

*Bethel & Liberty Farmland Protection Plan Committee Meeting, 2-24-09*

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Paul Hahn            John Schmidt  
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*See next page for homework and next steps!*  
*SC Planning has a new phone number: 807-0527*

1. Review of Scope of Work Timeline

First Step: Data gathering (surveys, workshops)

Second Step: Develop a vision for the future of agriculture

Third Step: Develop strategies to achieve that vision

Currently, we're moving from step one to step two. We have County-wide data from the maps, surveys, and workshops, and Nan and Don are working to isolate Town-specific information in that data.

Nan and Don will draft a vision statement and some goals, based on existing information, and distribute it to the committee members for you to look at prior to the next meeting.

2. Checklist of Data in the Profile/Inventory

a. Farm information: location, characteristics

b. LESA Analysis (Land Evaluation & Site Assessment): "Land evaluation" refers to the soil properties, etc. on a parcel. "Site analysis" refers to characteristics of the site location (proximity to roads, sewer lines, etc.).

c. Buildout analysis: look at zoning regulations to identify potential conflicts (for example, if a high-priority farm is located near a high-density residential zone).

3. January 10 Workshop Summary

a. See attached notes for participants' ideas about the roles, importance, and challenges of agriculture.

b. One consistent concern, in the surveys and the workshops, is taxes.

c. Another often-cited challenge is the cost of doing business (equipment, fuel, etc.)

4. Farmer Survey Results

a. Question #4 asked in which towns respondents owned or rented land. 28 respondents own land in Bethel, 15 rent land in Bethel, 16 own land in Liberty, and 8 rent land in Liberty. The attached town-specific survey findings and summaries are based on respondents' answers to Question #4.

b. Of all 4 towns, Bethel stood out in some ways:

i. the largest variety of types of farms

ii. more farmers market users than any other Town (4)

iii. largest number of full-time workers employed

c. Some similarities among all four towns:

i. generally, each farm supports roughly one household

ii. the number of years that land has been in farm production was similar (74 to 94 years)

iii. Callicoon and Delaware respondents report that their farms have been in their families for longer than Bethel and Liberty respondents (C: 80 years, D: 63, B: 44, L: 50).

d. Re: farmland protection strategies—Question 10 raises some new questions. Exclusive agricultural zones have a very high level of support among all 4 towns (somewhat less in Liberty than the others), yet they are extremely restrictive. Overlay zoning districts, which are less restrictive, get somewhat less support. Perhaps respondents did not understand the descriptions of these strategies clearly, or perhaps they interpreted "exclusive agricultural zones" to mean "agricultural districts."

e. Most farmers get either a small percentage of their gross income (less than 25%) or a very large percentage (greater than 75%) from their farms.

5. Agribusiness Survey Results

a. Responses to the agribusiness survey are not town-specific.

b. Question #4 shows us that responding businesses employ 445 people, a significant number.

c. 15 businesses make gross more than \$500,000 per year.

- d. But, 17 businesses are either regional or diversified—under 25% of their client base is from the Sullivan County ag community.
  - e. Overall, both responding businesses and farmers seem optimistic and plan to increase or at least maintain the size of their operations over the next 10 years.
6. Moving Forward with the Data Collected
- a. Next step: SWOT Analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats). Strengths and weaknesses are local factors, whereas opportunities and threats are external forces (for example, the price of milk).
  - b. Map work: Once we identify all the farms, we can use LESA to rank farms and prioritize which farms we should focus on protecting. Priority farms will be targeted when applying for grants, low-interest loans, and other help. The State wants to see that we have an objective process to determine how farms are ranked.
    - i. How to rank the farms? This is up to the committee.
    - ii. The County already has a ranking system, which they use when applying for PDR (purchase of development rights) programs on behalf of local farms. This is a good starting point, but each town's committee can modify it as needed.
    - iii. Some criteria that the County uses:
      - a. % prime soils
      - b. % soils of statewide importance
      - c. Crop yields
      - d. % soils highly suitable for development
      - e. Feet of road frontage
      - f. Distance from hamlets/ villages
      - g. Proximity to existing or proposed water or sewer lines
    - iv. Different ways of looking at prioritizing: If a farm is close to a water line, we might say there is more development pressure, so this farm gets a high ranking; on the other hand, we might say this area has been identified as a place where the town wants development, so it's not worth protecting the farm.
7. SWOT, Town level questionnaire—generating a vision and goals
- a. **Homework for next time:**
    - i. **Look at the SWOT analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) included in tonight's packet. Make suggestions for adding to or modifying it.**
    - ii. **Fill out the included questionnaire, "Is Your Town Planning a Future for Agriculture?"**
8. Questions & Discussion:
- a. To keep the public informed of the process:
    - Post survey and workshop results on your Town websites
    - put out a press release to publicize the workshop and survey results
    - use the press release as the basis for an article in the newspapers to inform the public of our progress
  - b. The Columbia Land Conservancy has some great information about state and federal tax programs available to farmers: go to **clctrust.org** to find a brochure called "Farm and Forest Landowner Bulletin."
  - c. Once we articulate a vision statement and some goals, we can reach out to the stakeholders' group again (IDA, SC Partnership, and the others) to get their input on developing strategies to reach those goals.
9. Next Steps:
- a. **Next meeting, March 31, Liberty Town Hall, 7:00 pm.**
  - b. Don will bring the results of the map analysis to the March meeting.
  - c. Plan another farmers' focus group, to discuss the map results, vision and goals—probably sometime in April. To be discussed at the March meeting.

**To Do:**

- **Nan: Draft a press release publicizing the status of the plan, and results of surveys and workshops**
- **Maureen: coordinate publication of press release in the newspapers**
- **Bethel & Liberty: post survey and workshop results on Town websites**
- **Committee members: Look at SWOT analysis, make recommendations for modifying it to suit your town**
- **Committee members: Fill out "Is Your Town Planning a Future for Agriculture?" questionnaire.**