REPORT TO THE ONONDAGA COUNTY LEGISLATURE

2024 EIGHT YEAR REVIEW

AGRICULTURAL DISTRICT 4

TOWNS OF DEWITT, FABIUS, AND POMPEY TOWNS OF LAFAYETTE, ONONDAGA, AND TULLY (EAST OF I-81)

FEBRUARY 2024

ONONDAGA COUNTY AGRICULTURE AND FARMLAND PROTECTION BOARD

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INTRODUCTION

This report presents the findings of the Onondaga County Agriculture and Farmland Protection Board's (AFPB) 2024 eight-year review and final recommendations to the County Legislature for Agricultural District 4 in the Onondaga County towns of DeWitt, Fabius, Pompey, and the Towns of LaFayette, Onondaga, and Tully (east of I-81).

The New York State Constitution directs the Legislature to provide for the protection of agricultural lands. Since 1971, the Agricultural Districts Law, Article 25AA of the Agriculture and Markets Law (AML), has fulfilled this constitutional mandate, in part, by providing a locally initiated mechanism for the protection and enhancement of farmlands as both a viable segment of the local and State economies, and as an economic and environmental resource of major importance. It is the cornerstone of State and county level efforts to preserve, protect, and encourage the development and improvement of agricultural land for the production of food, fiber and other agricultural products.

Several benefits accrue to farm operations conducted within certified agricultural districts. Chief among these include:

- the obligation of State agencies, as a matter of policy, to encourage the maintenance of viable farming in agricultural districts;
- limitations on the exercise of eminent domain and other public acquisitions, and the advance of public funds for certain construction activities;
- limitations on the siting of solid waste management facilities on land dedicated to agricultural production;
- limitations on the power to impose benefit assessments, special ad valorem levies, or other rates or fees in certain improvement districts or benefit areas;

- requirements that direct local governments to realize the intent of the Agricultural Districts Law
 and to avoid unreasonable restrictions in the regulation of farm operations when exercising
 their powers to enact and administer comprehensive plans, local laws, ordinances, rules and/or
 regulations; and
- requirements that applications for certain planning and zoning actions impacting a designated
 farm operation within an agricultural district, or on lands within five hundred feet of such farm
 operation within an agricultural district, include an agricultural data statement designed to allow
 the review agency to evaluate any possible impacts of the proposed action on farm operations.

The Agricultural Districts Law also:

- establishes a land classification system used to assign agricultural assessment values to qualified properties both within and outside district boundaries;
- creates a process for the review of agricultural practices;
- discourages private nuisance lawsuits arising from agricultural practices determined to be sound;
- provides for advisory opinions as to whether particular land uses are agricultural in nature;
- and requires disclosure to prospective grantees of real property that the property is in an agricultural district.

In addition, the Agricultural Districts Law also defines the procedure for district creation and review.

Agricultural districts do not preserve farmland in the sense that the use of land is restricted to agricultural production forever. Rather, districts provide benefits that help make and keep farming as a viable economic activity, thereby maintaining land in active agricultural use.

Article 25-AA of the NYS Agriculture and Markets Law requires the AFPB to consider the following factors when creating an agricultural district:

- the viability of active farming within and adjacent to the district;
- the presence of viable inactive farm lands within and adjacent to the district;
- the nature and extent of land uses other than active farming within and adjacent to the district;
- county developmental patterns and needs; and
- any other relevant matters.

Viable agricultural land, as defined in NYS Agriculture and Markets Law, Article 25-AA, Section 301, sub.7, is "...land highly suitable for a farm operation..." and a farm operation as defined in sub.11 is "...the land and on-farm buildings, equipment, manure processing and handling facilities, and practices which contribute to the production, preparation and marketing of crops, livestock and livestock products as a commercial enterprise..."

NYS Department of Agriculture & Markets provides further guidance in how it defines farm operations and thresholds in determining farm activities that constitute a commercial enterprise, to include factors such as types of products, acreage in production, gross sales and capital investment, experience, and commitment.

Districts must consist predominantly of viable agricultural land. Predominance has been interpreted as more than 50 percent of land in farms.

In judging viability, Article 25-AA of the NYS Agriculture and Markets Law requires the AFPB to consider:

- natural factors including soil, climate, topography;
- markets for farm products;
- the extent and nature of farm improvements;
- the present status of farming;
- anticipated trends in agricultural economic conditions and technology; and
- any other relevant factors.

