

LAND PRESERVATION COMMITTEE MINUTES
JUNE 12, 2006 – 2:00 P.M.

Present: Chairman Peck; Supervisor Sausville; Tom Lewis, David Miller, Lynn Schumann, At Large; John Behan, Behan Planning; Jason Kemper, Town of Clifton Park; Heather Mallozzi, Town of Malta; Alane Chinian, Saratoga PLAN; Sarah Clarkin, Wilton Wildlife Preserve & Park; Liz Brock, David Haight, American Farmland Trust; Jamie O’Neil, Sara. Co. Planning; Stan Weeks, Town of Greenfield; Press.

Chairman Peck called the meeting to order and welcomed all in attendance.

Mr. Behan said there was a good turnout at a public meeting held in the Town of Charlton. After hearing several suggestions the information will be taken to make some revisions to the draft plan, he said.

Ms. O’Neil said that the grant applications are due by June 30th. After receiving them the County Planning Department will compile the information and distribute to all Supervisors.

Mr. Haight gave a brief overview of the Working Landscapes Plan. Handouts were distributed. He said the important message is that we are talking about landscapes not islands. Talking about keeping large parcels of land mostly in tact for not only farm use, but for working forestry and managed woods. We can’t just have little islands of those, you need to have bigger areas, he said. Another topic that was heard a lot was the diversity of landowners. When talking about working landscapes people think mostly of full time farmers. There are some people that make their living as a full time farmer; others employed with a full time off farm job and a full time farm job. There are those people who just own land that they rent, and those who just like having animals. When combining all these people, this is what makes a working landscape. When looking at recommendations, you need to look at what recommendations are appropriate for all those different groups of people, he said.

This is a time of transition in Saratoga County for a lot of farmers. When looking at the issues they are facing, whether it is international competition for apple producers, rising costs of healthcare and labor, farms are changing rapidly in Saratoga County. Some are getting bigger to take advantage of the economy of scale, some are doing more retail to take advantage of the consumer dollar, and some are doing value added processing, i.e. selling dairy genetics.

Mr. Haight highlighted the following goals:

1. Stabilize the areas of land in terms of a working landscape. Presently there is approximately 52,000 acres in the four corridor farming areas of: Halfmoon, Clifton Park, Moreau/Stillwater, Ballston/Charlton. It is suggested to have a 20-year goal and try to keep approximately 52,000 acres available for active farm use.

2. To permanently protect acreage, landowners need to be offered better alternatives than selling their land for development.

In terms of what farmland is permanently protected, currently it is estimated at approximately 1,000 acres, mostly in the towns of Saratoga and Stillwater through State and County grants.

3. It was suggested that the current county grants program be reviewed, recognizing that farm projects have some unique characteristics. Guidelines for the farmland protection grants should be reviewed as well.

The following grant categories were discussed.

1. Providing grants to help provide development rights on farms, putting permanent conservation easements on farms.
2. Establish a different style of grant, a farmland entrepreneur option, based upon some programs started in Massachusetts and at a number of state agencies. This option would provide smaller grants of \$25,000 to \$50,000 for an existing farm or for someone who would like to establish a farm. In return, they would put a deed restriction on the property not to develop the property for a period of ten years.
3. Encourage municipalities to reduce property tax assessments for landowners that are willing to make a deed restrictive commitment not to develop their property for anywhere from 5 to 30 years. The property tax reduction would run accordingly.
4. The county already administers an agricultural districts program, which is really a local policy making vehicle for identifying priority agricultural areas. Right now there is some disconnect between what are termed agricultural districts, and what are core and priority farm areas. Work needs to be done to extend those districts to all core areas.
5. Farms are changing and more communities are doing more planning. This gives an opportunity to look back at what was in the zoning codes, making sure that is it appropriate for farms and supports their business needs.

Mr. Haight said, extensively at every public meeting it has been said there is a board public interest in horse trails and a horse park.

The meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

Chris Sansom