

ST. LAWRENCE COUNTY
AGRICULTURAL AND FARMLAND PROTECTION BOARD

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APPROVED MEETING MINUTES

Thursday, February 4, 2010, 7:30 PM

County Courthouse, Room 226 A and B, 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 7:31 PM. **Members present:** Robert Andrews, David Fisher, Dan Girard, Steve McKnight, Jane Powers, Allyn Tubbs, and Keith Zimmerman. **Members absent:** Kevin Bresett, Clive Chambers, Jon Greenwood and Dan Martin. **Staff present:** Brent Buchanan, Betsy Hodge and Matilda Larson. **Others present:** Dawn Howard and Robert Wilson.
- (b). **Adoption of the Agenda.** Andrews recommended the agenda be amended to discuss the County's sales tax issue and a letter to County Legislators. The modified February meeting agenda was adopted by consensus.
- (c). **Approval of the Minutes.** The November 4, 2009 meeting minutes were unanimously approved (Tubbs/McKnight).

II. Reports

- (a). **2009 Ag Initiatives.** Hodge reported she presented the pizza program to 10th grade students at the Hermon-DeKalb school, and in Brasher. The same presentation was delivered in Madrid last week; will be delivered in Canton tomorrow; and will be delivered to a BOCES group in early March. Hodge said she will also assist 4-H with revisions to their curriculum. Hodge said she received online requests for information on the County's ag careers program, and made DVD copies for distribution.

Buchanan said the Tri-County Ag Plastics Project received state funds to purchase a baler, which is anticipated to arrive in May. A site to receive ag plastics prepared for recycling is located at the Extension Office. The first truck load of baled recyclables will go out once the baler arrives, or the project will rely on Clinton County's baler. Buchanan said he is providing phone consultation to interested farmers on best management practices, and Larson is conducting initial interviews with interested participants to obtain baseline data.

Buchanan said former employee Kevin Mace converted the Agribusiness Directory database into Microsoft Access, and distributed copies of it to persons in attendance. Buchanan said Ron Rogers collected information from the Amish on available materials, construction materials and services, livestock services, and agribusinesses, and said more phone work needs to be done to complete the database. Buchanan assumed 20 more hours would be needed to complete the project. Zimmerman responded St. Lawrence University is looking for the placement of interns, and suggested Cooperative Extension contact the school for help in finishing the project. As for the Come Farm with Us program, Buchanan said he received calls from out of area, but often from persons with no equity. Due to membership cancellations, the regional program is considering a reduction in membership fees.

Andrews said he was glad with the continuation of Ag Careers Program, and asked what would happen to the ag plastics recycling project once Blake Putman's position ends on March 31st. Buchanan said the project would continue in the county through the Northeast SARE grant. Zimmerman added Clinton County's baler is still available for use. Howard said the Black River RC&D is looking to provide funds to cover the costs for an alternate baler. The DEC funds to purchase the Jefferson-St. Lawrence baler was granted to Cornell University, and those funds must be expended within 60 days or will be lost. Wilson asked if it is possible to shred ag plastics for recycling. Wilson was told shredded plastic tends to bind up the pick up heads. Andrews said the County Fair Association received a state grant for an ag plastics recycling project. County Legislator Don Peck delivered a presentation with the FFA group to demonstrate a plastics baler at the county fair grounds. A picnic table will be made out of the recycled plastic lumber for raffle. The Board unanimously supported conducting two ag plastics baling demonstrations at the County Fair (Fisher/Tubbs).

Andrews asked Zimmerman what happened to the Ag Board's unexpended funds to implement the 2009 Ag Initiatives. Zimmerman said these funds were not authorized to be carried over. If they were not spent on time, they were rolled back into the County's fund balance. Andrews said at the Ag Board's November meeting, Cooperative Extension was specifically told these projects had to be done by end of the calendar year. Buchanan replied Cooperative Extension didn't have the staff to develop a quality Agribusiness Directory, and added Cooperative Extension will develop the Directory on its own.

Andrews asked if Cooperative Extension had a breakdown for the Directory's printing costs. Buchanan said no. Zimmerman said the Directory could be printed by the County Printing Office at reduced cost. A suggestion was made to secure donations from agribusinesses by selling advertisements in the Directory. Zimmerman added the County IDA could assist with printing costs, but said staff time is the issue, as the Directory needs to be converted into a printer-friendly format. A statement was made to find staff time to finish the product. While a recommendation was made to hire an intern to finalize the Directory, their time would be limited to 5-6 hours per week. To reach the

county's Amish population, Wilson recommended printing hardcopies of the Directory rather than publishing it on the Internet.

To implement the Northeast SARE grant, Larson expressed concern about reviewing best management practices by phone rather than in person, and for not conducting initial surveys with farmers. Andrews if an ag plastics collection will be held before March. Howard replied that a collection would be held on February 26th, March 9th or March 13th depending on the availability of Clinton County's baler.

