



ERIE COUNTY AGRICULTURAL & FARMLAND PROTECTION BOARD MEETING MINUTES

August 22, 2024 | 6:00 PM

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

Board Members in Attendance: Brett Kreher, Rachel Chrostowski, Diane Held, Len Janiga, Mark Gaston, Mayda Pozantides, Dan Castle, Bryant Zilke

Board Members Absent: Scott Bylewski, Dan Henry

Staff in Attendance: Sarah Gatti, Mark Rountree

Guests in Attendance: Barbara Johnston, Josh Greene, Valerie Weisbeck, Hayly Parzonko

1. **Consideration of the March 2024 Meeting Minutes**

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

2. **November Storm Fund**

Commissioner Castle provided an update noting that there was about \$600,000 remaining and the Fund has been expanded to include damages to farms sustained during the July 2024 tornadoes.

3. **Agricultural Districts Open Enrollment**

Sarah Gatti noted that open enrollment will begin on September 1 and that the Department of Environment and Planning is prepared for the process to start. At the request of the Board, letters will be sent to landowners with land that receives an agricultural assessment but is not within an Agricultural District.

4. **Notices of Intent**

Ms. Gatti provided an update on the two Notices of Intent (NOI) for Solar Development in an Agricultural District. These projects are located on Feddick Road in Boston and Knoll Road in Eden. The NYS Department of Agriculture and Markets has not determined these NOIs complete and therefore the Board's response cannot be sent. Ms. Gatti noted the responses are ready and will be sent at the appropriate time.

5. **Evans Agribusiness Park Letter of Support**

Mark Rountree and Commissioner Castle provided background on the project and explained the need for a Letter of Support. Commissioner Castle stated a template letter for partner organizations to review and sign will be distributed.

Mark Gaston made a motion to **APPROVE** the Letter of Support for the Erie County Agribusiness Park, seconded by Bryant Zilke, and carried by all voting members.

6. Agricultural and Farmland Protection Plan Update

a. Update

Labella, the project consultant, provided an update of Plan's progress, noting several interviews had been conducted and work has continued on identifying key issues and opportunities.

b. Key Issues and Opportunities

Labella presented, by topic, on key issues and opportunities. Board feedback included: weaving urban agriculture throughout the Plan, in addition to having a chapter dedicated to the topic; considering language barriers regarding New Americans and agricultural regulations, and making semantic changes to clarify the intent.

c. Agricultural Maps

The maps were reviewed and the following suggestions and clarifications were made: there will be a separate map depicting forested areas, the protected areas symbology will be removed from the ag universe map, the cropland data layer will undergo QA/QC to ensure only accurate parcels (i.e., no golf courses/landfills) are included, the protected land map may be expanded to show additional easements if such data exists, and the definition of land cover will be added to the land use map.

The Natural Resource Rating map will be deleted from the updated plan.

d. Farmland Rating System

The current Farmland Rating System was discussed. Preliminary changes include: updating the high-value agricultural clusters map, developing a map that clearly identifies parcels prioritized for protection, incorporating agricultural universe parcels and high-value agricultural clusters on the priority map, considering solar development pressure when prioritizing parcels, and amending the rating system to be language-based rather than numerical.

e. Fall Focus Groups

A flyer for the upcoming Fall focus groups was distributed and Board members were encouraged to attend one or more of the meetings. Input on interactive activities for the focus groups was solicited but tabled at the meeting. Follow up regarding this will be conducted via email.

f. Next Steps

Labella will share an up-to-date interview status spreadsheet. Once received, Board members will review and share interview suggestions. Maple and dairy producers are among those Labella was encouraged to interview.

7. Other Business

Bryant Zilke inquired about the sky lantern memo sent to the Legislature in August 2023. Mr. Castle stated it was sent to the Legislature and there were no further updates. Ms. Gatti will send the memo to Mark Gaston.

8. Adjournment

Rachel Chrostowski made a motion to **ADJOURN** at 7:51PM, seconded by Diane Held, and carried by all voting members.

NEXT MEETING OCTOBER 17, 2024

