

**ST. LAWRENCE COUNTY
AGRICULTURAL AND FARMLAND PROTECTION BOARD**

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DRAFT MEETING MINUTES

Thursday, November 3, 2011, 7:30 PM

County Courthouse, Room 226, 48 Court Street, Canton, New York

I. Call to Order

A. Roll Call and Determination of a Quorum. Andrews called the meeting to order at 7:36 pm, and noted a quorum was not present. **Members present:** Bob Andrews, Clive Chambers, David Coffey, Darren Colton, Allyn Tubbs and Keith Zimmerman. **Members absent:** Tony Arquiett, David Fisher, Jon Greenwood, Dan Martin, and Steve McKnight. **Staff present:** Matilda Larson. **Others present:** Leigh Rodriguez, St. Lawrence County IDA.

B. Adoption of the Agenda. The agenda was not adopted due to lack of a quorum.

C. Approval of the Minutes. Chambers asked the minutes be corrected to note Buchanan's presence at the September 1st meeting. No action was taken on the minutes due lack of a quorum.

II. Old Business

A. Update on 2011 Annual Review of Ag Districts 1 and 2. Larson said she received a phone call from the Department of Ag and Markets informing her Ag Districts 1 and 2 will be certified, and the County should receive written notice this month. Larson said additions to Ag District 2 include the Dean parcels in Lisbon. Larson confirmed for Chambers that the Ag Board's recommendation to exclude the Dean parcels was based on the Ag Board's belief that the farm operations on those parcels was a secondary, not a primary use, of the land.

III. Reports

A. Soil and Water Conservation District. Howard said the County will provide Soil and Water with level funding, which is 10% less than what was allocated to the agency two years ago, and less than what was allocated in 1985. Howard said they are also

administering a \$1 million grant to address non-point source pollution with farms, which has assisted six farms to date. Howard was asked how large the assisted farms are. Howard said they were not CAFO farms; the assisted farms had herds between 100 to 150 cows. Coffey asked if these farms had to be in proximity to water resources. Howard said yes, assistance given to farms is tied to water quality. Howard said they are also responding to a couple of well water complaints, and said they were primarily due to well development and their proximity to septic tanks. Larson asked Howard if the District is pursuing more grant funds to replenish the organization's budget. Howard said with less staff, they are unable to pursue more funds, and they will seek to fill a part-time position with workfare clients to answer phones.

Zimmerman arrived at 7:41 pm and a quorum was established.

B. Cooperative Extension. Chambers said the latest issue of "Ag News" was recently distributed, and they are moving forward with Clinton, Essex, and Franklin County extension offices to create a biofuel crops position that will start in April. Chambers said they made an offer to a candidate to fill the Dairy Specialist position, and the candidate is still in the process of accepting the offer. Chambers said the position is designed to work with mid- to large-size farms. Chambers announced he will be retiring at the end of December, and Patrick Ames will assume the role as Executive Director. Larson asked who would be attending future Ag Board meetings on behalf of Cooperative Extension. Chambers said these meetings would be attended by either Ames or Buchanan.

C. Industrial Development Authority. Rodriguez said she was attending tonight's meeting on behalf of Kelly who could not attend. Rodriguez said the IDA had discussions with the County Workforce Investment Board, Greg Hart from the Workforce Development Institute, and Cooperative Extension to examine if Jefferson County's farm labor placement and training program could be replicated in St. Lawrence County. Rodriguez said County Legislator Sam Burns submitted a request to the Board of Legislators to consider using casino compact money to fund a training program, \$20,000 of which would be used for ag worker training. Candidates in the program would receive new worker training, or learn new techniques. If funded, Rodriguez explained the IDA, WIB and Workforce Development Institute will seek eligible projects and applicants.

Zimmerman said the North Country Regional Economic Development Council said a number of working groups, including agriculture, were established to identify industry issues. Zimmerman said a couple of work groups were missed: workforce development and the medical industry. Zimmerman said once the Council's strategic plan is forwarded to the Governor on November 15th, the Council will begin working on addressing both issues in the next round.

Andrews said he had a news article regarding Jefferson County's workforce development program, and they established a website to promote it. Andrews said with a high unemployment rate in St. Lawrence County, he hopes it can be replicated here. Chambers asked how many people Jefferson County has placed through the program. Rodriguez said of the 20 applications Jefferson County received, two were placed. A comment was made

that farms aren't relying on county services for placements, but rely on word of mouth. Another comment was made that farm work is done as a last resort. Rodriguez said the program is intended to place long-term hires. Chambers said he was concerned about the program's ability to achieve long-term results and success. Andrews said the program will have to overcome farm labor's stigma that it is undesirable work. Zimmerman said the North Country region will likely see an increase in direct to market work, which will have a certain appeal to people. As an increase in low wage with no benefit position increase, agricultural positions that offer higher wages and benefits will gain in appeal.

D. Board of Legislators. Arquiatt was not present to deliver a report. Zimmerman said the County Board of Legislators is trying to develop a budget that is beneath the 2% tax cap. Zimmerman said the tentative budget not a desirable budget, and the Board is struggling with it. Zimmerman said that after a 15% cut was made to partnering agencies, the Board has since restored level funding for all but one organization. A comment was made that the County Chamber of Commerce and the IDA received an increase in funding. Zimmerman said the County will also begin working on election redistricting, and is waiting for a prison population count. Andrews asked if there was any increase in property value. Colton said there was an increase of \$60 million in property value, which is not much compared to total value, but has doubled compared to last year. Colton added that .7% of the \$60 million came from new construction. Andrews asked Colton if he would like to provide a report on the Real Property Office.

E. Real Property Office. Colton said six or seven towns will conduct revaluations after next year; traditionally only three or four towns conduct revaluations in a year. Chambers asked which towns. Colton said Edwards, Oswegatchie, Hopkinton, followed by Hermon, Potsdam, and DeKalb. Andrews said farmers are concerned about agricultural values. Colton said ag lands are generally one-third of what they should be. Colton said tillable land that is not tilled is typically selling for \$1,000 per acre, and \$1,500 for tillable and tilled. Colton said their office is working with Town assessors on valuations for farm structures. Tubbs said investing in tiling has the highest payback for a farm operation. Andrews said that as long as grain prices continue to climb, the County will continue to see fallow land be put back into production.

IV. Other Items

A. Announcements. Howard said New York Department of Ag and Markets merged their agriculture and farmland protection division with soil and water conservation. Andrews said as a result of herd reductions in 2008, not enough milk is being produced to supply existing dairy processing facilities in the region, and added there aren't enough state inspectors to open new processing facilities in state. Andrews said the nation has the same number of cattle as in 1957, and is primarily due to the drought in Texas.

B. Correspondence. Andrews said he brought a news article on barn quilt tours as a potential agricultural tour program. Zimmerman suggested forwarding it to 4-H to see if they are interested in pursuing it.

C. Next Meeting. The next Ag and Farmland Protection Board meeting will be on Thursday, February 2nd, 2012 at 7:30 pm in Room 226 of the County Courthouse in Canton. Andrews asked Larson to remind Ag Board members to identify any 2012 agenda items for discussion.

V. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned by consensus at 8:52 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Matilda Larson

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