



**ERIE COUNTY AGRICULTURE & FARMLAND PROTECTION BOARD  
MEETING MINUTES**

January 21, 2021 | 6:00 PM | Webex

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Board Members in Attendance: Brett Kreher, Bryant Zilke, Mark Gaston, Diane Held, Dan Henry, Dan Castle, Rachel Chrostowski, Earl Gingerich

Staff in Attendance: Sarah Gatti

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1. Consideration of the October 22, 2020 Meeting Minutes – Vote

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

2. Nomination and Election of Officers of 2021

Mark Gaston made a motion to **NOMINATE** Brett Kreher as Chairperson and Bryant Zilke as Vice-Chairperson of the Erie County Agricultural and Protection Board (AFPB); seconded by Earl Gingerich and carried by all voting members (Brett Kreher and Bryant Zilke abstaining).

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

3. 2020 Open Enrollment

Sarah Gatti provided an update to the AFPB, informing them that the Erie County Legislature had approved the recommended modification to Erie County Agriculture Districts (AD) with the exception of one parcel on Grand Island. The AFPB had recommended this parcel not be included. The Legislature opted to include the parcel in the AD. The modifications have been certified by the New York State Department of Agriculture & Markets (NYSDAM) and the 2020 open enrollment cycle is now concluded.

Sarah Gatti reminded the AFPB of the Oct. 15, 2020 conversation regarding modifying the open enrollment application. The suggested changes include removing/revising the financial language or adding a disclaimer that these items are optional. The AFPB concluded the following:

- Add a disclaimer that financial questions are not required, but do provide additional information that may aid the AFPB in decision-making

- Add a note that including a business plan is not required but will strengthen your application
- Add the question, “On your last tax return, did you have over \$1,000 in agriculture-related income?” The \$1,000 figure corresponds with the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) definition of a farm.

Sarah Gatti will modify the application and present a draft at the next AFPB meeting.

#### 4. Office of Agriculture

Sarah Gatti informed the Board that the Office of Agriculture funded five agricultural planning efforts had in 2020. The Towns of Eden, Colden, Concord, North Collins, and Sardinia were funded and will be updating their comprehensive plans and/or zoning ordinances. The Office of Agriculture intends to have another round of grant funding in 2021 although details of budget and timeline are to be determined.

#### 5. Agriculture and Farmland Protection Plan Implementation Matrix

Sarah Gatti provided an update on the implementation of the Agriculture and Farmland Protection Plan, highlighting three keys outcomes:

- Erie Grown and the Erie Grown Passport implement several recommendations by creating a County agriculture brand, promoting farmers markets, and acting as a self-guided tour during COVID-19.
- The County is still doing agriculture trainings and will continue to do so. A training with the University at Buffalo Regional Institute (UBRI) is currently being planned and will focus on food systems and will include a segment on agriculture. Ahead of the 2021 open enrollment/eight-year review, some sort of education agricultural districts will be arranged. Details to be determined.
- Some of the recommendations in the matrix have been identified by other groups (Food Policy Council, Agriculture and Food Systems Subcommittee) and hopefully will be accomplished as implementation efforts begin.

The Board noted that continued training is important, especially on the topic of ADs. Other concerns noted were whether a ditch maintenance program had been created and the importance of an agricultural workforce development program (i.e., housed in BOCES or at community colleges).

#### 6. Other Business

Diane Held updated the Board on the status of the Agriculture and Food Systems Subcommittee (AFSS), noting that implementation efforts will begin in earnest soon. Ms. Held identified some actions the AFPB may have a role in and inquired whether the AFPB would be interested in taking a more active position. The AFPB agreed to take on a more active role in AFSS implementation. It was decided that a March meeting may be scheduled to accommodate this expanded role. If a March meeting is scheduled, proper notice will be distributed to all Board members.

Sarah Gatti informed the AFPB that pursuant to the Erie County Agriculture District Consolidation Plan, three existing ADs (Marilla, Wales, and Elma) will be consolidated into a Central AD this year. Mailings will go out and the AFPB will be kept apprised of progress. Open enrollment will still happen this year to capture new enrollments in the other ADs.

Dan Castle told the Board of ongoing work to draft an Erie County PILOT/Community Benefit Agreement (CBA) policy for large-scale solar energy developments. The CBA would require that money per acre be paid for development on prime or active farmlands. The exact details and language remain to be determined. These funds would then go to the Office of Agriculture to be used for further Agriculture and Farmland Protection Plan implementation, with input from the AFPB. Mr. Castle warned that the county share of PILOTs/CBAs can be quite small and inquired if a policy of this sort would be welcome by the AFPB. The AFPB confirmed that it would.

7. Next Meeting: Scheduled for May 20, 2021. A meeting in March will be scheduled and the AFPB notified with proper notice.

The meeting concluded at 7:30 PM.

Respectfully submitted,



Sarah E. Gatti