

Callicoon & Delaware Farmland Protection Plan Committee Meeting, 5/21/09

Present:

Don Meltz	Melinda Ketcham
Earl Myers	Nan Stolzenburg
Jennifer Mall	Paul Hahn
Jim Scheutzow	Sonja Hedlund
Joe Horak	Tom Bose
Linda Babicz	Wes Gillingham

Next Meeting Thursday, June 18

7:30 pm

1. Buildout Exercise

Don has completed the buildout for Callicoon, and is near completion for Delaware.

The buildout uses maps to evaluate each town's zoning code, and what level of development the code allows in each zoning district. The maps show:

- a. buildings on each parcel
- b. allowable density in each zoning district (e.g., 1, 2, or 3 acre minimum lot size)
- c. the parcels that are already built out to the maximum allowable density
- d. the parcels that can still be built upon, according to the zoning code
- e. environmental constraints (steep slopes, flood plains, wetlands, etc.—the zoning code requires that these be subtracted out of the total parcel size when determining allowable density)
- f. the actual buildable area on each parcel (after subtracting out environmental constraints)
- g. the number of houses that could be built if every landowner subdivided to the full extent of the zoning

This would be somewhere between 7000 and 10000 new houses in the Town of Callicoon.

Don will send out the buildout data, and put the maps on CPEA's website www.planningbetterplaces.com

Over the next month, think about the following:

- Look at these maps, with the map of farm parcels as an overlay. Where is our farmland? Where is our potential development? Are the two compatible?
- Determine whether the amount and location of potential development is acceptable, given our focus on farmland protection. What would this development mean for agriculture?
- Is density the problem? Is location of potential development the problem? A combination? How to make development compatible with agriculture?

Discussion of the relatively poor quality of Sullivan County soils for farming.

We need to be realistic—dairy farms have been declining for many decades. It is unlikely that dairy farms will stop decreasing in number.

This is the value of the LESA: it allows us to prioritize. We perhaps can't save each farm, but if we look at factors such as soil type, proximity to roads and infrastructure, and other things, we can determine which farms are most valuable for preservation. So, we need to look at the map of potential new houses in conjunction with the map of priority farm parcels.

Growing food isn't the biggest problem we have here: people around the world grow food in much worse conditions than we have in SC. The most serious impediments are taxes, milk prices, etc. And farming is changing all the time—other types of agriculture can take place in areas that are not suitable for traditional dairy operations.

2. Zoning Strategies

We can't fix the economy with our plan, so we must address what it can—which brings us back to zoning for farmland protection.

If we set large minimum lot sizes, we would restrict farmers and make it harder for them to get good prices for their land if they decided to sell off a piece. It's a balance: protect farmland but not at the expense of crippling farmers financially. Density is a critical issue but it will be a difficult discussion. We need to meet the needs and desires of landowners, and the needs and desires of the rest of the community.

Creative Zoning Options:

We don't need to limit our thinking to large lot sizes. Layout of lots is as important as size. Conservation subdivisions or cluster developments are becoming more popular. Essentially, a 30-acre lot can be divided into 10 lots if the minimum lot size is 3 acres. Traditionally, the 30 acres will be chopped up into uniformly shaped lots, and one house will be put in the middle of each lot. With a conservation subdivision, the lots are irregularly shaped so that the houses are concentrated or strategically placed, and the open space is left intact. In recent years, it's been shown that buyers are eager to pay for such lots, because they want the rural character. Still, it's hard to imagine that a conservation subdivision will make as much money for developers (this is something to look into some more). Both Callicoon and Delaware have conservation subdivision/ cluster development in their town codes, but they are not as effective as they could be.

Can zoning district boundaries follow the topography or other natural features? This would make sense for protecting an area like the Beechwoods, or limiting development in floodplains. On the other hand, when district boundaries follow lot lines, there is less confusion as to how a particular lot is zoned. Overlay zones are also an option—these are designed to reflect some environmental feature or activity (for example, agriculture).

Other Opportunities:

Sullivan County's strength lies in our historical link to NYC. People remember this place from visits and vacations, and we need to take advantage of those ties, as well as our proximity to the city. So, while we can't compete with Ulster, Orange or Delaware Counties in terms of soil productivity, we have an advantage in our name recognition. We need a concerted marketing and branding effort. For example, Sullivan County ice cream, yogurt, etc. The Watershed Agricultural Council can help with this (Pure Catskills).

Encouraging New Farms:

We need leadership and commitment from the towns as well as the County, to foster establishment of new farms. Over time, people's fear of contaminated, factory-produced food will push them to seek local food. These conditions should help create a good environment for new farms. And our zoning should allow and encourage new farms.

What the Community Wants:

Next Tuesday, Jeffersonville Enhances More of Sullivan (JEMS) and Sullivan Renaissance will hold a visioning session for the future of Jeff. Some committee members will attend and report back, to see what the community at large wants, and how supportive they are of farming. Many JEMS members are relatively new to the area, so this could be an opportunity to bridge the gap between new or part-time residents and agriculture.

Next Steps:

Nan and Don: E-mail or mail everyone the buildout report, and put the maps on the CPEA website.

Committee: Think about the implications of your town's zoning.

Nan: Add to the draft plan the section on how farm-friendly the towns are.

Don: Keep working on the Delaware buildout analysis.

Nan and Don: Generate a list of some modifications we might make to our zoning, to protect agriculture, and e-mail this list to the committee.

Planning: Call committee members shortly before the next meeting, to encourage them to attend.

Next Meeting:

Thursday, June 18th. We will meet ½ hour later, at 7:30 pm. Location TBD.

Planning will send out additional materials as we get them.