

Town of Lima - Agricultural Advisory Committee Meeting Report – November 26, 2024 - 7 PM

PRESENT: Chairman, Mike Neenan, Ed Blodgett, Jr., Lee DeKramer, Marc Krieger, John Lehning, Jeff Recktenwald

EXCUSED: Ron Gruschow, Tom Simpson

GUESTS: Bill Carey - Town Board Liaison, Mike Falk – Town Supervisor, Ron Blodgett - Town Councilmember, Mark Petroski – Town Councilmember, Steve Werner - Town Councilmember, Augie Lindsay, Cathy Gardner, Volunteer Secretary

Mike Neenan called the meeting to order at 7PM and opened with the Pledge of Allegiance.

Mike announced that three farm property owners in Lima applied for consideration for the New York State purchase of development rights program. These applications were made by Blodgett Brothers Farm, Mroczek Farms and Tri Acres Farm.

Mike expressed his support for the applications. He stated that the property owners are taking a long-term view, recognizing that Lima has productive soils and nearby outlets for crop sales which makes preserving farmland forever in the face of development pressure approaching from the north a way to make sure the land stays available for farming. He distributed a copy of a letter which was made available to the Town Board to express support for the applications, provided by David Behm of the NYS Department of Agriculture.

Ed agreed, noting that the program provides a great opportunity for families to preserve both their farm business legacy and valuable farmland.

Marc explained that the program led to the start his farming business in Lima. Selling the development rights on farmland in Pittsford years ago provided the capital to buy farmland in Lima. While the value of the land in Pittsford has increased many times since the sale, the land that he invested in in Lima has appreciated too and has allowed him to grow his business. He is in the process of selling development rights on the land in Lima and would like to continue to grow his business with additional farmland. He stated that he has never experienced any negatives with the program and does not want to see the property change from agriculture.

John Lehning asked for an explanation of the purchase of development rights program. Upon hearing about the program, he added his support for the applications.

Lee stated that he was in favor of it and asked about “forever.” What happens 200 years out if there isn’t a farmer to take over the land?

This led to a discussion of the aging of farmers, but also the fact that farming will always be essential to feed the population, a population that is growing today.

Jeff agreed with support for the program, stating that ‘they don’t make land anymore’ and we will always need farms to feed people.

Marc added that Lima isn't experiencing developers seeking to build 800 house subdivisions, but that it is very easy to sell off multiple single house lots. As a farmland owner, like others in Lima, he receives multiple inquiries a year from solar companies and land dealers as well as individuals looking to buy a single housing lot. He cited a recent sale of a 5-acre lot on Woodruff Rd that sold for \$50,000 for construction of a single new home as an example of that demand.

Ron Blodgett noted that many of the farmers in Lima are getting older. For him, selling development rights to conserve his farmland will keep his legacy, the land. He recalled that during the 1980's when farming returns were tough, some farmers sold off good chunks of frontage for housing lots to raise needed dollars. This leads to challenges for farming behind housing with residents objecting to necessary farming activities. Keeping farmland from being broken up is important.

Mike concluded the discussion, pointing out that it's safe to say there is plenty of development pressure in Lima.

The second topic for discussion was the findings of "Cost of Community Services" studies. Mike asked Cathy Gardner to provide an overview.

Cathy said she first became familiar with these studies during the development of Lima's Agriculture and Farmland Protection Plan. The studies involve comparing the tax revenues collected from different types of land uses to the cost of services used by the same land uses. Typically, land uses are sorted by residential, commercial, industrial and agriculture. The findings are generally the same across different communities. Residential land use costs more in services than paid in taxes, while the other uses including agricultural businesses, subsidize the services required to support residential housing by paying more in taxes than costing in services. For example, while road maintenance is required by all land use types, many services such as schools, libraries, parks and recreational facilities, local courts and some administrative functions are used exclusively or more heavily by residential uses.

Mike distributed a copy of this type of study that was completed by the Town of Victor as part of its comprehensive planning. The study tallied local tax receipts and allocated every budget item according to land use.

The results indicated that, for every \$1 of tax revenue collected, the cost of services used by each measured land use type was as follows:

<u>WITHOUT EDUCATION</u>		<u>WITH EDUCATION</u>
Residential	\$1.55	\$1.76
Commercial	\$0.43	\$0.19
Industrial:	\$0.57	\$0.29
Farm & Forest	\$0.54	\$0.50

The Victor study also includes findings from ten other NY Towns. In every instance, agriculture and business uses subsidized the higher costs of residential land use by paying more in taxes than using in services. Developing farmland into housing is not shown to reduce taxes. The opposite is shown.

Marc commented that he is not opposed to seeing Lima continue to add a couple of houses a year. These can be built on land that is not being farmed. Ron Blodgett said efforts to add to the tax base should focus on business development where the town has planned for it, as on a part of Rt. 15A.

Mike concluded with the observation that it takes generations to build farm businesses, and that farms needed to support agricultural businesses can be lost quickly. We have seen it happen in nearby towns. Next, Mike asked Supervisor Falk to provide updates on the Town's 2025 budget and the water district effort. The town budget will exceed the tax cap and increase by about 5% due to increasing expenses. This will require an average town tax increase of .10 cents per \$1,000 of assessed value. The town engineer will present a new Map, Plan and Report for a revised proposed water district at the December 3 Town Board meeting. A public workshop is planned for December 17 to review the report and address questions. No decisions will be finalized at this meeting. Then a public hearing will be held. Once that is done, the board may decide to form a district, subject to a permissive referendum required if 5% of affected property owners bring a petition for referendum. Or the board could choose to hold a public referendum which would cost about \$4,000.

Steve Werner thanked all present who assisted with the second annual Pumpkin Fest and said that attendance was estimated at about 4,000 based on cell phone pings recorded. Plans are underway for the next festival to be held October 4, 2025.

Adjourned at 8:20 PM

Report Submitted by Cathy Gardner, Volunteer Secretary