

Tioga County Agricultural and Farmland Protection Board Meeting

February 3, 2025, 10:00 AM

Legislative Conference Room

Minutes

APPROVED

I. CALL TO ORDER – Chair Bloodnick called the meeting to order at 10:05 AM.

A. Introductions – Introductions were made around the table.

II. ATTENDANCE

A. Members: Tim Lawton, Steve Palinosky, Kristi Snyder, Lisa Bloodnick, Elaine Jardine, Cub Frisbie, Pam Moore arrived at 10:27 AM.

B. Absent: Tracy Monell, Ben Whittemore, Howard Visscher, Barb Roberts

C. Local Officials: None

D. Guests:

E. Staff: Wendy Walsh, Danielle Singer, Bryan Goodrich, Linda Sampson

III. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Motion to approve the agenda: K. Snyder, 2nd T. Lawton, Carried

IV. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

February 21, 2024

Motion to approve the minutes: S. Palinosky, 2nd T. Lawton, Carried

V. ANNUAL AGRICULTURAL DISTRICT INCLUSIONS 2025

- Resolution 2-2025 Modification of Spencer Agricultural District #1

E. Jardine previously emailed all the paperwork regarding the Modification of the Spencer Agricultural District. It was also distributed at the meeting. E. Jardine reported getting one annual inclusion on the last day of the inclusion period. Teresa Rathke owns approximately 11 acres in Tioga Center. The location was pointed out on the map on display. It is near the Tioga Central School District. She is going to put heifers on her land in May. Currently she has pigs and poultry. She is very interested in protecting her land for agriculture. Resolution 2-2025 is to approve the modification of the Spencer Agricultural District #1 which encompasses the Town of Spencer, Candor, Barton and Tioga. This resolution approves the addition of 10.9 acres into this district.

L. Bloodnick asked about putting heifers on land that looks wooded. E. Jardine responded that it is not as wooded near the house, adding that she is not sure how many heifers are going to be put on the land, but it is likely it will be just a few, like a homestead situation.

Motion to approve Resolution 2-2025: C. Frisbie, 2nd S. Palinosky, 6 Yes, Carried

VI. NORTH TIOGA AGRICULTURAL DISTRICT 8-YEAR REVIEW

E. Jardine previously emailed all paperwork related to the North Tioga Agricultural District 8-Year Review. Hardcopies were also distributed at the meeting. E. Jardine reported this district encompasses the Towns of Richford, Berkshire, Newark Valley, and the Village of Newark Valley.

- Report and Map

E. Jardine reported that a great job was done in canvassing the whole district with a completed GIS analysis and a notification letter to the landowners. E. Jardine thanked Bryan Goodrich, GIS, and Steve Palinosky and Karen Hall, Real Property, for their help. The comment period was the month of October, the on-line survey was in November. After reviewing the GIS analysis map B. Goodrich prepared, we sent a notice to the currently enrolled properties, those that were in the ag assessment but not enrolled in the ag district, and appropriate land cover parcels that weren't in the agricultural district. 560 notices were sent, and a month was given for a response. E. Jardine indicated we received the best response rate we've ever had for on-line survey responses including many phone calls for which E. Jardine reported filling out the survey for those landowners. We conducted a very accurate survey for existing and potential landowners during this agricultural district review. Unfortunately, based on the numbers, this District, which is the one with the least amount of agricultural activity, shows a decrease in agricultural activity from 2017.

Survey results: Non-Farmer Hay (Landowners that rent their land to farmers for hay) 42, Livestock (Other than dairy) 30, Hay 13, Silviculture 6, Cash Crop 3, Dairy 3, Horses 2, Maple 2, Nursery/Ornamentals 1, Christmas Tree 1, Other (woods, field) 1; totaling 104 responses.

E. Jardine commented that the District is still achieving its objectives because it still protects the enrolled farmland. From what we reported to Ag & Markets in 2017, we have had an increase overall in the number of acres in the district by about 1400, but the number acres in farms is down about 1900; the number of farms in the district went down by 23 to 80; acres owned by farmers went down about 4200 acres; acres rented went up about 2200 acres; and acres cropped went down about 260.

The map and parcel listing will be presented at the Public Hearing on February 18th at 1:00 PM in the Berkshire Town Hall. All are welcome to attend.

- Resolution 1-2025 Recommendation on Modifications to the County Legislature

C. Frisbie asked what the classification of a farm is. E. Jardine responded that we follow the NYS Agricultural & Markets Agricultural District Law 25AA definition of a farm which is very inclusive of all agricultural activities.

