



ERIE COUNTY AGRICULTURAL & FARMLAND PROTECTION BOARD MEETING MINUTES

March 14, 2024 | 6:00 PM

Roycroft Power House | 39 South Grove Street | East Aurora, NY 14052

Board Members in Attendance: Brett Kreher, Diane Held, Scott Bylewski, Len Janiga, Dan Castle, Bryant Zilke, Dan Henry, Rachel Chrostowski

Board Members Excused: Mayda Pozantides, Mark Gaston

Staff in Attendance: Sarah Gatti, Mark Rountree

Guests in Attendance: Barbara Johnston, Josh Greene, Dennis Bauman

1. Consideration of the October 2023 Meeting Minutes

Bryant Zilke made a motion for **APPROVAL**, seconded by Diane Held, and carried by all voting members.

2. Election of Officers

Diane Held made a motion to **ELECT** Brett Kreher as Chairperson and Bryant as Vice-Chairperson of the Erie County Agricultural and Protection Board (AFPB); seconded by Rachel Chrostowski and carried by all voting members (Brett Kreher and Bryant Zilke abstaining).

3. WNY Land Conservancy Letter of Support

Ms. Chrostowski stated a Letter of Support was needed for a NYS Department of Agriculture and Markets grant, then recused herself from the discussion and left the meeting room. Sarah Gatti explained the grant was to place conservation easements on two parcels in Marilla owned by Clarence Gerhardt Junior.

Bryant Zilke made a motion to **APPROVE** the Letter of Support for the Gerhard Farmland Conservation Easements, seconded by Len Janiga, and carried by all voting members (Ms. Chrostowski recused).

4. Agricultural District Open Enrollment

Dennis Bauman, member of the public, was present and added to the agenda to briefly speak on the 2023 Agricultural District Open Enrollment. The AFPB recommended these parcels be included in the District and the Erie County Legislature disagreed, ultimately not voting to include them. Mr. Bauman sought further explanation. Brett Kreher explained that the Legislature is the decision-making body and that this Board can only make recommendations. Ms. Gatti further stated that there was no mechanism to alter the 2023 Open Enrollments and that Mr. Bauman can apply next year.

5. November Storm Fund

Ms. Gatti provided an update noting that as of the end of February, ten grant awards have been made totaling \$855,760.63. Another three applications are in progress totaling \$134,826.05. Additional applications are anticipated but have not been submitted.

6. Agricultural and Farmland Protection Plan

a. Introductions

The Project Consultants, Barbara Johnston and Joshua Greene, were introduced to Board members.

b. Project Understanding, Scope, and Schedule

The Consultants provided an overview of the project schedule.

The Consultants asked the Board to identify issues they would like addressed in the Plan update. The following were identified: land and people, workforce development, sewer and water district expansions and contractions, farmer/neighbor conflicts, updated maps, a review and comparison of current and past plans, a forecast of future issues, urban farming, solar on farmland, climate refugees and demand for land, and a clear set of realistic recommendations and action items.

c. Outreach and Communications

The Consultants provided an overview of the first round of public outreach, slated to being in early April. The Board suggested the location of the four in-person focus groups be changed to better reach farmers where they are at. Ms. Gatti agreed to work on making those changes.

The Consultant also asked for suggestions on who to interview as part of this project. The following were suggested: farm neighbors, farm bureau, those who are part of the agricultural ecosystem, and Kristin Heltman-Weiss from Providence Farm Collective. Board members will email Ms. Gatti with additional suggestions.

7. Other Business

Len Janiga expressed his concern over recent Board membership changes. Dan Castle provided an explanation, noting that the Board is an advisory board to the Legislature, the Chair of which has full authority to appoint members. The Chair exercised this right in appointing an urban farmer in the only active farmer seat available. County staff agreed to put membership on the mid-year agenda moving forward.

Bryant Zilke inquired about the sky lantern memo sent to the Legislature in August. Mr. Castle stated it was with the Energy & Environment Committee. Mark Rountree recommended that a Board member reach out to the Legislator assigned to the AFPB to move the sky lantern memo forward.

8. Adjournment

Dan Castle made a motion to **ADJOURN** at 7:50PM, seconded by Diane Held, and carried by all voting members.

NEXT MEETING MAY 16, 2024