

## Bethel & Liberty Farmland Protection Plan Committee Meeting, June 23, 2009.

Present:

|                   |               |                |
|-------------------|---------------|----------------|
| Maureen Barber    | Robert Blais  | David Biren    |
| Denise Frangipane | Paul Hahn     | Dean Farrand   |
| Melinda Ketcham   | Jennifer Mall | Willie Hughson |
| Lynn Killian      | Ray Kelly     | Nelson Hector  |
| John Schmidt      | Dan Sturm     | Jennifer Young |
| Joe Walsh         | Jill Weyer    |                |

### I. Draft Plan-- Profile and Inventory

- a. Ag census data: there is an issue with zip codes. All ag census data is broken down by zip code, but not by town. So, we cannot get town-specific data on farming.
  - i. However, looking at the 1997 and 2002 data, we can spot general trends, and identify challenges and opportunities for agriculture.
  - ii. One interesting finding: more people say their principal occupation is farming in 2002 than they did in 1997. Why could this be?
    - a. Perhaps because many new farms are starting up—retirees, expatriates from NYC, etc.
  - iii. Question: the data in the inventory groups farms by size, and one category is 50-999 acres. Can we fine-tune this for our towns? No farms are really that big, so this category isn't too helpful.

Answer: Yes, we can probably fine-tune it to reveal more about farm size (Nan).

### II. Buildout

- a. A buildout analysis is a planning tool that helps you understand the potential consequences (good or bad) of your zoning. The question for you is, can you meet your agriculture goals if your town is fully built out?
- b. Is this the capacity for growth that you want to establish? In terms of meeting your agriculture goals, and politically speaking. These plans require political will to create and implement.
- c. Bethel's buildout
  - i. Bethel just updated their zoning code, and the Environmental Impact Statement that was created for that process gave growth estimates. Probably those estimates are lower than what's shown in the buildout—but the buildout numbers are not growth estimates. The maps do not depict any particular time in the future—that is, they are not based on growth patterns and trends. They depict the full extent of each town's development, based on current zoning laws.
  - ii. The buildout maps don't show the updated Smallwood golf course zone. Also, wells are a problem in Smallwood. If you spot other problems with the buildout documents, please let Nan or Don know, and they will update their data and maps.
- d. Liberty's buildout
  - i. Liberty's zoning is currently under review. Some proposed changes are: decrease the size of the RD District, add to the Service Commercial district, remove Resort Hotel District, etc. Nan and Don can apply the proposed zoning to the buildout maps if the Town provides it to them.
- e. Ag Zones
  - i. Both towns have Ag Zones. The committees need to look at whether the ag zones match up with where agriculture is actually taking place, and whether the existing zoning works to maximize agriculture.

- ii. Also, look at municipal borders. Does your town's ag zone abut an industrial or other incompatible zone in an adjacent municipality?
- iii. Question: what building lot sizes are common in agricultural zones in other parts of the State?  
 Answer: 3 acres is common, but more towns are moving to 5, 8 or even 15 acres. The Town of Seneca uses a sliding scale density. On smaller parcels, the minimum lot size is smaller. On large parcels, the minimum lot size is larger. So, lots that have already been subdivided can be subdivided more, and lots that have been left intact must remain relatively intact.  
 Other mechanisms include using a density, rather than a minimum lot size. So, you might allow any building lot that can accommodate a well and septic. This is also a good tool for affordability.  
 The American Farmland Trust says that one dwelling per twenty acres allows agricultural and residential uses to coexist.  
 Lot size has gone up as the size of homes has increased.  
 Density affects the need for fire and police personnel, schools, water and sewer and other amenities—not just agriculture.
- iv. Discussion of developing farmland: farmland is dry, has access, and is cleared. So, it's the most desirable and developable. We see more and more "for sale" signs on current and former farmland. When the economy picks up, we risk losing them.
- f. Some suggestions from Nan about Bethel's and Liberty's zoning.
  - i. Bethel requires a special use permit for new agricultural operations, which is a hindrance (but this requirement has been removed in the brand new zoning law).
  - ii. Site plan review in agricultural districts: Should municipalities require it? This requirement makes it harder for new ag operations to start up. But, some modified review could ensure that environmental constraints and nuisance issues are addressed.
    - a. NYS Ag & Markets offers a model modified site plan.
  - iii. Definitions are critically important. You want to give a wide array of ag uses the best chance they can have, and one way to do this is by writing your definitions carefully.
  - iv. Exclusive agricultural zones are also an option (though very unlikely—this means no other uses besides agriculture are allowed within a given district). Ag overlay zones are a good alternative.
  - v. We will address economic development strategies as we continue. Right now, we're looking at the regulatory strategies. We will also include incentives for agricultural protection and preservation. The regulatory strategies are easier to implement (through zoning changes), but the incentives are also very important.

### III. Next Time

- a. Next meeting July 28, 8 pm at the Liberty Town Hall.
- b. We will brainstorm the strategies—going through them one by one. Please read and be ready to discuss!