

TOWN OF GORHAM
CONSERVATION BOARD
FEBRUARY 16, 2007

The Town of Gorham Conservation Board met on Thursday, February 16, 2007 at 7:00 PM at the Gorham Town Hall. Present were: Steve Horrocks, Andrew Hoover, Bob Brancato, John Foust, John Frank, Gene Hermenet, Bill Johnson, Fred Lightfoote, Maria Rudzinski and Nancy Hollenbeck.

Mr. Hermenet stated that he met recently with Maria Rudzinski of the Ontario County Planning Department and asked if she would be willing to come to our meeting and give us a little direction, information and guidance. She graciously accepted.

Ms. Rudzinski stated that there are a number of ag and planning and other things coming together at the same time where a little bit of work would serve at least four or five purposes. One is Agricultural District #4 which is up for renewal. The State established legislation back in the 70's to allow land owners (farmland owners) to come together and create agricultural districts and they appealed to the Board of Supervisors and the County and created a Farmland Protection Board. The intent was to provide some measures of protection, advantages to farmland owners and farmers within the district. Some of them have to do with the right to farm which means they have some protection if following sound agricultural practices, some protection from unreasonable local regulations. These districts are on a specified renewal cycle during which time lands can be requested to be added to or deleted from the specific district. Most of the Town of Gorham is in District #4 and it is up for renewal now. There are reporting requirements when doing these and you go through a lot of information on what is in the district, how much land there is, what are the threats to the land, what should be done to protect farm land, there are a whole series of things. Ag District #6 which is our neighbor, immediately to the east, will be done at the same time.

There is talk that the Town of Gorham may be updating their Comprehensive Plan in the near future, Ms. Rudzinski mentioned that because the State created a program that enables in addition to the County Agricultural Enhancement Plan (Farmland Protection Plan), a Municipal Agricultural and Farmland Protection Plan, at the Town level. There is a remarkable comparison of what is needed for each of these documents or tasks. In addition, if you are going to update your Comprehensive Plan, one of the questions would be the ag element in the plan. If you want to apply for State Farmland Protection Grants you will get more points if you have a plan in process. You will be in better stead to compete for those dollars. Ms. Rudzinski stated that there is a lot of work that she will be doing which she briefly explained, but this Board can assist with certain tasks which would help with the update of the Comprehensive Plan, County Agricultural Enhancement Plan, etc. A lot of the work can be accomplished within six months.

Steps to create a Gorham Agricultural Enhancement Plan were reviewed and discussed. Current agricultural land use needs to be identified, a profile developed that shows ownership patterns such as farmer owned, rented by a farmer-friendly owner, rented from an owner with an intent to develop; identify significant agricultural soil resources, current development density and build out based on existing zoning. Agricultural activity and infrastructure, need to describe the current types of agricultural operations, practices, activities, etc. Identify existing agricultural infrastructure if any or within close proximity, mills, processing facilities, equipment dealers, transportations, etc. Describe the types of development pressures in Gorham, areas under current and near term large scale development pressure, etc. Development inducing factors such as water/sewer, proximity to lake or view shed, etc. Critical issues threatening the long term viability of agriculture such as development pressure, impact of local zoning, loss of ag infrastructure, etc. Create an ideal build out scenario for the year 2027; identify agricultural lands valued for their concentration of highly productive ag land with minimal non-ag development, other natural resources such as woodlands, wetlands, etc., historic or cultural resources and other unique qualities like viewsheds, adjoins publicly owned land, buffers other important natural resources. All of these items were discussed at length.

PDR, Purchase of Development Rights were discussed. This can be a very useful land use tool to preserve agricultural land, but it can be a rather lengthy and costly process. In order to apply for grant funding for this type of application from the State or Federal Government, you must have other things in place such as the Comprehensive Plan and Agricultural Enhancement Plan, etc.

Conservation Easements were also discussed. Working with a Land Trust or professional would be very beneficial as this can also be a lengthy process.

Subdivision of land in the agricultural district to be beneficial to the farmer was discussed. It can make a difference where a lot is located. If a farmer is required to go around a residential lot or his access is relocated to a less desirable part of a parcel it may cost the farmer in time and in the end some areas may become too difficult or time consuming to continue farming. Placement of new parcels should consider the efficiency of the farmer to do his work.

Ms. Rudzinski provided a map of the Town of Gorham, agricultural parcels were in green. They talked about land classifications, it seemed that some parcels should have been classified as ag but are not, may want to check with the Assessor on these. She suggested that this Board may like to go over this map and on the lists of parcels provided rank each one as: farmer-owned, rented by a farmer-friendly owner, or rented from an owner with intent to develop. She suggested that colored markers be used to identify each parcel to correspond with the rank given. Board members discussed this idea and how it would be done and whether they should request assistance from other residents.

Mr. Horrocks moved that this Board take this step and move forward to work on the map as described by Ms. Rudzinski. Mr. Hermenet seconded the motion that carried unanimously.

Tom Bay will be asked to assist in this task since he knows more about the area on the other side of Town.

Board members were reminded that there is a joint meeting with the Gorham Town Board, Planning Board and Conservation Board on Wednesday, February 28, 2007 at 7:00 PM at the Town Hall.

The next meeting of the Conservation Board will be Tuesday, March 6th, 2007 at 7:00 PM at the Town Hall.

On the motion by Mr. Frank, seconded by Mr. Hoover, the meeting was adjourned at 9:20 PM.

Nancy Hollenbeck, Secretary