

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

Courthouse, 48 Court Street  
Canton, New York 13617-1169  
(315) 379-2292

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**APPROVED MEETING MINUTES**

Thursday, February 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 7:30 PM. Members present: Bob Andrews, Tony Arquette, Clive Chambers, David Coffey, Darren Colton, David Fisher, Dan Martin, Steve McKnight, and Keith Zimmerman. **Members absent:** Jon Greenwood and Allyn Tubbs. **Staff present:** Dawn Howard and Matilda Larson. **Others present:** None.

Andrews welcomed everyone to the Ag and Farmland Protection Board's 2011 organizational meeting, and asked everyone to introduce themselves. After introductions, Andrews explained to Legislator Arquette the Board's efforts to secure funds to create the County's 2001 Agricultural Development Plan; reviewed who served as Ex-Officios to the Board; and discussed recent focus group meetings that were held throughout the county in 2010.

**B. Adoption of the Agenda.** Larson said a request for a resolution to restore funds for the State Agricultural and Farmland Protection Fund was added to the agenda. Larson also said Patrick Kelly may arrive later to the meeting, and would share a copy of his email that describes recent IDA activities concerning the county's farming industry. The modified meeting agenda was unanimously adopted.

**C. Approval of the Minutes.** The November 4, 2010 meeting minutes were unanimously approved. (McKnight/Martin)

**II. Nomination and Selection of Chair and Vice Chair** Larson reported that Andrews has been serving as the Chair of the Ag Board since 2007, and at Andrews' suggestion, asked if other members of the Board would be interested in serving in this capacity. Fisher suggested Andrews continue serving as the Chair of the Board, and other members of the Board nodded in agreement. Andrews said he found his service as Chair of the Board to be meaningful. The Board unanimously voted Andrews as Chair of the County Ag and Farmland Protection Board. (Fisher/Colton)

Andrews explained due to the distance between the County Planning Office and his home in Fowler, a Vice-Chair is selected primarily for signatory purposes. Zimmerman suggested Coffey could serve as the Vice-Chair because his spouse, Chandra, works in the County Administrator's office and could deliver papers to their home for signature. The Board unanimously voted Coffey as the Vice-Chair of the County Ag and Farmland Protection Board. (Colton/Zimmerman) Andrews asked staff to distribute an updated copy of the Ag Board's membership list.

**III. Resolution to Restore Funding for the NY Farm Viability Institute** Larson explained she received an email from a Jefferson County legislator asking St. Lawrence County's Ag Board to consider passing a resolution to restore funding for the New York Farm Viability Institute. A comment was made that under Governor Cuomo's proposed state budget, the Department of Ag and Markets took a large hit, with certain programs in particular. Zimmerman noted a recent news article about a Jefferson County resolution to restore funding for the "Come Farm With Us" ag marketing program. Zimmerman explained when the County Ag Board's budget was eliminated in 2010, the County stopped making contributions to the program. Arquette asked if the Ag Board should support restoring funds for the marketing program. Martin explained he is for small government. Zimmerman noted no one in St. Lawrence County is having any great difficulty moving farmland.

Chambers said the Integrated Pest Management Program was zeroed out; \$6 million was cut from one program. A comment was made that a detailed budget proposal hasn't been reviewed yet. Zimmerman suggested contacting Senator Richie's office for a summary of the proposed cuts to Ag and Markets' programs. Someone noted the Governor is seeking to make 10% cuts across the board. If the State is looking to lay off 9,800 state employees, there isn't a lot of maneuvering room.

Fisher recommended the Board not take action. Fisher said the Farm Viability Institute collects 15% for overhead expenses; has 4 to 5 staff in Syracuse; and they spend their funds on capital subsidies. Fisher said supporting North Country Development is more cost effective for the county's farming industry. Zimmerman said the Board should consider all of the proposed cuts that are being made to the Department of Ag and Markets. Fisher said the Ag Research Program is operated out of Cornell University, and they may not travel to the North Country that often. If there was a more regional allocation of funds, they would have added incentive to travel and service the North Country region. Some of the programs they support include the Miner Institute, the White Facility, and the Sugar House in Lake Placid. The Board agreed by consensus not to pass a resolution to restore funding for the New York Farm Viability Institute.

