



Onondaga County Legislature

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PLANNING & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE MINUTES – MAY 22, 2024 **DAVID H. KNAPP, CHAIR**

MEMBERS PRESENT: Mr. Meaker, Ms. Harvey, Mr. Olson, Mr. Ryan
ALSO ATTENDING: Chairman Burtis, also see attached

Chair Knapp called the meeting to order at 9:33 a.m. and the previous meeting's minutes were approved.

- 1. PLANNING DEPARTMENT:** Megan Costa, Assistant Director
 - a. Calling for a Public Hearing on the Proposed Inclusion of Viable Agricultural Lands Within Certified Agricultural Districts Pursuant to Section 303-B of the New York State Agriculture and Markets Law (July 2, 2024 at 12:50 p.m.)**

The Annual Addition of Viable Ag Lands Report is on file with the Clerk.

PURPOSE: *This resolution calls for the authorization of a public hearing and the publication of a public notice for the consideration of the annual addition of predominantly viable agricultural lands to Agricultural Districts in Onondaga County.*

OBJECTIVE/ WORK PLAN: *New York's Agricultural Districts Law, Article 25-AA of the NYS Agriculture and Markets Law was enacted in 1971 to help keep farmland in agricultural production. Agricultural districts are designed to protect agriculture through a combination of landowner incentives and protections that discourage the conversion of farmland to non-agricultural uses.*

Responsibility for the creation and review of the State's agricultural districts lies within the authority of the county legislative body. AML Sections 303 (district creation), 303-a (district review), 303-b (annual inclusion/addition of lands) and 303-c (district consolidation) detail the role county agricultural and farmland protection boards and legislative bodies play in district creation and review and prescribe the public notice and public hearing requirements.

Per Section 303-b, landowners can submit requests during an annual thirty-day period for the inclusion of predominantly viable agricultural lands within certified agricultural districts. Pursuant to Onondaga County Resolution No. 71-2004, that thirty-day period is to occur January 1-30 of each year.

The Onondaga County Agriculture & Farmland Protection Board (AFPB) then prepares a report with a recommendation as to whether the land to be included in an agricultural district consists of predominantly viable agricultural land and presents it to the County Legislature, who is to hold a public hearing and then make its finding. The County Legislature then submits the final report with its finding to the Commissioner of Agriculture & Markets for certification.

During January 1-30, 2024 a landowner made a request to add land to an agricultural district. The Onondaga County Department of Planning prepared a report, and at its February 27, 2024 meeting the AFPB reviewed and voted to forward the report and recommendation for the inclusion of predominantly viable agricultural lands within a certified agricultural district to the Onondaga County Legislature. The Onondaga County Legislature shall conduct a public hearing and will subsequently make its finding at a following session.

FUNDING SOURCE & BUDGET: *No fiscal impact*

Chairman Knapp presented the following information:

- 4 Agricultural districts in the county ~ 1 district is up per year
- Farmer putting land in an Ag district
 - Nothing to do with property taxes
 - Provides zoning that protects the land from zoning that may inhibit farm agricultural use
- Every year any place in county can add property to the district
- When specific district is up for review, that is the only time people can take land out of the district
 - District number 4 is up and is prime farmland in Onondaga County
 - Southeast portion of county (12th district)

Ms. Costa presented the following information:

- One landowner request
 - 2 parcels totaling ~7 acres
 - Joseph Moore lives on Valley Drive in the Village of Elbridge
 - Owns 100 acres, adding ancillary lands to property
 - Working with Planning on conservation easements for his farmland through program

Questions/Comments from the Committee:

- Resolutions before the committee are not approving/disapproving the additions; only calling for public hearings
- Planning Department coming next month to the Planning Committee with housing study presentation

A motion was made by Mr. Olson, seconded by Mr. Meaker, to approve this item. Passed unanimously; MOTION CARRIED.

b. Calling for a Public Hearing on the Modification of Agricultural District No. 4, County of Onondaga, Towns of Dewitt, Fabius, and Pompey, and Towns of LaFayette, Onondaga, and Tully (East of I-81) (July 2, 2024 at 12:55 p.m.)

The Ag District 4 Eight Year Review Report is on file with the Clerk.

PURPOSE: *This resolution calls for the authorization of a public hearing and the publication of a public notice for the consideration of the modification of Agricultural District 4 in the Towns of DeWitt, Fabius, La Fayette, and Towns of Onondaga, Pompey, and Tully (east of I-81).*

OBJECTIVE/ WORK PLAN: *New York's Agricultural Districts Law, Article 25-AA of the NYS Agriculture and Markets Law was enacted in 1971 to help keep farmland in agricultural production. Agricultural districts are designed to protect agriculture through a combination of landowner incentives and protections that discourage the conversion of farmland to non-agricultural uses.*

Responsibility for the creation and review of the State's agricultural districts lies within the authority of the county's legislative bodies. AML Sections 303 (district creation), 303-a (district review), 303-b (annual inclusion/addition of lands) and 303-c (district consolidation) detail the role county agricultural and farmland protection boards and legislative bodies play in district creation and review, and prescribe the public notice and public hearing requirements.

