

ONTARIO COUNTY
Agricultural Enhancement Board

MEETING MINUTES: April 2, 2019
Chairman Fred Lightfoote

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Elizabeth Newbold
Maria Rudzinski – for OCPD Tom Harvey
Robert McCarthy
Erin Bullock
Robin Johnson, OCRPT

Frank Fessner
Katie Capiello – for OCSWCD Megan Webster

Members Excused:

Fred Lightfoote
Tim Davis, CCE

Guests:

Lorna Wright, Genesee Land Trust
Ed Hemminger, Farmington Zoning Board of Appeals

Carol Smith, Farmington resident
Roger Smith, Farmington resident
Dan Compitello, Delaware River Solar

Call to Order: In the absence of Fred Lightfoote, M. Rudzinski chaired the meeting.

April 2, 2019 Minutes:

Motion to approve the minutes was made by F. Fessner. Seconded: R. McCarthy. Motion carried.

Board Vacancy: M. Rudzinski reported that Sup. Lightfoote was still working on recruiting a farmer from the Mennonite community. The Board discussed postponing a board member public recruitment effort until Sup. Lightfoote could report on his efforts.

NYS Department of Agriculture & Markets (NYS DAM – Final Notice of Intent – Delaware River Solar, Yellow Mills Solar Project – Town of Farmington.

Mr. Hemminger, Farmington Zoning Board of Appeals, explained the Town’s process for review of commercial solar projects. Commercial solar operations are an allowed use in the zoning district where the proposed project is located. This project requires area variances and a special use permit.

Mr. Compitello, Delaware River Solar project representatives, explained that the area variances were requested in order to minimize the amount of farmland that would be directly impacted by the solar operation. He noted that agricultural operations would continue on the balance of the property.

The Board discussed the project and had the following comments to NYS DAM on the project:

- The proposed project will result in the loss of approximately 30 acres of prime farmland on a parcel that is identified in the Ontario County Agricultural Enhancement Plan – 2018 as a Priority Land for Protection. It is included in the county plan because it was also identified in the Town of Farmington’s Farmland Protection Plan.

As proposed, the landowner will be able to continue their agricultural operation at its current scale. The Board recognizes the landowner’s right to pursue development of uses allowed in the zoning district. However, it is concerned about the potential for the cumulative significant loss of prime agricultural land where commercial solar PV systems are allowed uses in zoning districts (such as A-80) where agriculture is the predominant land use and is a priority for protection.

- The applicant should be required to determine if there are any surface or subsurface agricultural drainage systems that will be impacted by the proposed project. Damage or removal of such infrastructure can adversely impact the viability of the farmland remaining on the parcel and adjoining farmland which may be connected to the sites system.
- *§165-65.3 H. (5) [4] Decommissioning* states, “Stabilization and revegetation of the site with native seed mixes and/or plant species (excluding invasive species) to minimize erosion.” The Board recommends that conditions be

placed on any approval that requires restoration of the site to productive farmland (including surface and subsurface drainage infrastructure) in a manner that is specified by the OC Soil and Water Conservation District or any successor agency and as may be required by Town law or condition of local approval.

- The Board also supports the provisions in §165-65.3 H. Abandonment and Decommissioning regarding the provision of adequate financial surety for the restoration of the site to productive agriculture.

Motion: Authorize a letter be sent to NYS Department of Agriculture and Markets that contains the above comments and recommendations. Made by: R. Johnson, Seconded: R. McCarthy. Motioned carried unanimously.

Discussion with Finger Lakes Land Trust and Genesee Land Trust on addressing the Agricultural Enhancement Plans recommendation regarding the County’s role in the State Farmland Implementation Grant (FPIG) (Purchase of Development Rights -PDR) grant application process.

Lorna Wright, Genesee Finger Lakes Land Trust (GLT), explained the process that they follow.

- GLT submits applications for farmland owners in Monroe, Wayne, and Ontario Counties.
- They hold pre-application meetings for landowners in the autumn prior to the year that the State will be soliciting FPIG applications.
- Landowners must submit a pre-application to GLT which is reviewed and ranked by a committee consisting of Board members and farmers. Criteria reflect the State’s priorities so that they select the most potentially competitive projects. The Town of Parma conducts its own solicitation and selection process and submits one application for GLT to consider.
- The number of applications submitted depends on the limit set by the State and the staff capacity to prepare applications and administer grants.
- The Town of Parma contributes \$3,000 to GLT toward preparation of an application if their project is selected.
- Wayne County provides staff support and partners with GLT in preparation of the FPIG applications.

Elizabeth Newbold, Finger Lakes Land Trust, explained their involvement with FPIG projects. FLLT serves 11 counties and does not have a formal process for soliciting pre-applications from landowners, evaluating them and selecting which they will submit to the State like GLT. FPIG projects are treated and evaluated by the same process and criteria FLLT uses for all their land conservation projects. The number of FPIG applications they will submit depends on their organizational capacity to prepare applications and manage projects.

Yates, Seneca, Schyler, and Onondoga Counties and the Town of Canandaigua conduct their own outreach and pre-application process. They submit their projects to FLLT which are then subject to FLLT review just like any other land conservation project. If a county/town project is not selected then it is up to the locality to decide if it wants to submit an application to the State. Yates County contributes \$5,000 toward preparation of applications. The Town of Canandaigua contributes \$50/acre for projects submitted by FLLT.

Update: Agricultural Enhancement Plan Implementation Projects

Project Sponsor	2019 Agricultural Plan Implementation Projects	Status
Geneva City School District	Development of Agricultural Education Program for GCSD	Working on establishing the FFA. Organizing field trips for the students.
Cornell Cooperative Extension of Ontario County	Adult Tractor & Farm Safety Educational Programs	Summer/fall project.
Cornell Cooperative Extension of Ontario County	Update of Ontario County’s Finger Lakes Agricultural Website	Retained consultant to update the fingerlakesagriculture.com website

Finger Lakes Land Trust	Farmland Owner Land Protection Training Workshops	Have a meeting set in May to discuss workshop topics and schedule
Ontario County Soil and Water Conservation District	Educational Activities to Promote Healthy Soils/Ag Practices	Soil Health Workshop held in March. Will order signs for landowners planting cover crops as a conservation measure.
Ontario County Soil and Water Conservation District	Agricultural Tire Clean-Up Project	Summer/fall project

Other Business/Agency Reports

Deferred until next meeting due to length of meeting.

Adjournment The meeting was adjourned by unanimous consent.

Respectfully submitted by,
 Maria Rudzinski, Senior Planner

