

Town of Farmington Agriculture Advisory Committee

March 19, 2009

Meeting Notes

Attending: Pete Maslyn- Chair, John Marvin, Royal Purdy, Bob Gerlock, Jim Ochterski, Dick McClurg

Guests: Donna LaPlant (Farmington Assessor), Greg Atwood

1) Changes in Agriculture Assessment in Farmington:

The change in the base assessment for land that qualifies for agriculture assessment is from \$1100 per acre to \$1300 per acre (18% increase). The surrounding towns all have higher values for their assessments and the Assessor consulted with several farmers to determine if this was a fair and tolerable increase; it seemed so. In the process, the Assessor reported learning important things about farm land and buildings, such as the significant depreciation in barns. The Assessor explained the rationale and math behind the increase and is looking for additional input from the Agriculture Advisory Committee.

Discussion of how farmland assessment comparisons can be made from town to town, when it is the school district that has a bigger influence on the tax burden.

The Assessor is mandated to make adjustments to the overall assessment base to keep it 100% of market value. Farmington is currently the second lowest base agriculture assessment in the county (next to Town of Hopewell). In Farmington, there was not a lot of actual parcel data to go on. Bloomfield seems to have the most farmer-to-farmer parcel sales data. However, all sales data from Bloomfield suggests assessments of \$2400 and up.

Applications for agriculture assessment in Farmington are generally steady, with some land being bought and rented back to farmers just to get the agriculture assessment.

It is the consensus of the Advisory Committee that the increase in assessment is probably appropriate, though undesirable for agriculture interests. The assessment is based on current use, not highest and best use. There will need to be attention paid to parcels being split off as frontage – they should be assessed higher due to that activity.

The idea of distinguishing between tillable land ag assessments and untellable land (pasture) is controversial. ORPS has defined the differences between pastured and tillable land. The FSA office also has data on land considered tillable or pasture. There are a few parcels in the town that are split between tillable and pastured.

The Assessor would like to meet with the Ag Advisory Committee at least once per year.

2) Pursuit of a farmland planning grant

The Agriculture Advisory Committee, based on favorable feedback from the Town Board, will go ahead with an application for a Municipal Agriculture and Farmland Protection Plan development. Jim O. will pursue the grant application and get the process organized to present to the Planning Board and the Town Board by June 2009. The awards announcement would not

be expected until late 2009 or early 2010. General agreement that such a plan should influence town planning for agriculture in a way not previously done. The application will take more commitment from the Town, but would provide important information and benchmarks.

3) Farm development in Farmington:

Discussion of school districts and taxes, general economic conditions, recent changes in real estate values, and horse farms.

4) Committee membership: Jim Gray has expressed an interest in being part of the Agriculture Advisory Committee if there is a slot available.

Next meeting: Scheduled for April 16, 2009; 7:30 PM Town of Farmington Hall