

AGRICULTURE, PLANNING, TOURISM & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT  
COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES FEBRUARY 23, 2010

AG, PLANNING, TOURISM & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE MEMBERS

PRESENT: Hurley, Brown, Campbell, Idleman, Haff, Gordon

AG, PLANNING, TOURISM & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE MEMBERS

ABSENT: Lindsay

SUPERVISORS: Rymph, LaPointe, Henke

Debra Prehoda, Clerk

Brian Gilchrist, Exec. Director CCE

Mark St. Jacques, WC Fair Manager

Joe Driscoll, Soil and Water

Kevin Hayes, County Administrator

Dave Perkins, Pres. Snowmobile Assoc.

Tori Riley, Exec. Director LDC

Barb Winchell, Personnel Director

AGENDA AS PRESENTED IN COMMITTEE NOTICE:

- 1) Call to Order
- 2) Approval of Minutes – January 19, 2010
- 3) Department Reports/Requests:
  - A. Agriculture
    - a. Update on the Status of Agriculture in Washington County – Brian Gilchrist, Executive Director, CCE
- 4) Update on Process to Employ Director of Planning
- 5) Other Business
- 6) Adjournment

Chairman Hurley called the meeting to order at 1:06 P.M.

Chairman Hurley stated he proposes to limit his meetings to a two-hour limit. He also mentioned that he has been contacted by Todd Shimkus, Adirondack Regional Chamber of Commerce, who is proposing a meeting between Warren and Washington Counties that would focus on how we might make this environment a more friendly one for business. This is in preliminary discussions at this time. Kevin Hayes, County Administrator, suggested inviting the village mayors.

A motion to approve the minutes of the January 19, 2010 meeting was moved by Mr. Campbell, seconded by Ms. Idleman and adopted.

AGRICULTURE: Brian Gilchrist, Executive Director Cornell Cooperative Extension, addressed the following items:

Update on the Status of Agriculture in Washington County – Brian noted that Sandy Buxton, Farm Business Management Educator, is currently working with dairy farmers on their farm business summaries and is willing to address the committee on the dairy industry after the tax season. Brian distributed a brief overview of farm numbers from the US Census of Agriculture, handout attached. The overall farm numbers have decreased from 1992 up to 2002 where they begin to rise slightly and then fall again in 2007. The overall land in farms has followed the same trend. He feels this is due to the diversification of agriculture going on in Washington County. More people that have sizable portions of land are looking for ways to make it pay. He stated there is a strong movement in local foods and people are getting into livestock and fiber operations. The overall market value of Ag products sold has increased since 1997 along with the average per farm. The handout also compares Washington County to our neighboring counties. The handout does not include landscape and forestry industries. The biggest decrease is in dairy farms. Since 1992 there has been a decrease of nearly half of our dairy farms. The average production per cow has

increased and total poundage produced. Dairy prices are at an all time low. Dairy prices in 2007 were \$19.70 on average, 2008 at \$18.60 and in 2009 below \$15.00 per hundredweight. This is the longest these low prices have prevailed combined with the high cost of input items, fertilizer and fuel. This is a very difficult position for dairy farmers right now. With very little control over the price of milk, the dairy farmer has to control their input costs. They have been encouraging them to do more soil testing and seek competitive pricing for fertilizer. One of the largest concerns currently is that they are seeing issues with animal welfare and husbandry. There is not a lot of this in Washington County but he feels it is coming.

They have seen an increase in the beginning farmer in Washington County that requires a lot of time being spent with them and holding classes for them. Farmers are looking for ways to diversify and create new marketing opportunities. Brian mentioned the Battenkill Creamery, season extension greenhouses with radiant heating in the floor, eight cheese-processing operations and ten farm growing commercial grapes. There is an increased interest in Farmer's Markets. The winter farmers market in Glens Falls draws over 200 people and up to 600 when special events are offered. The average sale is about \$20/customer. Farmers markets are not easy to create and you need a good concentration of vendors. Many of the farmers markets in Washington County are small. He also noted there has been an increased interest in CSA and selling to restaurants. Producers are looking for a way to make their product stand out and at the same time consumers are trying to know what these terms mean. The only two designations that matter are organic and certified humane.

On the state level, policy things are occurring; cuts to PDR programs, loss of funds for creating Ag & farmland protection plans and cutting funds to farms viability grants. At the national level, the USDA has reorganized and in the last farm bill creating a National Institute of Food and Agriculture, which is science based addressing global food security, climate change, childhood obesity, and food safety. There will be a lot of grant opportunities out of this National Institute, regional multi state grants.

