

Town of Ancram
Agriculture & Farmland Protection Plan Project Team Meeting
May 4, 2009
5 PM

Present: Art Bassin, Sue Bassin, Barry Chase, Laurie Davenport, Nan Stolzenburg

The meeting was called to order by Art Bassin at 5 PM.

The Committee reviewed and approved the minutes of the April 6 meeting.

1. Glynwood –The Committee discussed Virginia Kasinki’s presentation at the last meeting, and decided to wait until we had a better sense of our project plan before getting back to her with how Glynwood might be able to assist us.

2. Grant Status -- Mr. Bassin reported we have gotten the Ag & Farmland Protection Plan Grant Contract for \$25,000, and have applied for a \$6250 advance on that grant to get started.

3. Farm Inventory – The Committee reviewed the Inventory form, made revisions and decided to test the Inventory on 6-10 farmers before finalizing it. Mr. Bassin will coordinate with Ms. Stolzenburg to determine the costs of the survey and the logistics of getting them tabulated. The Committee noted that one of the questions on the survey -- rental land -- had become an important and expensive part of the local farm equation, as some large farmers were bidding up the price paid for farmland and some landowners were asking for more to rent land to farmers. The scarcity of farmland available for rental coupled with the increasing dependency of the surviving large farms in the area on rented land is pushing the rental cost farmland land up. Copies of the Inventory will be emailed out before the next meeting, and will be available at the meeting in printed form.

4. Farmer/Landowner List – The Committee reviewed and revised the farmer/landowner list and identified which Committee members could hand-deliver the survey to the farm operators who will be asked to fill out the farm inventory. The Committee will review this list again for completeness and accuracy next time, and finalize the process for distributing and receiving the inventory. Copies of the revised farm operator list will be circulated by email prior to the next meeting, and will be available at the meeting.

5. Project Plan – Ms. Stolzenburg described what the NY State Department of Ag & Markets expected in a Farmland Protection Plan, and outlined the following steps which we would need to take to complete the Farmland Protection Plan:

a) identify and map all farmland – both land now in farming and land which could be in farming

- b) locate and map all farms and their boundaries, identifying owned and rented land
- c) prioritize all farmland using the Land Evaluation and Site Assessment (LESA) model; Ms. Stolzenburg will present and explain the model to the Committee, and the Committee would be responsible for actually using the model to rank farmland
- d) define what “farming” and “agriculture” means in Ancram – does it mean only commercial agricultural businesses, or can it include hobby farms, small backyard operations raising chickens, eggs and rabbits etc?
- e) develop a profile of agriculture and farming in Ancram based on census data and the results of the Farm Inventory which would describe both what kinds of farming were going on and how farming contributed economically to the Community
- f) conduct focus groups with farmers to review the results of the Farm Inventory and discuss their plans, concerns, issues
- g) conduct focus groups with the general public to review the results of the Farm Inventory and discuss their questions, concerns and issues regarding agriculture
- h) consult with agricultural experts from Cornell, Ag & Markets, the Farm Bureau and Farm Credit to get a county and state overview of the issues and trends affecting farming locally and regionally
- i) review/revise zoning to make it more “farm friendly”
- j) review and update Comp Plan agricultural strategies if necessary

Ms. Bassin suggested that the Committee also needed to review the agricultural tax exemption system to fully understand the impact of this program on farmers, landowners and on the Community as a whole. Ms. Bassin noted that there was a lot of mis-information about the ag exemption program which needed to be clarified and corrected.

Ms. Stolzenburg indicted that Don Meltz has the ability to load up the most recent property tax data base and develop tax related information.

Ms. Bassin also suggested that the Committee develop information about “Farming Basics” which could be used to help non-farmers understand the important role framing played in the Community.

Ms. Stolzenburg noted that it was sometimes difficult to get farmers to pay attention to surveys and committee meetings during the summer, but suggested that the project could be done in 12 months.

6. Next Meeting – The Agriculture and Farmland Protection Plan Project Team will meet again on Monday, June 1 at 5 PM at the Town Hall.