DISTRICT EIGHT-YEAR REVIEW

Agricultural districts are reviewed by the Onondaga County Legislature and recertified by the NYS Department of Agriculture and Markets Commissioner every eight years. During the review landowners can decide if they want their property to remain in the district or be removed or added. The review is announced through public notices and announcements, a municipal notice letter, and a mailing to all landowners within the district, which includes a property owner notice letter, a removal and addition request form, and an optional farm questionnaire.

The Onondaga County Legislature directs the AFPB to prepare a report that includes:

- the nature and status of farming and farm resources within such district, including the total number of acres of land and the total number of acres of land in farm operations in the district;
- the extent to which the district has achieved its original objectives;
- the extent to which county and local comprehensive plans, policies and objectives are consistent with and support the district;
- the degree of coordination between local laws, ordinances, rules and regulations that apply to farm operations in such district and their influence on farming; and
- recommendations to continue, terminate or modify such district.

The District was last reviewed and recertified in 2016. Following the 2016 review and recertification, the District encompassed 62,893.41 acres. Since 2016, property owners have had the option to request to enroll viable agricultural land into the District on an annual basis. As a result, a total of 599.74 acres have been added to the District since the 2016 recertification. Following a parcel modification adjustment of 8.26 acres, the District totaled 63,501.41 acres at the start of this review.

AGRICULTURAL DISTRICT 4 ACREAGE HISTORY		
Year	GIS Acres*	
2016 Renewal Acreage	62,893.41	
2017 Additions	434.66	
2018 Additions	112.76	
2022 Additions	52.32	
Parcel Mapping Adjustment **	8.26	
2024 Review Total	63,501.41	

^{*} Geographic Information System (GIS) calculated data, not Real Property Services (RPS) data.

^{**} A parcel mapping adjustment reflects acreage changes resulting from Geographic Information System (GIS) parcel splits, combinations, or redrafting.

STATUS OF FARMING AND FARM RESOURCES

The District is located in the southeast quadrant of Onondaga County. Onondaga County is geologically divided by the Onondaga Limestone Escarpment, which runs east/west through the middle of the County and demarcates the major watershed divide between the Lake Ontario and Susquehanna River Basins. The Erie-Ontario Plain encompasses the area north of the Escarpment, and the Alleghany Plateau encompasses the area south of the Escarpment and is where the District is located.

The District is situated primarily in rural agricultural and forested towns that contain small historic villages and hamlets, and rural roadside residences. The Syracuse Urbanized Area, and public sewer and water infrastructure reaches significantly into the northern Towns of DeWitt and Onondaga, and into the very northern edges of the Towns LaFayette and Pompey.

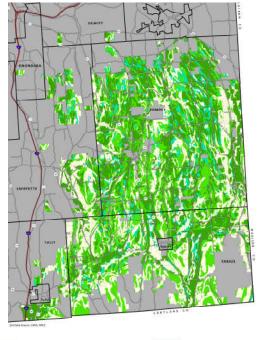
Transportation corridors within the District, including Interstate Route 81, US Route 20, and NYS Route 80, provide critical infrastructure for the movement of crops to markets, and services and goods for agricultural production.

Topography within the District boundaries consists of rolling hills that range in elevation between 600-1,800 feet. Generally speaking, the rolling hills and variable topography found within the District are best suited for a mix of dairy farms and field crops with land grading to forests at higher elevations.

SOILS

Approximately 69 percent of the District is composed of high quality farm soils: 34 percent is classified as Prime Farmland, 27 percent is classified as Prime Farmland of Statewide Importance, and eight percent is classified as Prime Farmland if Drained. These deep, well-drained soils are well-suited to farming and are responsive to agricultural management practices.

Soil Classification	Acres	Percent of District
Prime Farmland	21,667	34%
Farmland of Statewide Importance	17,436	27%
Prime Farmland if Drained	4,823	8%
Not Prime Farmland	19,575	31%
Total	63,501	100%





LAND USE

At the start of the review, there were approximately 2,370 landowners with 3,498 enrolled parcels totaling 63,501.41 acres within the District, according to Onondaga County's Geographic Information System (GIS).

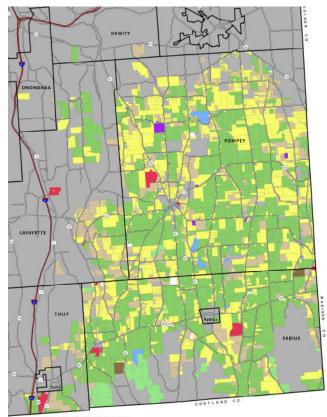
Agriculture, shown in green, is the dominant land use within the District, encompassing 47 percent of the land area. Residential uses, composed primarily of rural residential, comprise 33 percent of the land area.