What can Washington County do. He stated these are his views not those of the CCE Board who has not endorsed any of these. Regarding land use policies, allow the farmer to continue to farm and when needed get a return on their land when no longer in farming, communities need to have up to date comprehensive plan and be specific to agriculture (not good enough to state preserve the rural appearance). He stated there is on going conversion from Ag to low use residential development due to the increase in property taxes. There needs to be a balance of land uses in the plans so the burden does not fall on just the large landowners. Once a plan is in place, it is important that it is implemented. Are your right-to-farm laws up to date and possibly exploring zoning as a tool down the road. When we are talking about economic development is agriculture receiving the same attention as traditional businesses do. Regarding the upcoming meeting with the Adirondack Regional Chamber and any other economic conversations they should include agriculture. Are they able to go to the LDC for funding. He would encourage the county to start to look for businesses that are compatible with agriculture including bio-energy, wood chipping and ag plastics of which Soil and Water has access to a plastic baler. He supports tourism efforts in the County and feels people come here because of the open space and the views of the working landscape.

The number of poultry producers has increased. It is increasingly difficult to get into chain stores with local products and agricultural products due GAP regulations, good agriculture practices. Kevin asked for a listing of Ag businesses in Washington County and the amount of sales. Mr. Brown suggested having people get together to discuss Ag business ideas. Mr. Haff stated that Hartford is going to start a farmers market at the firehouse. Brian Gilchrist stated that CCE can help with this by bringing farmers together.

Chairman Hurley asked Brian to identify what businesses would be compatible with and supportive of agriculture. Brian stated the ag plastics is one, processing and value type operations. Ms. Idleman stated the Greenwich Mayor is trying to bring in a brewpub and use local grown hops. Tori Riley, LDC Director, stated five different value added ag businesses are coming to Washington County: fiber manufacturing, interest from two individuals regarding a buffalo mozzarella operation and a pickle operation and she stated 80% of slate is waste and there is a project to take this waste and make precast forms. Tori stated we are in a good location between New York City and Montreal and have rail access. Brian stated communications between various agencies has approved. CCE is working with the Battenkill Kitchen on use of that site. Tori stated businesses are looking for ready sites, broadband service and uninterrupted energy.

Kevin stated in agriculture, Ag is synonymous with independence. He suggested developing co ops for marketing. Brian stated there has been a lot of talk about marketing. The producer has a very good product but do not know how to market it.

Chairman Hurley asked Brian what he would identify as the short term trends in agriculture and how does that relate to the pressure from development. Brian stated the largest trend is dairy farms going out. Some land will go to the neighboring farms. There is not the next generation to operate these farms so the option is to sell. Whether this land is bought and built on right away all depends on what happens across the river especially in places in southern Washington County within an easy commute to Saratoga and Albany. He also feels the trend of niche agriculture will continue. Taxes are not going to go down and people are looking for ways to make their land pay.

Kevin asked what is the next thing to do out of this meeting. Chairman Hurley stated we need to incorporate agriculture into our whole approach to economic development. He stated not only figure out a strategy but a whole set of actions that can be supportive. We have not had the opportunity yet to expand what is compatible with agriculture and how we can market ourselves.

Mark St. Jacques, Washington County Fair Manger, stated he feels we are going in the right direction and need good coordination. From the fair's perspective, he is seeing the number of the big farm exhibitors going down but still sees more of 4-H and more new people entering their vegetables and products in the fair. He commended Cornell Cooperative Extension. Cooperative Extension is a great asset that should be utilized.

Mr. Brown commented relative to master planning asking how many people envision wall-to-wall strip malls and corporate America as desirable. He stated people admire the beautiful countryside and hope it is there in the future. The way to keep that is to keep and strengthen agriculture. He stated maybe we could establish an agriculture promotion committee to come up with concepts worthy of promotion. A think tank type of some sort. Chairman Hurley stated he will discuss this

further at the next meeting.

Chairman Hurley distributed a proposed resolution for consideration entitled: In Support of the Future Farmers of America Organization and Their Contributions to Agriculture and Washington County, on file. The committee recommended adding something specific at the conclusion regarding protecting the monies to the FFA program and include the names the legislators this is to be mailed to. A motion that the Ag, Planning, Tourism and Community Development Committee supports FFA resolution and letter supporting FFA funding and forward to the full Board for consideration was moved by Mr. Campbell, seconded by Messrs. Gordon and Haff and adopted.