Per AML Section 303-a, the County Legislature is responsible for conducting a review of each agricultural district in the County on an eight-year schedule. During the review period, landowners and municipalities can request to have property added to or removed from the district, usually between January 1-30, to align with the annual additions request process for all districts in the County.

The Onondaga County Agricultural and Farmland Protection Board (AFPB) then prepares a report with a recommendation to continue, terminate, or modify the district and presents it to the County Legislature, who is to hold a public hearing and make its finding. The County Legislature then submits the final report with its finding to the Commissioner of the NYS Department of Agriculture & Markets for certification.

Agricultural District 4 is up for review in 2024 and landowners requested that lands be added and removed from the District. The Onondaga County Department of Planning prepared a report, and at its February 27, 2024 meeting the AFPB reviewed and voted to forward the report with its recommendation to modify Agricultural District 4 to the Onondaga County Legislature. The Onondaga County Legislature shall hold a public hearing and subsequently make its finding at a following session.

FUNDING SOURCE & BUDGET: *No fiscal impact*

- Agriculture and Farmland Protection Board prepares a report on viability of ag industry within that district
- Since 2016, added 599 acres to the district
- Current additions and removal requests made this January
 - ~33 acres added in Fabius and LaFayette
 - ~140 acres removed in Fabius, Pompey and Tully; net loss of 90 acres
 - 600 acres up since last renewal in 2016
- District contains predominantly agricultural land with ~ 63,500 acres total

A motion was made by Mr. Meaker to approve this item.

Questions/Comments from the Committee:

- Do all the red squares inside the circles add up to 140 acres? (*see map on pg. 21 of report*)
 - Yes, it is a big district
 - One of the properties is 42 acres
 - 68 acres in Pompey, 49 acres in Fabius, 25 acre in Fabius as well, and 22 acres in Tully being removed
- What is the reason for a removal request?
 - In the 1970's when the ag districts were created, it had to be a contiguous area within the ag district
 - Properties were added to the districts that were residential and non-agricultural
 - Currently if there is a house on a property that is enrolled, but does not need to be, it is being taken out
 - Another reason is someone wanting to develop the property, so it is taken out
- It does not matter for tax implications whether zoned residential or agricultural
 - No, it does not matter
 - Ag district protects agricultural land owners to keep their land in farming and protect them from nuisance lawsuits or to pay for infrastructure expansion

Mr. Ryan seconded the motion. Passed unanimously; MOTION CARRIED.

c. Amending the 2024 Onondaga County Budget to Accept Grant Funds from New York State Empire State Development for the Preparation of the Central New York Regional Market Revitalization Strategy (\$100,000)

PURPOSE: *The purpose of this resolution is to accept funds from and enter into contract with NYS Empire State Development for the preparation of the CNY Regional Market Revitalization Strategy.*

OBJECTIVE/ WORK PLAN: *The CNY Regional Market Authority, established in 1935, operates the physical campus and operations of the CNY Regional Market located on Park Street in the City of Syracuse. The Market is the largest year-round retail farmers market operating on the East Coast, and is a longstanding cultural and community asset.*

Age and deferred maintenance have taken a toll on the market facilities which are in need of repair and revitalization. Important building spaces are in disrepair, underground and above-ground infrastructure is in need of much overdue modernization and maintenance, and the limitations inherent to existing structures is creating challenges for tenants and vendors, particularly for the long-term wholesale operations on site.

The Authority has recently begun a campaign to solicit public funding to address the physical deterioration of the Market property and buildings, with estimated \$90m in identified improvements. As a State Authority, the Regional Market is often

not eligible to apply for typical public funding mechanisms for such work. And tenant rents and other revenue streams barely cover day-to-day Market operations.

In an effort to support this regional asset, Empire State Development has dedicated grant funds to stimulate needed revitalization activity. And in support of the County's recently adopted Plan Onondaga comprehensive plan and Onondaga County Agriculture & Farmland Protection Plan goals, Onondaga County has made surplus funds available for the advancement of developing a strategic master plan for the operation.

This Revitalization Plan is being developed to articulate the role the CNY Regional Market facilities are to play in the community, in the region, and as a critical component of the local food system – both today and for future generations. The plan will examine how the facilities serve the public, its vendors and tenants, and assess current conditions. It will also explore what physical changes are necessary to best meet ongoing maintenance challenges and future programmatic needs and opportunities.

In addition to a physical assessment of the Market structures, the planning process will also include an analysis of the fiscal and operational sustainability of the Market Authority in achieving its mission. This strategic plan is intended to set forth a clear course for public and private investment into the market operation, show investors and funding agencies the Market has a vision and plan which will reduce uncertainties for investment, and provide for a thriving and self-sustaining future for this unique, regional asset.

