

**Herkimer County Legislature
Natural Resources
Committee Meeting
Friday, June 19, 2020
Via Teleconference
9:30 a.m.**

Persons Attending:

Peter Campione (Chairman, Natural Resources)
Peter Manno (Natural Resources committee member)
William E. Keeler, Sr. (Natural Resources committee member)
Bob D. Hollum (Natural Resources committee member)
Ray Donley (Natural Resources committee member)
John L. Brezinski (Natural Resources committee member)
Vincent J. Bono (Chairman of the Legislature)
James Wallace, Jr., County Administrator
Brandy Serow, Sec. to County Administrator
Lorraine Lewandrowski, County Attorney
Sheri Ferdula, Budget Officer
Steve Billings, Personnel Officer
Nan Stolzenburg, Principal Planner Community Planning & Environmental Associates
Garet D. Livermore, Executive Director Cornell Cooperative Extension
Guy Sassaman, Associate Planner Oneida County Department of Planning
Tyler Kelley, Soil & Water Resource Conservationist

(Non Committee Members Signed In)

Legislator Gregory Malta, Sr.
Legislator Mark Gaworecki
Legislator Robert J. Schrader
Legislator Raymond Johnson
Legislator John P. Stephens
Legislator Raymond Smith
Legislator Kurt Ackerman
Legislator Patrick E. Russell
Legislator Frederick J. Shaw, Jr.
Legislator William Weakley

Absent:

N/A

Mr. Campione called the meeting to order at 9:30 a.m.

Items discussed:

NATURAL RESOURCES:

1. Declare County as Lead Agency for the Farmland Protection Plan
2. Approve SEQRA review and issue negative Declaration
3. Approving Agricultural and Farmland Protection Plan
4. Other

Committee Vote Record

NATURAL RESOURCES:

Mr. Campione stated "First I am going to let Nan Stolzenburg talk for a minute. She is going to let us know her role in this and a little bit of a presentation. Nan, go ahead."

Nan Stolzenburg stated "Sure. Thank you very much. My name is Nan Stolzenburg. I am the Planning Consultant hired by the County to work with the Agricultural and Farmland Protection board and their volunteers to put this new Agricultural and Farmland Protection Plan together. I work with Bernie to kind of shepherd the group through

the planning process and we are pleased today to be able to present the draft plan to the committee for your consideration. I wanted to take a couple of minutes just to briefly tell you what this plan is. This is an update of the original plan that was done in 2002. Like the previous one, it was funded by a grant from the New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets. In essence this is a road map for decision makers, farmers and ag businesses to learn about what the current conditions of agriculture are in the County, what the opportunities to enhance agriculture are and what the strategies could be to help you all get to a better and more successful and resilient agricultural community in the future. The plan is laid out in having a few key sections and I hope that each of these sections will be useful for different groups. There is a section that is pretty detailed about the agricultural census and the economic data that tells you all about the trends in agriculture, how it has fared from the past and what the trends are for the future. It includes some terrific maps that were done by the Oneida GIS folks. The maps are very useful even with not implementing any of the other recommendations. We hope the maps will be useful for other future decision making. We did an audit of five towns to see whether their plans and regulations were what we call farm friendly and consistent with promoting agriculture and recommendations came out of that effort to improve local regulations to help them offer more opportunity for agriculture at the local level. All of that information went into kind of a big analysis called the strengths, weaknesses and opportunities where we looked at what was working, what wasn't working and what were some of the suggestions. The vision and goals is a section of the plan that is kind of the motherhood in apple pie statements about what you hope the agricultural economy will be like in the next ten years. And the bulk of the plan is a series of recommended strategies and actions that different agencies and organizations can take over the next few years to really make this real and not a sit on the shelf kind of plan. We left you with a set of priority projects that the group felt was the most important strategies to get underway as soon as possible so they lay the ground work for other things and the plan has an action plan in it that basically says: This strategy, who are the stakeholders or players that can help implement it and helping to get that done. We hope it leaves you with the tools to implement it and carry it out to meet the goals, which really is to enhance farming, help make the farming industry successful, economically profitable and resilient. Some of the priority projects that stand out in the plan, and there are many recommendations in there, but some of the big ones that call out is a set of strategies designed to help Herkimer County build the capacity for the programming and the projects that are needed. You have the foundation between Soil and Water and Cooperative Extension and Planning and the Farm Bureau but we have to get these agencies and stakeholders all working together and coordinated. The first priority is to set up an agricultural counsel to coordinate implementation of the work and kind of shepherd those projects through. That's typically where we see failures with these plans. Without having a good organization to actually use the plans. That's where this one started with what do we have to do to set up things in the County to put these recommendations to work? The second set of priority recommendations looks at existing programs that you already have in the County that could be enhanced and strengthened, we don't need to reinvent the wheel, there is a great foundation of things already going on and we just have to find a way to make them more robust and stronger. The third set of priority recommendations is there are many new ideas that have been very successful in other places that we can learn from. And again, we don't need to reinvent the wheel but we need to have a big tool box. The issues facing agriculture are complex and our tool box has to be complex to address that. Between building capacity to implement them, strengthening your existing programs and finding ways to start some new programs that have shown to be very successful elsewhere in the state and the country. Some of those being that we really need to work to diversify the farm types we have, to enhance food processing locally, that's especially important these days with COVID, local food, local food systems and local processing. There is so much interest and need for that. It's really come to the top of the list of things we need to work on. Promotioning, marketing is always critical because agriculture has traditionally been very bad at marketing its products and itself and we really need to do a better job with that. We need to work on ag education to help the community understand the importance of agriculture to our communities and our economy and the kind of character you have in Herkimer County, then to protect farmland as we can. As I mentioned the first steps for laying this plan out after adoption is to format agricultural counsel and thanks to John Piseck at IDA, for the phrase "Grow Herkimer County". It's kind of a tag line to pull all of these programs together to make this happen. As a longer term outlook, we need an ag economic development specialist who has the skills to pull these things together. There really needs to be a navigator at the County level to facilitate and move these things along. Some other steps for success is to continue to support those critical agencies that are working with agriculture, Cooperative Extension, the IDA, are critical to provide the support for these programs. We can use the County website and other websites way more effectively to identify local foods and access availability. Another one the committee thought was an essential first step was to works towards a beginning farmer program and get more youth interested in ag and ag businesses and being somehow involved in agricultural economy. We have an aging farm population and we need a new generation of farmers. All of those are contained in the plan and we hope