Renee Bouplan, Agriculture Stewardship Association (ASA), addressed the committee and distributed a proposed resolution for consideration entitled: To Support the State's Farmland Protection Program and Environmental Protection Fund. ASA administers the County's purchase of development rights program and their main source of funding is from the State's Farmland Protection Program. The Governor has proposed drastic budget cuts to the Farmland Protection Program and Environmental Protection Fund. There were no requests for proposals last year and without this funding there will be no proposals this year. The farmers who have submitted applications will be waiting even longer to receive funds. Renee stated funds are also being shifted from the General Fund to the Environmental Protection Fund. NYS also keeps borrowing from the Environmental Protection Fund with no repayment of those funds. Mr. Brown also requested another resolution about borrowing monies from Environmental Protection fund. Renee asked if the committee would consider the resolution presented today and she will see about getting this other resolution prepared. A motion that the Agriculture, Planning, Tourism and Community Development Committee supports the resolution to support the State's Farmland Protection Program and Environmental Protection fund and forward to the full Board for consideration was moved by Mr. Brown, seconded by Messrs. Campbell and Gordon and adopted.

UPDATE ON PROCESS TO EMPLOY DIRECTOR OF PLANNING – Chairman Hurley stated there were two candidates for the position and both declined. He stated we are back to the beginning. Kevin presented a suggestion to combine the LDC and Planning Department, handouts on file. Kevin explained the proposal and attached is the cover page and structure. Chairman Hurley stated to get a Director of Planning; the County would have to invest more money. The planner position is competitive. In reviewing this proposal, Mr. Henke asked would the LDC be setting the direction for what the County staff is doing. Kevin stated they would have a say in it. Mr. Henke stated having a say is one thing, setting the duties is a little overstated. Mr. Brown asked what is the budget impact. Kevin stated this is only a concept. Compensation issues should be addressed with Tori. Kevin stated it would involve increased responsibility. The County currently funds \$65,000 to the LDC and Kevin proposes to instead use that toward an economic development person and a planner. The economic development person would now be a county employee. He felt a break even on the benefit cost. Chairman Hurley asked if there was any problem with the concept. The \$65,000 that the county currently funds the LDC goes toward the empire zone person and clerical person. Tori stated this concept is very preliminary. Chairman Hurley stated Mr. Lindsay expressed interest in having no planner for a year and the damages from not having the position/office would not hurt the county. Kevin distributed a handout detailing

the Planning Department duties that are either being absorbed by other departments or not getting done, on file. Chairman Hurley asked do we want to pursue a discussion on not having a planner. No committee interest in pursuing not having a planner. Mr. Brown stated we have a planner in the room and asked Brian Gilchrist, CCE, to comment. He suggested looking at what do we want the position to do and the duties. The danger is looking at the people you have here and designing a job around them. What is the county's roll in those functions and create that position that would carry out those functions and not look at existing structures. Chairman Hurley stated he assumed the Board was not willing to spend any further money to go get a Director of Planning. Mr. Campbell supports the proposal presented. Mr. Haff feels the best solution would have been if we were able to hire one of the Director of Planning candidates but this proposal saves money. Mr. Brown stated we need more time too think about this. Chairman Hurley requested a more specific proposal and more thorough job description based on this general concept for consideration next month. Kevin stated if the committee wants to pursue then input is needed from Tori and the LDC Board. Mr. Brown asked what planning services could CCE provide. Brian Gilchrist stated Cornell Extension has the ability to bring people to the table to start having conversations about what do communities want for the future, facilitation. Mr. Brown stated perhaps this job could be split in half between a part-time planner and Cornell Cooperative Extension. He stated he would have to look at his organization to see if these duties could be incorporated or if additional personnel are needed. Kevin suggested perhaps a think tank. Thoroughly explore options as to what the position should be, meeting with all the people associated with this function and then have a detailed description of the duties/tasks to be performed and a number of options.

#### OTHER BUSINESS:

Tori mentioned that the LDC is getting a lot of phone calls on Ag events in the County and asked if tourism would be on the agenda next month. Chairman Hurley stated tourism would be on next month's agenda. She is receiving calls from the maple producers, fiber tour and Washington County Fair regarding a change in the new matching funds program put in place. She has asked them to contact Christine Hoffer, Tourism Director. She asked if there has been a change in the funding because all these people were funded in the past. These organizations are looking for clarification on this matter. Mr. Campbell stated the I Love NY funding is looking at a huge cut.

Joe Driscoll, Director of Soil and Water, distributed his annual report, on file.

The committee adjourned at 3:06 P.M.

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