**IV. Resolution to Support the Restoration of Funds for the New York Farmland Protection Program** Larson said the Planning Office received a letter from American Farmland Trust requesting a resolution to restore funds for the State's Farmland Protection Program. Fisher said public funds shouldn't be used to purchase property rights. Zimmerman said the Office

pursued grant money from this program to implement activities in the County's Ag Development Plan, but was told the program acquires conservation easements only, which are not in demand in St. Lawrence County. Conservation easements, Zimmerman explained, are typically used in geographic areas that face population growth issues. This program, Zimmerman explained, has a very narrow focus as it does not fund any other farmland protection activities. Zimmerman suggested a resolution to support the restoration of funds should be considered if the program expanded its protection activities above and beyond conservation easements.

Martin said there are a lot of government agencies that provide nice, but not essential, services. The only alternative for continued support of all state programs is higher taxes. Arquette said the state is heading toward a reduction of government layers. Martin said the State's proposed property tax cap, which he favors, will still be allowed to increase by 2%. Martin said while he doesn't have a problem with his assessment, he does have a problem with his tax rate. The Board agreed by consensus not to support a resolution to restore funding for the New York Farmland Protection Program.

- V. Joint Meeting with the Jefferson County Ag Development Corporation** Andrews said he recently spoke with Jefferson County Ag Development Coordinator Jay Matteson who is willing to deliver a presentation to the Ag Board about their recent activities, and to discuss farming issues that face both counties. A suggestion was made to contact the IDA, and to schedule a meeting in March. Zimmerman suggested inviting representatives from Lewis County, and to hold the meeting in Gouverneur. Zimmerman said a meeting room is available at Cambray Courts. Andrews said an example of a shared issue to discuss is the construction of Interstate 98, and reviewed the locations of value-added production facilities that are proximate to Interstate 81. Martin said it doesn't make sense to export raw milk out of St. Lawrence County, and it would be cheaper to manufacture cheese here. With the recent closure of the North Lawrence Dairy Plant, Arquette asked if it was possible to reconfigure the plant to produce cheese rather than yogurt. Chambers and Fisher said all of the plant's equipment is all going to the Breyer's facility in Vermont. A question was asked if the equipment leaves, how will the plant work? Zimmerman asked which dairy cooperative supplies the North Lawrence plant. Fisher replied Dairy Lee.

Chambers asked for clarification to the purpose of the March meeting. Andrews said it would be to discuss current projects, identify similarities, and discuss the possibility of future shared services. Chambers suggested scheduling a joint meeting with Franklin County. Howard asked if Franklin County has an Ag and Farmland Protection Board. Andrews said they used St. Lawrence County's Ag Development Plan as a template for theirs. Zimmerman recommended a meeting with Franklin County be scheduled before the current County Administrator, Jim Freely, retires.

## **VI. Reports**

- A. Board of Legislators.** New legislative representative Tony Arquette said he was here to

listen, and would advocate on behalf of the Ag Board to the Board of Legislators. Arquette said this Board has the respect of the County Legislators. Larson said a presentation about last year's four focus group meetings will be delivered to the County Board on February 22<sup>nd</sup>. Zimmerman said a summary from NYSAC's Blue Ribbon Commission on agriculture was distributed to County Legislators last fall.

**B. Soil and Water Conservation District.** Howard said the big news from their office is staffing changes. A position for a technician recently opened, and the office's Secretary was hired for the position, and will be certified to develop Nutrient Management Plans. They are now training a new secretary in their office. The District is advertising for a SWCD Forester who will prepare forest management plans for private landowners. \$800,000 of construction grants is currently underway, and the District applied for another round of funding. The deadline for Ag Valuations is March 1<sup>st</sup>, and farmers are already signing up for the no-till grain drill. The ag plastics baler is already in use, and is currently on loan to Franklin County. The Crop Congress was held yesterday, and the proposed State budget provides level funding for the District through the Environmental Protection Fund. The District is also considering new grant opportunities through the Department of Ag and Markets.