that it will be a road map for you all to follow over the next decade or so to give you good ideas and projects to start implementing. So that's a really quick tour of what's in the plan and I will turn it back over to you."

Mr. Campione stated "Thank you Nan. Does anyone have any questions for Nan?"

Mr. Gaworecki asked "I noticed in the pamphlet we got your swat analysis is missing the threats section and I was wondering if you have any plans to mitigate threats such as declining pollinator populations and foreign imports of produce and meats, things such as that?"

Nan Stolzenburg stated "I would have to go back and look at it. Certainly there are pieces in the plan that talk about environment resiliency and ensuring that some of the facilities are compatible with farming and the environment. I'm not sure that we had a specific recommendation just for pollinators. I would have to go back. I could look that up and get you back that answer. Bernie or Guy, Tyler or any of you that worked on the plan on that do you recall anything more specific?"

Guy Sassaman stated "I don't recall anything more specific. Not specifically for that issue."

Nan Stolzenburg stated "And that's something you feel is critical to address? We certainly can do that. The concept of environmental resiliency and consistency between farming and the environment was addressed."

Garet Livermore stated "I know that in the state permitting process for the solar facilities, they particularly pay attention to pollinator at Cornell. We are working on developing specific mixes of seeds and other factors to make the solar site be more environmentally sensitive in relation to pollinators."

Mr. Gaworecki and Mr. Campione said thank you.

Mr. Schrader stated "I just want to let you guys know we are having another milk free give away and possibly getting about 1,000 boxes of meat and vegetables. It will be June 30th. It starts at 10:00 a.m. at the high school in Herkimer."

Mr. Campione thanked Mr. Schrader.

Mr. Campione stated "First on the agenda is to declare Herkimer County as Lead Agency for the Farmland Protection Plan Program. Do I have a motion?"

Item #1 – On motion of Mr. Hollum, seconded by Mr. Brezinski, Item #1 was voted on, approved, and moved for Resolution. Unanimous.

Mr. Campione stated "Second on the agenda, approve the SEQRA review and issue the negative Declaration."

Mr. Wallace asked "Have we gone through that Lorraine with the Committee?"

Lorraine responded "I don't know if the committee members received a copy of the SEQRA review."

Mr. Wallace stated "We need to go through that as a committee."

Lorraine stated "Nan did a full environmental assessment form in which we took a look at whether or not this plan would have any adverse environmental impact. The adoption of a countywide Ag and Farmland Protection Plan is a planning instrument. Did you guys receive a copy of the EAF? This would be the usual things we consider. Would there be an adverse impact on planning and zoning actions. The answer was that there would be an impact and it's working with Planning and Zoning. The rest of the impacts, there are none, because this is a plan that is hopefully enhancing our ability to provide for agricultural economic development. Nan did not find any adverse environmental impacts. She summarized in her presentation the narrative part of the SEQRA environmental impact. This would be to build capacity in the County, strengthen our programs and initiate new programs. Nan listed some of the recommendations that came out of the plan and that was number one, to create an ag counsel, create a Grow Herkimer County program, hire an ag economic development specialist and work with the various agencies. As

such, this plan itself is an action but it does not result in any physical changes to the environment. The things that were looked at in the plan, I know it's really hard to read on the computer, and there will be some hard copies later I believe, looked at land resources, geological features, impacts on surface water and ground water, flooding, air, plants and animals, ag resources, aesthetic resources, historic resources, open space, transportation, energy, community character and company planning. Since it's not really having an adverse environmental impact on anything, the recommendation was that a negative declaration be issued. If anyone would like to read the full EAF I have a copy here. I would like to thank Nan for completing this. Her presentation summarized the narrative."

Mr. Campione stated "Thank you Lorraine. Do I have a motion?"

Item #2 – On motion of Mr. Brezinski, seconded by Mr. Keeler, Item #2 was voted on, approved, and moved for Resolution. Unanimous.

Mr. Campione stated "Third on the agenda is approving Agricultural and Farmland Protection Plan. Do I have a motion?"

Item #3 – On motion of Mr. Keeler, seconded by Mr. Donley, Item #3 was voted on, approved, and moved for Resolution. Unanimous.

Mr. Campione asked if there was anything under other.

Item #4 – N/A

With no response Mr. Campione requested a motion to adjourn.

On motion of Mr. Keeler, seconded by Mr. Hollum, the Natural Resources committee adjourned at 9:47 a.m.