Land Use	Acres	Percent of District	
Agricultural	29,960	47%	
Commercial	644	1%	
Industrial/Utility	156	0%	
Mining	194	0%	
Parks/Open Space	1,816	3%	
Public Service	506	1%	
Residential	20,648	33%	
Vacant	9,381	15%	
Missing Data	196	0%	
Total	63,501	100%	
Onondaga County Real Property Data			

The District is located primarily in the Towns of Pompey and Fabius, and to a less extent Onondaga and Tully. Residential growth continues on the northern edges of the District, particularly in northern Pompey at the outer edges of the Village of Manlius where residential subdivisions created prior to 2016 continue to be built out. New rural, large-lot

homesteads, some with viable secondary agricultural uses, have also emerged throughout the District, particularly in Pompey.

Commercial solar development is occurring on large, open parcels in and near the District, where significant electrical transmission infrastructure travels. Since 2016 there have been 13 large (>2.5 megawatts) proposed and/or built on and near District lands.



Town	Single-Family	/ Multi-Family	Total
	Year Built 20	16-2022	
ge-lot	Parks/Open Space	Land not enrolled in	District 4
orior	Mining	Missing Data	
ge of	Industrial/Utility	Vacant	
y in	Commercial	Residential	
ies 💳			

Public Service

Agricultural

Year Built 2016-2022			
Town	Single-Family	Multi-Family	Total
	Units	Units	
Pompey	55	0	55
Fabius	12	0	12
LaFayette	31	2	33
Tully	119	1	120
Onondaga	170	0	170
DeWitt	65	220	285
Grand Total	452	223	675
Onondaga County Real Property Data			

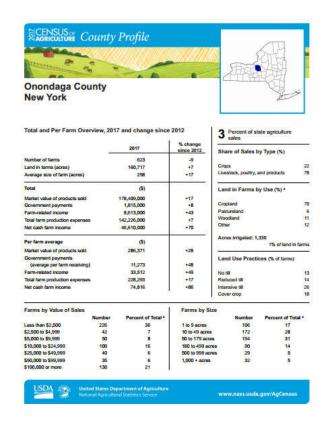
AGRICULTURAL CENSUS

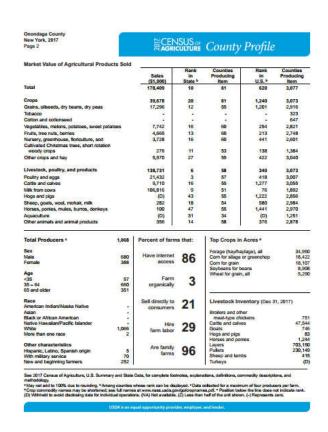
The 2017 US Census of Agriculture indicates a relatively stable farmland community within Onondaga County. Total farmland acreage has remained stable for the past two decades, a result of good soils, market forces, savvy farm operators, a trained labor force, and opportunities for nearby, off-farm employment in a metropolitan area.

According to the 2017 Census of Agriculture, total farm sales in Onondaga County were a record breaking \$178,409,000, up from \$152,050,000 in 2012. And land in farms increased from 150,269 acres in 2012 to 160,717 acres. And the 2017 Census cites 252 new and beginning farmers were added in the 5-year period.

However, the number of part- and full-time farm businesses decreased by 8% percent over this time period, and 10% since 2007, more than the State average. Farms in Onondaga County with more than \$10,000 gross farm sales also decreased from 342 in 2012 to 305 farms in 2017, a 10% change. And the number of farm operators decreased from 1,075 operators in 2012 to 1,068 operators in 2017.

Top crops include forage (34,950 acres), corn for silage and greenchop (18,422 acres), corn for grain (18,107 acres), soybeans (8,908 acres) and wheat for grain (5,290 acres). Livestock inventory includes over 47,000 cattle and calves, over 700,000 layers, 230,000 pullets, and 1,244 horses and ponies. Onondaga County ranks in the top 10 in the State for total value of agricultural products sold, (10th), livestock, poultry and products categories (6th), poultry and eggs (3rd), and milk from cows (9th).





