a 12-month process which would begin with steering committee meetings and include interviews of local farmers. They would spend a lot of time on one to one contact which helps to share information as well as gather information. Some areas they would focus on include what is changing in the community, what the community envisions, what niche opportunities are available, zoning, supportive businesses.

Aft would hold public hearings to bring both the supporting business and the farmers together and look broadly at the many tools available to help protect farmlands. Aft would help develop focused recommendations, develop a readable report and help design and implementation matrix including available grants and funding. AFT is local (Saratoga) and all they do is farmland work.

For mapping they would work with the County to develop maps instead of developing the maps themselves. Aft will not seek out additional mapping info but use what is already available and review the accuracy of the available information. AFT will help identify priority farmland and work with us to develop a ranking system for future prioritization. Liz Brock will be the lead person from AFT with some involvement from Dave. Liz will lead the public meetings.

The price quoted in the RFP is a fixed cost and a plan will be completed for that amount quoted.

Behan Associates – John Behan, Rick Lederer-Barnes

Behan is currently working with Charleton on a farmland protection plan. They are in contact with John Brennan at Ag & Mrkts to ensure any plan will be approved by the Commissioner. Their plan process is flexible so that it will meet our needs. A steering Committee will be established and an inventory will be put into a GIS – Behan will get data from the County to help with this inventory.

A basic financial analysis will be done to determine the value of the agriculture and the cost of protecting the agriculture. They anticipate two major focus groups of farmers and businesses supporting farmers. They also stressed that individuals that lease land to farmers are an important group because in general their land is vulnerable to development since they are not the actual farmers.

They anticipate one town wide meeting to get input and to educate the town as to what the Protection plan is and the importance of the plan.

A priority ranking system will be developed. They stated that Ag & Mrkts would like to see parcels ranked from 1 to X but Behan would provide a system to allow lands to be ranked as owners come forward wanting to get grants or easements. Some of the criteria will be soil, core farmland, the infrastructure, and access to the land. They will develop a form that can be used in the future for prioritizing land.

The actual Plan will be a summary of all the work and information gathered and they will help to get the appropriate approvals. The final plan could also be adopted as an addendum to the Comprehensive Plan.

An analysis of farms will be completed. Behan finds that assessor information is at best 10% accurate and very vague as to the type of farmland so some field touring will be done to help verify the accuracy of farmland information. This will require support and help from the Committee. Behan will help to identify grants and (at additional cost) help secure grants in the future as part of an implementation plan. Behan spoke about green infrastructure and protecting these resources.

Behan can start when the committee is ready to begin. They use a team approach, Rick would be the project manager, Mike Welti would also be part of the team, John would be involved in the public meetings and Melissa Barry is an environmental planner.

Behan stated the \$25,000 quoted in the proposal is a fixed cost and they would complete the plan and help with the approval process for this amount.

The meeting concluded with the agreement that committee members would get their **consultant selection to Dottie Schneider by MONDAY JUNE 23**. Dottie will compile the votes and a meeting will be held on July 7 at 7 p.m. to get agreement on the consultant selection to be presented at the July 9 Town Board meeting.

THE NEXT MEETING IS SCHEDULED FOR JULY 7 AT 7 P.M. AT THE TOWN HALL.