- (b). **2010 Focus Group Meetings.** Larson reviewed the preliminary results from the focus group meetings in Madrid and Hopkinton. Larson was asked about meeting attendance. Larson said 22 persons attended the Madrid meeting, and 15 attended the focus group in Hopkinton. Andrews replied despite promoting the event in the newspapers and milk houses, attendance is low compared to the meetings held 10 years ago.
- (c). **Board of Legislators.** Girard reviewed the Farm Labor bill that came up in the State Legislature, and the County efforts to educate the state that the ag industry is a different entity; that raising labor costs and changing overtime rules for farm workers won't work. Girard also said he spoke with IDA representative Fred Morrill, and suggested the IDA redirect some of their resources toward small scale farms. Girard suggested the Ag Board help identify opportunities for investment. A statement was made that Jon Greenwood formerly served on the IDA Board, now no one on their Board represents the ag industry. Zimmerman replied the IDA Board doesn't have an ag representative because it doesn't have any specific membership requirements. The County Board of Legislators determines the membership of the IDA Board. Wilson replied the County IDA doesn't address agriculture, and primarily focuses on investing in projects that provide jobs rather than on creating wealth. A question was asked if a candidate has been selected for Greenwood's vacancy. The next opening on the IDA Board is in June. The County has received a number of candidates who have expressed an interested in serving on the Board, which is higher than usual.
- (d). **Soil and Water Conservation District.** Howard thanked the Ag Board for suggesting to the County Board of Legislators to reallocate their 2010 budget to the SWCD. Howard said it is a tough budget year for the County. As a non-mandated office, the SWCD will need to justify all of its activities and services. Howard said they are busy; and are down by a staff person. A lot of soil requests are coming in for ag valuations. The Natural Resources Conservation Service will be charging the SWCD \$3,000 per computer per year for access to its computer network. The no-till grain drill has arrived, and they have already received 18 requests for its use this spring. Howard said the DEC has control over unconsolidated aquifers, and announced a new water withdrawal requirement went into effect on February 1st. For any use that consumes 100,000 gallons per day, a monthly report will need to be submitted to the DEC. Howard said it is not currently being enforced for agricultural uses. The SUNY Canton digester project has been resurrected. Rather than locating the digester on the TeRiele farm, the school is considering trucking manure to the digester on campus.

A question was asked about a dispute between Hurlbut and a neighbor over newly installed farm equipment. Larson replied that an offer for the Ag Board to mediate the dispute was mailed to both parties. No response was received.

Zimmerman said there are pretty significant concerns regarding the County's budget. The first payment of sales tax revenue is \$900,000 less than the previous year, which represents a 22% decline. Last year's sales tax revenue was 13% less than the year before. The Governor's proposed state budget paints grim news for the County. Zimmerman added the Planning Office is a vulnerable, but valued department, and noted it will be a rough fiscal year. Zimmerman announced the County's new website with a web portal to view a property's tax parcel boundaries, wetland and soil characteristics, and aerial photos.

- (e). **Letter to County Board of Legislators.** Andrews said he presented a letter to the Board of Legislators on December 21st which favored an increase of sales tax over property taxes if additional revenue needed to be generated by the County. Andrews added that without an increase in sales tax, land owners could see a 20% to 30% increase in property taxes. Zimmerman said the County anticipates the federal FMAP program will be extended another year, which would be a huge benefit to the County. The County anticipates depleting its cash reserves by end of January, and will not be able to cover its payroll costs. Zimmerman said that if an increase in the sales tax rate is defeated, only county legislators who voted against it can entertain a motion to increase the sales tax rate over any increase in property taxes.

Wilson asked if revenue from the Mohawk Casino will go to the County's general fund rather than towards economic development projects. Wilson was informed the County is examining how to fund the operations of the economic development office, and the marketing activities by the County Chamber of Commerce. Girard said legislators may be in favor of raising the sales tax rate. Girard explained legislators who were originally against the idea are now working to formulate how the increased revenue will be used. Girard added County government over time has grown too big, and spending is out of control. Andrews said that if property taxes are too high, they simply won't be paid because land owners won't be able to afford them.

III. Other Items

Wilson announced this will be his last Ag and Farmland Protection Board meeting, as he and his wife are planning on moving to New Mexico this summer. Wilson said he plans to keep their property in Hammond.

Zimmerman asked to be excused and left at 8:53 pm

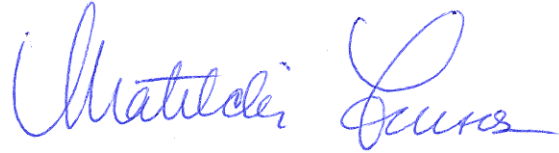
- (a). **Next Meeting.** The next Ag and Farmland Protection Board meeting is scheduled for Thursday, June 3, 2010 at 7:30 pm in Room 226 of the County Courthouse in Canton.

Larson said items for discussion and action at the June meeting include a grass pelleting presentation by Jon Montan, a summary of the January and February focus group meetings, and a presenting the annual Ag District review report. A majority of the Board voted to provide a written summary of the focus group meetings to the County Board of Legislators and to state elected officials (Girard/McKnight).

IV. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned by consensus at 9:16 pm (Tubbs/Fisher).

Respectfully submitted,



Matilda Larson