AGRICULTURAL TRENDS

Cornell Cooperative Extension—Onondaga County reports that dairy farms and supporting croplands are the predominant agricultural operation in the District and is where approximately half of the largest dairies in Onondaga County are located. Dairy farms continue to grow through acquisition and consolidation of smaller dairy farms. Although the overall number of dairy farms has decreased, the number of acres in dairy farming has not. Manure handling and disposal is one of the primary challenges faced by dairy farms, particularly in the spring when freeze/thaw weight limits prohibit heavy trucks on some roads.

ACHIEVING DISTRICT OBJECTIVES

Agricultural production in the District remains viable and will continue to do so in the foreseeable future. Since the last renewal of the District in 2016, 599.74 acres have been added, an indication that agriculture within the District is growing. Agricultural districts are an important tool that promote the continuation of farming and the preservation of agricultural land.

COUNTY AND LOCAL COMPREHENSIVE PLANS, POLICIES, AND OBJECTIVES CONSISTENCY AND SUPPORT

PLAN ONONDAGA

On July 23, 2023, the County Legislature adopted *Plan Onondaga* as the new official Onondaga County comprehensive plan, which establishes a shared set of values and priorities that can lead the community toward a vision of the future.

Plan Onondaga provides a framework for understanding how and where the County can focus its resources in order to support and foster Global Economic Competitiveness characterized by Economic Collaboration (Leadership and Vision, Institutional Strength, and Coordination and Collaboration), Investments in People (Social Capital, Prioritization of Livability, and Education, Education, Education), and Strong Centers (Forward-Thinking Planning to Guide Organic Growth, Intelligent Infrastructure Investment, Closing Infrastructure Gaps, and Compact Development).

Plan Onondaga focuses on the linkages between Economic Development (encourage private sector investment); Quality of Life (attracting and retaining the modern workforce); and Community Based Planning (municipal cooperation); and explores five thematic areas as a framework for a Future Land Use Vision, including Agriculture, which calls for ensuring that agriculture remains a viable and integral part of the economy and a defining characteristic of the landscape.

Plan Onondaga recognizes that agriculture provides multiple benefits for local communities including local food support, natural environment protection, unplanned sprawl prevention, rural landscape conservation, and local economic strength. To further these key benefits, *Plan Onondaga* identifies the following agricultural goals: provide food and support local agriculture, grow the agricultural economy, protect farmland and rural landscapes, and protect natural resources and scenic views.

Working in tandem with Agriculture are the themes of Strong Centers, Housing and Neighborhoods, Community Mobility, and Greenways and Blueways, all of which emphasize the need to for amenityrich, vibrant walkable centers with a diversity of affordable, attractive, and efficient housing that are accessible through a diverse and safe community mobility system; and a network of greenways and blueways for recreation and ecological health.

ONONDAGA COUNTY AGRICULTURE AND FARMLAND PROTECTION PLAN

The Onondaga County Legislature approved a new *Onondaga County Agriculture and Farmland Protection Plan* in October 2022, which was subsequently approved by the NYS Department of Agriculture and Markets. The Plan established a vision and planning goals, strategies, and tangible actions to be supported and embraced by public officials and the community. Specifically, the Plan identifies Goal 2 as follows: Strategically protect agricultural lands throughout Onondaga County to sustain and improve its vibrant agricultural operations. Within Goal 2, the Plan identifies 11 Action items including increasing conservation easement capacity, providing municipal planning assistance, developing a Farm-Friendly Toolbox for Municipalities, promoting the new Onondaga County Ag Mapper, and assisting with farm diversification through Agri-Tourism development and promotion.

The Onondaga County AFPB has been very active in implementing one of the plan's elements, the purchase or donation of development rights on prime farmland, funded by the NYS Department of Agriculture and Markets Farmland Protection Implementation Grants (FPIG) program and other federal and local funders. Since 1998, approximately 33 farm easement projects have been or are in the process of being completed, with over 11,000 acres of farmland protected by the State FPIG, Federal, and local programs in Onondaga County.

ONONDAGA COUNTY AGRICULTURE COUNCIL

In 2012, the Onondaga County Agriculture Council was formed to help ensure that county government is working to promote and preserve the County's strong farming community. The Council works to develop strategies and programs to promote local food regionally and strengthen and enhance connections between the urban core to rural, agricultural areas and to review, improve, and develop pro-agriculture/farming friendly policies and regulations that promote urban agriculture and make it easier for local farms to open and stay in business in Onondaga County.

Recently the Council initiated an Agri-Tourism grant opportunity and to date 33 applications have been received, 11 of which are situated in or near District 4 lands. Operations are diversifying and expanding and include beef, sheep and goat, u-pick cut flowers and fruit, local dairy café, gourmet mushrooms, Christmas Tree farms, and brewery/restaurant/event space.

