

DRAFT
Town of White Creek
Comprehensive Plan and Ag Protection Plan
Steering Committee Meeting Minutes
December 17, 2008

Attendees: Ed Gulley, Rody Walker, Jim Perry, Peter Hetko, Sarah Ashton, Carol Moore, Adriano Manocchia, Bill Badgeley

Absent: Tim Smith, Richard Moses, Rupert Jennings, Don Sweet

- (1) Minutes for the October 22, 2008 and November 19, 2008 Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee were approved.
- (2) The Steering Committee reviewed and agreed with a draft agenda (see attached) presented by Nan Stolzenburg for the Visioning Public Workshop to be held on January 21, 2009 at 7PM in Jermain Hall. A snow date will be established once Nan checks her schedule. Ed Gulley volunteered to coordinate the opening of Jermain Hall and provide some cookies. The public visioning workshop will involve small groups and steering committee members will help facilitate some of the small group discussions. Steering Committee members should arrive at 6:30PM to finalize the set up and be briefed on their facilitation role.
- (3) The Committee reviewed a draft letter to White Creek Residents inviting them to participate in the January public workshop and describing what a comprehensive plan is. Unfortunately the letters can't be mailed with the property tax bills given the nature of the bill structure and the fact that 1/3 of bills are sent to mortgage companies. The Town Board has approved funds in the amount of about \$500 for a mailing to all residents. Following significant discussion it was decided to mail a postcard—which would be less expensive. The Committee will consider doing a mailing and a survey once options for the plan are developed and depending on funding availability. Ashton and Stolzenburg will coordinate on development of postcard and Ashton will obtain labels and mail it out.
- (4) The steering committee meeting was then adjourned and participants attended the first Agriculture/Farm Focus Workshop.

Agriculture/Farm Focus Workshop

Facilitator Nan Stolzenburg offered a power point presentation describing what a comprehensive plan and farmland/agriculture protection plan is and the process for developing them. She then asked participants to describe the types of farms represented at the meeting, note those that were present in the township but not represented at the meeting. She asked farmers to note their concerns, what keeps farmers farming in White Creek; what participants would like agriculture to be like in the future; and steps that could be taken to strengthen agriculture. Participant responses are attached.

Town of White Creek
Summary of Farm Focus Group Meeting
December 17, 2008

Farm Types Represented at Farm Focus Group:

Dairy
Beef
Hay
Lease Land to Other Farmers
Forestry
Apples
Sheep

Farm Types Also Present in Town, but not at Focus Group:

Horse
Grain
Organic Vegetables
Goats
Vegetables
Berries
Alpaca
Honey
Farm Stand

Concerns Identified by Farmers Present (not in any kind of priority order):

- Income: Payment farmers get for their product (mostly milk price) is low. This was identified as critical, but not a local issue. Farmers need to make a living.
- Taxes. School taxes especially were felt to penalize farmers for having larger amounts of land.
- Lack of Internet to support business.
- Fewer people in town who understand agriculture. Farmers feel some people look at this 1-sided, that they don't know about agricultural practices and this negatively affects them.
- Tourism: This increases traffic and encourages new residents to move here. Farms don't need it.
- Maintaining investment in farm in light of land use regulations: Concerned about potential local laws and how it will affect business in the future. They want to be sure to be able to maintain the ability to make land subdivisions in small lots in the future and wants the right to make land decisions without battles in the future.
- Farmer – Non-Farmer relationships: Sometimes farmers are not nice to

- Lack of Farm Diversity: There needs to be more focus on smaller farmers – small herds and startups.
- Lack of Resources for Startups: New farmers are not knowledgeable about resources that are available and this can prevent them from being successful.
- Traffic: There has been a deterioration in traffic lately and with farm equipment added to the mix – more problems occur.
- Rental Lands: There has been an increase in land rentals by larger farms.
- Lack of younger people in farming.
- Lack of labor: an issue with the larger farms
- Long term economic sustainability: Global influences and lack of people to take over long term are issues related to this.
- Concerned about landowner rights – farmers are subsidizing rural character for others.

What Keeps Farmers in White Creek?

- Family heritage
- Nostalgia, community, friendly community
- We know neighbors and have family here
- It is a safe place
- We can grow our own food
- Good weather and soil
- Good group of progressive farms
- Lots of resources and knowledge available
- Washington County is a good area with lots of support among farmers, and support businesses exist
- We have clean water, air, wildlife and beauty
- Active farms keep the number of subdivisions down
- It is our duty to keep farming

What would we like agriculture to be like in the future in White Creek?

- Prosperous
- More diversity in farms
- No manure pits that pollute water
- Farming is done in an environmentally safe way
- Less traffic on roads
- Slower speeds
- Farms are prosperous enough to attract new farmers and keep the next generation farming
- We still have vets, auction houses, and the agricultural infrastructure
- We have educated the non-farming community and they know how to be a

- Farm tours exist to help educate our children
- There is respect of land by those who don't own it (ATV's for example)
- There is a perfect balance between farms and development
- No landfill
- We try to keep land and farm whole – not in new houses. Land is kept open for children and other farmers
- Farmers sell development rights and there is need for more support from the Federal and State government to give money back to local communities for PDR

Solutions Offered to Strengthen Agriculture

- Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) programs with more support for PDR
- Use Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) as an alternative.
- More tax exemptions for farmers
- Impose a tax on how far you have to travel to work
- Promote value-added products – there are opportunities (food and energy).
- Diversify farms
- Market locally grown foods
- Develop a Federally inspected slaughterhouse
- Farmers work closer together – example a cooperative methane digester
- Laws exist that help one generation pass farm onto the next easier. Tax issues related to farm transfers have been fixed
- Send federally oriented recommendations of this plan to Kirsten Gillibrand
- Two-way communication and education farmers and non-farmers - people understand why farmers do certain things on farms.
- Figure out how to help farmers feel appreciated and not feeling guilty for doing normal and accepted agricultural practices (such as manure spreading)
- Educate non-farmers