C. Frisbie asked for a reason for the decrease in agricultural acreage.

B. Goodrich and S. Palinosky responded that it's simply the reclassification property class codes from agricultural to rural residential as a result of landowners not farming their land anymore.

Motion to approve Resolution 1-2025: C. Frisbie, 2nd K. Snyder, 6 Yes, Carried

VII. AG & MARKETS LAND TRUST OUTREACH GRANT

- Update from Daneille Singer, Tioga County SWCD –D. Singer prepared a PowerPoint regarding the grant obtained from Ag & Markets, the Land Trust Outreach Grant, for American Farmland Trust. This Board approved by resolution recommendation of this grant application to the Tioga County Legislature in October 2023, the first time Tioga County has applied for this grant source. D. Singer reviewed her PowerPoint:

We worked with several partners: AFT, TC AFPB, TC ED&P, TIOGA SWCD and CCE Tioga. There were 6 outreach activities eligible, but applied for the following 3:

1. Connecting non-farming farmland owners with farmers; people that own large acreage getting them connected with a farmer that wants to operate.
2. Farm and farmland succession planning; because we have a lot of aging farmers, thinking about next steps, keeping the farm going for the next generation.
3. Understanding or negotiating leases on agricultural land; something that comes up a lot and we receive a lot of questions about.

American Farmland Trust (AFT) has resources on these topics but does not provide specific programming in the Southern Tier. We identified the entire County as our target area.

Timeline/Steps:

1. We applied in the fall of 2023, AFT was awarded in March 2024.
2. Inventory completed; 7 things to consider, we picked:
 - Viable agricultural lands of local importance
 - TC Ag and Farmland Protection Plan Definition: weighted farmland prioritization attributes = Low, Medium and High Priority areas: prime soils, soils of statewide importance, land in active ag, location in floodplain, land that serves as a buffer for a significant natural resource, level of competition by non-ag uses. Medium and high were selected.
 - Almost 10,000 parcels were identified.
3. Screening Process completed – Looking at the 10,000 parcels identified and narrowed down the results by the following parameters.
 - Removed duplicate landowners (some own many parcels).
 - Consolidated business owned (LLC or other) properties with landowners known by local partners to own that business.
 - Reviewed each parcel's land use and acreage to confirm agricultural viabilityEnded up with 791 landowners identified for a direct mailing. The workshops are going to be open to the public and will be advertised, however the 791 landowners are going to be targeted for the specific mailing.
4. Beginning to plan the workshops - Willing to move forward even though there is no contract. Hoping for an get as extension to have workshops in the winter.

We do not have specific dates, but 2 workshops have been identified:

- Farm Succession Planning.
- Navigating Leases and Connecting Landowners with Farmers (these are not the official workshop titles).

There will be 3 sessions of each workshop, one in each ag district: midday, evening and next morning making 3 opportunities to attend. T. Lawton suggested (and it was written in the grant) to hold the 3 sessions in each of the ag districts. E. Jardine pointed out that Tioga County has 3 ag districts : Spencer, North Tioga, and Owego/Nichols. When dates for the workshops are confirmed, E. Jardine will let everyone know. L. Bloodnick asked if the money had been secured. D. Singer responded that the State is running behind; there was no contract yet.

VIII. OTHER BUSINESS

- Towns Right to Farm Laws status – E. Jardine introduced Cub Frisbie, Tioga County Farm Bureau and new member to this Board. C. Frisbie reported the Towns of Spencer, Barton,

Tioga and Nichols now have adopted Right to Farm local laws and is currently working with Richford and Berkshire, adding this has been a slow process. Candor will be next, then will go to Newark Valley last. E. Jardine asked about the Town of Owego. C. Frisbie responded the Farm Bureau will approach the Towns of Owego and Newark Valley at the same time.

The next step is to install road signs around the County and C. Frisbie has talked to all the Town Highway Superintendents, except Nichols, and they are all set to get the signs up on the town roads. C. Frisbie talked to Legislative Chair M. Sauerbrey concerning getting County DPW installing the signs as well as getting a contact from NYS DOT Region 9 to be prepared once all the language is in their local laws. Chemung County and Tompkins County have already completed this and C. Frisbie may get a template for signs from the person that made their signs. P. Moore reported there is a new Highway Superintendent in Nichols, Jeff Blow, and will email contact information to C. Frisbie.