LOCAL PLANNING

Plan Onondaga and the Onondaga County Agriculture and Farmland Protection Plan encourage municipalities to update plans and adopt codes that incorporate measures that build strong centers as well as protect agricultural lands and promote the agricultural economy. Onondaga County has initiated two new efforts to assist in this endeavor.

The Onondaga County Ag Mapper, which identifies the county's most important farmland and what makes it special, and how it interacts with the larger community, is now available to local municipalities. In addition, the development of the Farm-Friendly Municipal Toolbox will provide a place where municipalities can find best practices in local regulation and planning support and help them integrate and update their land use plans and regulations as they relate to supporting agriculture land uses, address new and changing agricultural dynamics, and ensure consistency with NYS Agriculture and Markets Law.

The County has also initiated a Town Planning Grants Program, now being accessed by rural towns in the County, to complete hamlet and comprehensive planning work which will complement County land use and agricultural protection planning.

Most towns in Onondaga County have some form of comprehensive plan, which typically recognize the value of agricultural lands and the desire to protect them. However, there are few methods that ultimately implement this goal. Many towns typically use large lot zoning, generally two or more acres, to reduce density and thereby protect open areas. However, these requirements create the unintentional consequences of large lots strung along rural roads and large-lot subdivisions, excessive consumption of farmland and open space, more farmer/neighbor conflicts, and more traffic on farm roads.

Towns are also starting to recognize and implement clustering as permitted in NYS Town Law, a potentially beneficial technique for protecting community character, open space, scenic resources, and environmental features, but not necessarily considered effective at protecting farmland.

Implementing settlement patterns other than the dominant suburban pattern, like adopting new density average/fixed ratio zoning techniques as recommended by the American Farmland Trust, are ultimately needed to protect agricultural lands.

The Town of LaFayette adopted an Agricultural and Farmland Protection Plan in October 2014 to complement their Comprehensive Plan adopted in 2012. There is a need for more towns to adopt integrated County and local farmland protection plans that explore and implement a full range of agricultural protection tools.

LOCAL LAWS, ORDINANCES, RULES AND REGULATIONS COORDINATION AND INFLUENCE

The Onondaga County Soil and Water Conservation District reports that there is relatively strong coordination between local laws, ordinances, rules, and regulations that positively influence farm operations. They have found that it is one of the easiest agricultural districts to site manure nutrient storage and that there has been very little community resistance. Increased public awareness of agricultural practices and needs associated with Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations (CAFOs) would assist in continuing ongoing positive neighbor relations.

There is, however, continuing concern regarding increasing development pressure on open agricultural lands throughout the County, as it is easiest and least expensive to build new houses on. And, with new houses typically come new neighbor relations struggles.

New home owners looking to buy in an agricultural district need to be made aware that it's an area where farmers have the right to operate including: moving machinery on public highways and roads which can slow down traffic and take up a lane-plus of road, and working the land all hours of the day and night which can generate noise, dust, and a release of odors from harvest, manure nutrient applications, etc.

Real estate sales professionals and attorneys need to be reminded, per Agriculture and Markets Law, that purchase, sale, and exchange contracts for real property located partially or wholly within an agricultural district shall have an agricultural district disclosure.

RECOMMENDATION TO CONTINUE, TERMINATE, OR MODIFY DISTRICT

The AFPB mailed a notice of the eight-year review of Agricultural District 4 and a removal and addition request form to landowners with property currently enrolled in the District and municipalities within the District. Those results are summarized below.

ADDITION REQUESTS

The following property owners requested that their land be added to the district. These properties have been reviewed to verify the presence and characteristics of land highly suitable for a farm operation, viability as a commercial enterprise, location relative to existing agricultural districts, nearby development, and natural features.

ADDITION REQUESTS			
MUNICIPALITY	OWNER	TAX ID	GIS ACRES*
Fabius (Village)	Herlihy Kevin J	10102-11.0	9.10
Fabius (Village) Total			9.10
La Fayette	Ellys Acres Farm LLC	00601-18.2	1.29
La Fayette	Ellys Acres Farm LLC	00601-18.5	7.45
La Fayette	Ellys Acres Farm LLC	00601-18.7	8.11
La Fayette	Ellys Acres Farm LLC/Kenny Griffin	00702-23.0	5.50
La Fayette	Nurse Albert V	01102-25.1	2.02
La Fayette Total			24.36
GRAND TOTAL			33.46
* Geographic Information System (GIS) calculated data, not Real Property Services (RPS) data.			

