

April 27, 2017

Town of North East/Village of Millerton Comprehensive Plan Update Committee

Committee Attendance:

Edie Greenwood

John Midwood

John Crodelle

Dale Culver

Debbie Middlebrook

Ed Downey

Lance Middlebrook

Dianne Engleke

Guest: John Merwin

Edie introduced guest speaker Jennifer Fimbel, the Ag Navigator from Cornell Cooperative Extension. Jennifer is the liaison between farmers and municipal officials in Dutchess County.

- **Farmers on committees**

Jennifer stressed the importance of having farmers on as many committees as possible for their input. Lance mentioned that Gregg Osofsky is on the Solar Committee. Dale said time commitment is a factor with farmers.

- **PDR/TDR/Taxes**

She asked if any action has been taken for funding for PDR (Purchase Development Rights).

Diane said yes, that Kevin Smith of Sunset Ridge Farm has been involved.

Jennifer said to reach out to veterinarians and agri-business people for their input. She mentioned that the support of towns and villages is critical on finding funds to help farmers.

Dale said the problem is that there have been so many infrastructure costs (EMS, highway garage, etc.) within the last 24-36 months that have diverted tax dollars.

Jennifer said start small, it will take several years to grow. She said we should talk to committees with taxing authority such as fire or sewer that assess on full value to crunch some numbers and try to get the farms assessed at ag values.

Dale said that residents don't realize how few of the tax dollars that are paid by a farmer are actually used in services for farms.

Jennifer said many people, including assessor, don't know that and they are trying to get the word out. There is an upcoming assessor training this fall.

- **Definitions of Agriculture**

Jennifer had met with Brian Scoralick of the Dutchess County Soil and Water and Owen Ratchford and agreed that every town has issues with defining agriculture. The rule of thumb that works well is 500 pounds of grazing animal per acre. She said when an agriculture definition change is proposed, it must be submitted to the appropriate planning board and then to her and Brian Scoralick for review.

- **Ag Education**

Jennifer said that the ag program at Webutuck had been dropped and that Pine Plains is the only school left with an ag program in Dutchess County. Jennifer said Dutchess Community College is looking at the possibility of adding farming programs, food & ag science. BOCES is interested in starting something up again but it hasn't gotten there yet. Jennifer said some public schools have started gardens.

- **Town/Village Policies**

Jennifer said she hasn't received many complaints about ag issues but suggested the Committee review any identified ag issues in the past and see if they are still relevant.

- **Models available (County Plan)**

Jennifer suggested putting the Model Agricultural Statement in the comprehensive plan that can be modified for the town's needs.

- **Language**

Jennifer said some of the language in the current comprehensive plan is outdated.

- **Farm breweries/cideries/distilleries, etc.**
Jennifer said the craft beverage has exploded over the last 10 years. The laws vary and towns need to be careful of what they are allowing and not allowing. A distillery in town is different from a farm distillery.
- **Agri-Tourism/Agri-tainment and Farm to Table eating**
Could be hay production, having weddings on a farm, etc. Permits need to be in place to determine what is allowed. Farm fresh tours are a good opportunity for restaurants. Jennifer suggested doing a Taste of Millerton event and getting Dutchess Tourism involved.
- **Community Ag Profile**
They are produced for every town and are available on the Cooperative Extension's website. The Community Ag Profiles are very helpful and they are updated every year. They include info on the town, pictures, the number of parcels in agriculture, a map showing amount of agricultural land, and what is grown based on ag value assessment. They are modeled after USDA county profiles.
John Crodelle asked what the definition of a farm parcel is. Jennifer said they are based on ag districts. They are listed as other or buffers on the pie chart.
- **Agricultural Assessments**
Edie asked if the buffers get the ag assessment. Jennifer said only if a farmer is renting or using the rest of the farm that is open. Jennifer clarified that who gets an ag assessment is dependent on the use of the land.
Ed Downey asked for the definition of stand-alone property. Jennifer said it is land that produces something that goes direct to market; it is not used on the farm for feed, etc.
Ed asked if a memo was sent to assessors. Jennifer said a memo was sent to assessors who she was hearing complaints about. There will be training this fall for assessors regarding this issue. She said one of the goals of the training is to achieve town-to-town consistency.
Jennifer said a sticking point is with farmers that lease the land. She said assessors need to address a statement that landowners of large parcels of land make it possible for farmers to stay in farming.
Dale said it's cheaper for the big landowners to have the farmers farm the land than it is to create dollars for conservation easements. Jennifer said the problem with that is that there are many large parcels of land for sale. Traditional farms that are going organic present other issues. Yields are dependent on the weather. Dry conditions can result in not much yield and land can have erosion and run-off issues.
Jennifer said the Dutchess Land Conservancy has a great tool called the landowner/farmer match.
Edie asked if Jennifer works with the DLC. Jennifer replied yes, but separately. The extension and DLC are very well aware of what each other does.
- **Determine a Vision**
Jennifer said we need to determine a vision and see if others share the same and that priorities change. Dale said change is inevitable and we need to be open to change and adapt to the changing environment.
Jennifer handed out a review of the North East/Millerton comprehensive plan and zoning as it relates to being farm-friendly.
- **Purchase Development Rights**
Ed Downey brought up the issue of raising funds to help in the process of purchasing development rights. He said that the Town of Red Hook got authorization from the state to create a supplemental transfer tax to raise money for open space in agriculture. Ed questioned if this transfer tax has had an impact on the real estate activity in Red Hook. He asked if an observer could be brought in to collect data and determine what the effect of the tax has been. Jennifer said that would have to be organized at the county level of planning or real property and that she will speak to Owen Ratchford.

Meeting adjourned at 5:15 PM.