T. Lawton asked what does the Right to Farm do for us, what do we gain?

C. Frisbie responded it will give you one more political hurdle if someone tries to come after you. There is a template they are giving to every town. A lot of it is right out of Ag & Markets Law 201. For example, if there is an issue between non-farmer and farmer, there are two ways to handle the situation. You can go directly to Ag & Markets; they follow the letter of the law and have legal power. Or a town could create an ad hoc board that will comprise of 3 people, including a town board member. They may come up with a solution that may or may not be satisfactory. E. Jardine stated the Right to Farm Law, only in cases of nuisance conflict, affords all farmers the same protection whether their land is enrolled in an Agricultural District or not.

- Tioga County Agricultural Resource Group (TC ARG) Update – Wendy Walsh. D. Singer created a brochure that was distributed. W. Walsh reported ARG is a group of farmers, agencies (CCE, Soil & Water, ED&P, etc.) working together to contribute to a thriving rural community by creating and promoting agricultural vitality. The group meets monthly. D. Singer is the Chair of this group. The meeting is held in person as well as virtually. A speaker is usually invited to speak on an issue of interest. ARG carries out the strategies identified in the County's Ag and Farmland Protection Plan.

Also, distributed was a document with information on the Ag & Farmland Protection Plan including the vision statement for the current plan that was adopted in 2015, adding the process for a new plan update has begun. E. Jardine reported that she will apply for an Ag & Markets County Agricultural & Farmland Protection Plan grant in September, which should be awarded in October. E. Jardine will seek resolutions of support from this County Ag & Farmland Protection Board, ARG, TC SWCD and TC Farm Bureau. Jardine will need to obtain a consultant cost estimate to develop the budget for the September application and August County Legislature authorization resolution. The program requires a 10% match from the Legislature (update – requires a 50/50 match including the 10% cash from the county legislature). E. Jardine would like to have this Board meet in July to approve a resolution of support to recommend to the Legislature to make this application. Will need a quorum Also listed on the distributed document are the seven goals and strategies, as well as the implementation progress: a 10-year review from the 2015 plan.

D. Singer also distributed a flyer describing the annual Sundaes on the Farm event and reported working on securing a farm for 2025.

P. Moore asked about the parcels table for the North Tioga Ag District 8-Year Review – is that based on the people who are enrolled in the District? E. Jardine- That was from who we surveyed and properties that are currently enrolled. P, Moore Did you get a response from the Amish? E. Jardine responded that she didn't ask that detail.

P. Moore reported that there are two Amish communities within this District, and for religious reasons they do not want to participate in government programs. P. Moore said she did speak to them about the Ag District a year ago. She spoke to the minister in the Owego Communities. It's a hard sell. For that reason, I see this Ag District as perhaps increasing in agricultural activity, which is not reflected in these documents. But P. Moore is not entirely sure that it is the case. Additionally, there was a golf course on State Route 38 that is back in agriculture now with an Amish family. There is at least one commercial vegetable producer in Newark Valley and I know he works with other farms in that particular community. I don't see that represented here. I know you've already voted. Just an FYI to be thinking about how to work with the Amish in the Ag & Farmland Protection Plan update. It will take a little more work.

E. Jardine has it in her notes to add the topic of Amish farming communities to the grant application. But will need from P. Moore how many communities there are and what order they are, I'll be asking that when I write the grant application. P. Moore added the one in Candor there's over 2 dozen families now. When these communities hit 40 families they tend to split. This may happen fairly soon.

P. Moore reported on Solar and farmland. I've gotten phone calls from different farmers. Karen Gunther came last year and spoke about Solar proposed on prime farmland in Newark Valley. Also got a call from Paul Campbell, a farmer in Nichols and he is on the Town of Nichols Planning Board. Says they are working on tightening up on the solar regulations in Town of Nichols. Pam told him to come to the board meeting and talk about it. Pam brought her husband here and he said something needs to be done to keep solar off the farmland. Is there something you can do. K. Snyder said CCE is working with some of their Ag programs providing guidance or looking into the future of how to potentially coexist with some type of agricultural practices with solar fields/arrays. It's about the design of solar installations. About distance, using tilting arrays instead of fixed arrays can you potentially grow some crops. This is just in the beginning stages. P. Moore mentioned these proposals come before the planning Board, if it's within 500 ft of an ag district or a state/county road but despite this, solar developers basically do what they want.

IX. ADJOURNMENT

Motion to adjourn the meeting: E. Jardine, 2nd C. Frisbie, 6 Yes, Carried

The meeting adjourned at 11:24 AM

Respectfully submitted,

Linda Sampson

Administrative Assistant, Economic Development & Planning