FUNDING SOURCE: *NYS Empire State Development – Urban Community and Development Program Strategic Planning Grant (\$100,000)*

- Market authority initiated contact with County last year, did tour of facility and talked about infrastructure needs
- Been around since 1935 and have aging infrastructure
- NY State Comptrollers report was just released stating Regional Market financial conditions are stressed
- Last year, Market sought \$90M for engineering analysis
 - \$11M - \$30M was for critical improvements; seeking partnerships and funding from the community
- Regional Market is a huge asset to the community agriculturally and for the local food industry and tourism
- Interest on behalf of the County in helping the market succeed
- Prior to providing financial assistance, it is important to get a handle on
 - Fiscal condition
 - Operations
 - Needs
 - Create clear fiscal and management strategy, as well as a capital infrastructure plan
 - What are the things the Market will do to make them self-sustaining
 - What are the revenue streams to help this operation continue for future generations
 - What does the Market want this place to be
 - How will the Market balance their books in the future to make any County or State investments worthwhile
- Last year awarded \$5M from Legislature for agriculture and support implementing Plan Onondaga
- Looking at spending up to \$4M towards Regional Market improvements
- Requiring preparation of revitalization plan or strategy
- Focus on fiscal and operational aspects of the Market Authority
- Looking at infrastructure needs, capital plans, future vision for Market
- County prepared to put in ~\$225,000
- Empire State Development has offered \$100,000 grant towards initial planning and strategy

Questions/Comments from the Committee:

- This resolution is for \$100,000
 - Planning:
 - Yes, this is to accept/enter into a contract with Empire State Development for \$100,000
- Is there someone from the county to help review the Market?
 - Planning:
 - Yes, that is the purpose of this

- County Executive Office:
 - County Executive wants Steve Morgan, CFO, to take a look at it
 - This is broader on how the Market is going including infrastructure
 - Mr. Wixson, Facilities Management, did a walkthrough of Market and gathered information on what is critical
 - CFO will take a look at what is happening fiscally, plus having the NYS Comptroller's Report
- Makes sense to be long-term plan to ensure the Market is set up for a successful future
 - County Executive is working with Assemblymen Magnarelli to put forth legislation that will add two more people from Onondaga County to the board (County Executive picks) – maybe someone fiscal
- When will the Legislature know who will be doing the plan?
 - Planning:
 - RFP is being drafted and will be released once this is all set
- The \$100,000 will pay for the RFP, then it will be put to bid
 - Planning:
 - Yes, Purchasing will release the RFP
 - Planning will manage the project
- Will the firm come in to see what the long-term strategy is, what the fiscal viability is, what can be done to get more people to participate, promote agriculture, etc.?
 - Planning:
 - Yes, Planning will administer this with County Executive
- Will the Legislature know what is coming back to the Legislature?
 - Planning:
 - Yes
 - County Executive Office
 - RFP Committee would review it
- What role can the Legislature play to fix what is broken?
 - Planning:
 - This is the beginning to figure out what needs to be done from every aspect
 - Does management structure need to change
 - Is an influx of cash needed to help solve some underground infrastructure issues
 - Does the market need to go in a whole other direction
 - e.g. Talk about turning wholesale building into food hauler
 - What makes the most sense
 - How does it serve the vendors and public
- The media is suggesting someone has been paid almost \$1M and has not worked in the last four years
 - County Executive Office:
 - County Executive and Magnarelli's Office – multiple people trying to talk to Market's board about changes
 - CE is not going to invest this money if changes are not made
 - Planning:
 - Market says a stumbling block is being a state authority they are not eligible for typical grants others can get
- Are participants willing to change how things are going?
 - County Executive Office:
 - Conversation has started, this did not come from CE only, Assemblymen Magnarelli's Office as well
 - Have been meeting with individual board members

- Before releasing money from the plan and spending an excess of \$200,000 of taxpayer dollars to do a study through an RFP, then there should be a comfort level with willing participants in how this will be fixed
 - County Executive Office:
 - Market has to, because they have no other choice; do not have any money; running at a deficit
 - Looking for County to make emergency repairs, so the Market can rent out some of the facilities
 - CE not willing to do that until the County knows the money will be spent the way it should be
 - Not a quick fix, but everybody working on this are on the same page
- Met with Executive Director and a couple board members who are willing to collaborate and get this fixed
- There are other regional markets in NYS that are self-sustaining – need to look at best practices
- Is there any idea of the timeframe?
 - Planning:
 - Looking at 8-12 months, probably 12 months

A motion was made by Mr. Meaker, seconded by Mr. Olson, to approve this item. Passed unanimously; MOTION CARRIED.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:54 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,



DEBBIE KAMINSKI, Assistant Clerk
Onondaga County Legislature

**COMMITTEE: PLANNING & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
COMMITTEE**

DATE: MAY 22, 2024

NAME (Please Print)	DEPARTMENT/AGENCY
Megan Costa	Co Planning
Kristi Smiley	Finance
Joseph Hourigan	Finance
Ben Yans	Law
Darcie Lesniak	Leg
Nancy Lowery	CE
Isabel Harris	CE
John Desantis	Leg
Tim Beebe	leg
Joe Frateschi	Counsel
Tim Buttis	leg.