REMOVAL REQUESTS

REMOVAL REQUESTS			
MUNICIPALITY	OWNER	TAX ID	GIS ACRES*
Fabius	Aidun Meredith	10601-21.0	2.45
Fabius	County Of Onondaga	11202-13.0	6.44
Fabius	Crockett Peter J	12402-14.0	0.45
Fabius	Elter Thomas A	10704-01.0	0.94
Fabius	Ianuzi Stephen D	11102-10.0	0.68
Fabius	Jones Douglas M	10902-10.0	1.06
Fabius	Kowachik Michael J	11804-07.7	2.17

Grand Total140.52* Geographic Information System (GIS) calculated data, not Real Property Services (RPS) data.			
Tully Total			22.79
Tully	Shaw Ronald J	10803-06.6	22.79
Pompey Total			68.04
Pompey	Ward Sarah A	01503-06.0	1.76
Pompey	Ross Jennifer L	00418-07.0	2.07
Pompey	Pompey Community Church Inc	02102-07.3	5.00
Pompey	DeHaas George	00403-58.3	1.09
Pompey	County Of Onondaga	02702-10.0	0.02
Pompey	Beasley Dr Kenneth	00422-23.0	1.08
Pompey	Bargabos Dan E	00501-11.2	42.36
Pompey	Bargabos Dan E	00403-74.1	1.67
Pompey	Bargabos Dan E	00403-14.1	12.52
Pompey	Baniewicz Richard R	01301-05.0	0.47
Fabius Total			49.69
Fabius	Penoyer Robert H	11101-01.0	0.42
Fabius	O'Reilly John R	12402-02.0	9.41
Fabius	Morford Anne	10403-18.0	0.14
Fabius	Love Camp 355 LLC	10501-01.2	0.16
Fabius	Love Camp 355 LLC	10501-01.1	25.23
Fabius	Love Camp 355 LLC	10403-19.0	0.14

RECOMMENDATIONS

Production agriculture in the District remains viable and will continue to do so in the foreseeable future. Soils, climate, topography, transportation, agri-service and suppliers, and product markets provide the elements necessary for a successful agricultural economy. Since the last renewal of the District in 2016, 599.74 acres have been added.

The AFPB reviewed landowner removal and addition requests and had no objections to the list as presented. The AFPB recommends continuing Agricultural District 4 with the landowner-requested modifications.

FINAL ACREAGE

Agricultural District 4 was last recertified in 2016 and encompassed 62,893.41 acres. Through subsequent annual addition processes, 599.74 acres were added to the District for a total of 63,493.15 acres. In addition, an adjustment of 8.26 acres was made to reflect modifications resulting from parcel splits, combinations, or redrafting of the parcel data used in the Geographic Information System (GIS). As a result, the current District acreage at the time of the 2024 review was 63,501.41 acres.

The AFPB recommends that 33.46 acres be added and 140.52 acres be removed per landowner-requested modifications, for a final proposed Agricultural District 4 acreage of 63,394.35 acres, a net decrease of 107.06 acres.

RECOMMENDED AGRICULTURAL DISTRICT 4 FINAL ACREAGE		
	GIS ACRES*	
ACREAGE AFTER 2016 RENEWAL	62,893.41	
ANNUAL ADDITIONS 2017-2023	599.74	
PARCEL MAPPING ADJUSTMENT 2017-2023*	8.26	
ACREAGE PRIOR TO 2024 RENEWAL	63,501.41	
2024 RENEWAL ADDITIONS	33.46	
2024 RENEWAL REMOVALS	-140.52	
ACREAGE AFTER 2024 RENEWAL	63,394.35	
NET ACREAGE CHANGE RESULTING FROM 2024 RENEWAL	-107.06	

^{*} Geographic Information System (GIS) calculated data, not Real Property Services (RPS) data.

APPENDICES

Resolution - Notice of Review

Notice - Notice of Review

Map - District

Letter - Municipal

Letter - Property Owner

Form - Blank Removal and Addition Request

Form - Farm Questionnaire

Resolution - Public Hearing

Notice - Public Hearing

Letter - Property Owner Public Hearing

Minutes - Public Hearing

Resolution - Approval

SEQR - Environmental Assessment Form

List - District Parcel Final

Map – Final District

^{**} A parcel mapping adjustment reflects acreage changes resulting from Geographic Information System (GIS) parcel splits, combinations, or redrafting.

