

*David VanLuvern*  
*Town Supervisor*

*Robert Leslie*  
*Director of Planning*

# TOWN OF BETHLEHEM

*Albany County - New York*  
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## HISTORIC HEATH FARM ADVISORY COMMITTEE

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### MEETING SUMMARY

**November 29, 2023**  
**8:00am-9:00am**  
**Delmar-Bethlehem EMS Building**

#### **In Attendance:**

**HFAC:** Bobbie Lukasiewicz, Stuart Lyman, Zan McKenna, Dale Richter, Gabby Sant'Angelo, Tom Seymour, David Vigoda, Mark Warford, Kristen Yourno (excused)

**Staff:** David VanLuven, Town Supervisor, Robert Leslie, Director of Planning, Lauren Chiyoko Axford, Open Space Coordinator

#### **Meeting commenced: 8:00am**

Supervisor VanLuven opened the meeting by welcoming the group and providing an overview of the advisory committee's task over the 12 months. He explained that the committee's objective is to provide insight into what the community wants and help to develop individual goals and objectives for each Focus Area (as outlined in the StoryMap). The committees work will be incorporated into a Vision Plan for the Historic Heath Farm Initiative, presented to the Town Board, and will be available to inform next steps towards implementation.

Lauren Chiyoko Axford, Open Space Coordinator, led the remainder of the meeting, and provided the following information:

- The kick-off meeting is primarily an informational meeting to bring everyone up to speed. The topics covered at this meeting will include: the HFAC's scope of work, a report on work complete-to-date, a review of the Community Vision StoryMap Feedback Survey Report, and to lay the framework for an effective series of meetings over the next 12 months.
- Subsequent meeting will have more of a discussion format, with staff facilitating and providing both relevant with background information and technical information, as needed.

Next, a quick recap of the HHFI was provided:

- In 2022 voters approved Proposition 2 to purchase over 300 acres of active farmland and open space in Glenmont and Selkirk.
- A Community StoryMap was created providing identifying ideas for each of the nine parcels. The concepts presented were developed through discussions with members of organizations such as Cornell Cooperative Extension, American Farmland Trust, National Young Farmers Coalition, etc. for a full list, see slide #\_\_ of the power point).
- Existing public policy documents, surveys, and feasibility studies were also used as resources to develop potential land uses and concepts.
- The 9 parcels that comprise the Historic Heath Farm were described and displayed. These areas have been categorized into 'Focus Areas', as noted below:
  - Focus Area 1- Farmland on north side of Wemple Road
  - Focus Area 2 – Site of Barn Complex (including store, garage, silo and former farmhouse)
  - Focus Area 3 - Farmland on the south side of Wemple Road, adjacent to Town owned land
  - Focus Area 4 - Large woodland and ravine adjacent to the former Heath Dairy Farm.
  - Focus Area 5 - Parcel located on the east side of Amsterdam Avenue, nested within a residential development and adjacent to several contiguous parcels of land owned by the Town of Bethlehem along the Dowers Kill. The parcel is within a FEMA flood zone and is primarily wooded.
  - Focus Area 6A – Approximately 89 acres currently being used for agriculture on the West side of I-87, 16 acres of woodland, and 17 acres either unplanted land, windbreaks, or yards surrounding the existing residential structures. Approximately 18 tillable acres with more than 12 acres of woodland on the East side of I- 87
  - Focus Area 6B and 6C – Area 6B includes two vacant residential houses, while Area 6C is a vacant wooded area with some small agricultural fields.

Lauren then provided a 3-phase approach to the committee's work as shown in the HFAC scoping document (see project website):

- **Phase 1 – Existing conditions and information gathering:**
  - Much of this work has been done over the last year by staff and is still ongoing (such as a full structural assessment)
- **Phase 2 - Identifying needs and opportunities:**
  - HFAC will help to identify local needs, identify funding opportunities, explore potential partnerships, ways to maximize project impact.
- **Phase 3 – Vision plan development:**
  - The final outcome of the HFAC's work will be a vision plan for the overall farm property and its respective focus areas.

Rob reported that the Town worked with engineering firm CHA to complete a hazardous materials survey and that a full structural assessment is expected to be completed in 2024 on the barn. The findings of this assessment will outline the possibilities regarding whether or not restoration is feasible, and if so, what it will take for full restoration for public access and use, and what will it take for a partial restoration for agricultural use only.

A brief discussion ensued on the potential of restoring the barn, what kinds of farming might work best for the size of the parcels, and how it will be important to identify potential farmers and to think about the resources that might need to be invested for successful farm operations.

Lauren then presented the summary report of the Community Vision StoryMap and Feedback Survey. The full report can be viewed at [www.historicheathfarm.com](http://www.historicheathfarm.com).

Lauren then presented the committee's scope of work and tentative meeting schedule. All meeting materials will be posted on the project's aforementioned website.

The meeting concluded with an assignment for each of the committee members. Each member was encouraged to review the StoryMap Report in full, review the presentation and venn diagram of project themes, and then draft a preliminary vision statement for the overall Historic Heath Farm Initiative:

“The Historic Heath Farm Initiative will \_\_\_\_\_.”

The collected responses will be compiled and circulated for the committee to discuss at the next meeting in January. Lauren requested statements be emailed to her by December 15<sup>th</sup>.

It was noted that the committee will aim to present the Town Board with a Vision Plan for the Historic Heath Farm Initiative by the end of 2024.

Informational updates, meeting materials and all project information is available on the Historic Heath Farm website at: [www.historicheathfarm.com](http://www.historicheathfarm.com).

**Meeting Adjourned at 8:58am**

*Meeting Summary Approved: 1/10/2024*