**C. Annual Ag District Review.** Larson said the office received a letter from the Ag and Markets Commissioner certifying all 2010 additions to Ag Districts 1 and 2. The process to initiate the 2011 review will occur over the next six weeks. Howard said to date, over 400 ag value assessments have come through their office, and more are coming in every day. Zimmerman, Chambers, and Fisher recommended contacting Senator Pattie Richie to streamline the annual application process that qualifies every single parcel of a farm operation.

Andrews said last fall, Lieutenant Governor Bob Duffy, Senator Aubertine, and former State Democratic Party Chair June O'Neil visited the Gotham farm in Edwards. Andrews said Duffy offered to come up and meet with the Board to discuss farming issues, and identify areas that can be streamlined or simplified. A suggestion was made to provide the Ag Board with a written overview of the state's proposed budget cuts to the Department of Ag and Markets. Fisher said the information could be obtained quickly from the New York Farm Bureau.

**D. 2009 Northeast SARE Grant.** Larson said the project ended December 31<sup>st</sup>, and staff is in the process of completing participant surveys to prepare and submit the final report.

**E. Industrial Development Agency.** Larson reviewed Kelly's email regarding recent IDA activities concerning the farming industry in St. Lawrence County. The IDA is presently accepting applications for RVRDA funds and is awaiting its power allocation, which is monetized for five years. Zimmerman said the Governor's address included a revitalization of the "Jobs for Power" program, and the 20 megawatts may not be strictly reserved for the North Country. The Governor's proposed budget may include recapturing unspent grant money, which could include the monetized power. A comment

was made that if low cost power is gone, there are few attractive options for niche markets.

Fisher asked if the North Lawrence plant reopens, who will supply the plant? Fisher said the milk supply in the North Country is tight. A question was asked how much of the milk supply in the county is not committed. Members of the board responded very little milk is not committed. An observation was made that the leverage to re-open the North Lawrence Plant may be gone, and the IDA will have to lean on Dairy Lee to share its milk supply.

Arquette said a mobile slaughter unit in the county would be convenient. Zimmerman said the proposed unit is small in scale, and the processor is seeking to be certified as organic and humane. Zimmerman said the processor will have access to a good niche market, but will process a very limited volume. A challenge will be to determine where to hang, and render the processed meats. Martin asked how the processor will deal with access to water, and said the amount it needs is equal to that of a water treatment plant. Martin said current state regulations are killing small business opportunities. Chambers said based on a conversation with Assemblywoman Russell's staff Judy Aldrich, Stewarts could process dairy goods at the North Lawrence plant, and said they have an established presence in the North Country.

Howard said Losardo Foods in Heuvelton used to truck all of their whey to the North Lawrence plant. Now that the facility's closed, there isn't a place in the county where they can spread it on land in the winter. Howard said Losardo doesn't have a back up plan.

Coffey noted the price of milk is going up, and Fisher said futures look stronger. A question was asked what difference it makes if 10 processing plants are present, but milk prices are so low farmers can't make it. Andrews said the farming industry hasn't seen prices this high on various commodities. Fisher said because the dollar is weak, commodity prices will diminish as the dollar strengthens. Coffey said subsidies should be eliminated, and higher prices for the end product should be paid.

## **VII. Other Items**

- A. Announcements.** A small scale digesters presentation will be held at the Cooperative Extension Learning Farm on February 24<sup>th</sup>.
- B. Next Meeting.** The next Ag and Farmland Protection Board meeting will be on Thursday, June 2, 2011 at 7:30 pm in Room 226 of the County Courthouse in Canton.

## **VIII. Adjourn**

The meeting adjourned by consensus at 9:01 pm

Respectfully submitted,

Matilda Larson

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