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**TOWN OF BETHLEHEM**  
*Albany County - New York*  
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**HISTORIC HEATH FARM ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

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**MEETING SUMMARY**

**Wednesday September 18, 2024**

**8:00-9:00am**

Delmar-Bethlehem EMS Building  
114 Adams Place  
Delmar, NY 12054

**In Attendance:** Bobby Lukasiewicz, Stuart Lyman, Gabby Sant' Angelo, David Vigoda, Dale Richter, Tom Seymour, Mark Warford, Kristen Yourno, Zan McKenna

**Staff:** Lauren Chiyoko Axford, Open Space Coordinator; Rob Leslie, Director of Planning

**Meeting Commenced: 8:00am**

- Summary for August 13 meeting was sent out last night, will give everyone a chance to review and then please email any comments or revisions.
- Rob set the stage for the discussion, sharing that we will go through each agricultural focus area and see where everyone stands with the options we have been discussing.
- Bobbie took the feedback as provided by the committee members and created a visual tool for displaying some identified options for each the Agricultural Focus Areas, that is helpful in identifying where there is already consensus on recommendations. Thank you, Bobbie!
- Bobbie explained that she took just a few liberties with wordsmithing, to better represent the options and provide more consistency.
- The committee went through each focus area, discussing which options was best suited and why.
- Rob explains that in broad terms, our task, and what are we trying to accomplish with the plan provides:
  - 1- High level guidance on opportunities for the land
  - 2- Recommendations with enough flexibility that the Town can implement strategically (“if Option A is not possible, pursue Option B”). The recommendations need to be flexible, while also giving the board clear direction.
- Rob encouraged the committee to not get bogged down in so much detail, that we lose the ability to provide a high level plan to the board.
- Mark shared his thoughts: “This is a great place to start. Sometimes feels like we are all are not on the same page with the mission of the committee. The whole point is open conversation about where we stand. I asked Lauren to share the Farms & Forest

resolution to get a better sense of the purpose of this project. Really, the charge for our committee to make good farmland available and to make it available to new farmers and farmers who have been challenged accessing farmland. So whether we hold it or a nonprofit holds it, that is the outcome we are looking for.”

Q: Just what is the Town going to get out of this?

- Mark: Exactly what we just got, 307 acres. This purchased allowed the Town to use funds dedicated for land conservation and protection to take 307 acres off land off the plate of the developer. The land will continue to grow crops, not houses. So no matter what we come up with, the Town is getting a great a great deal- the majority of voters wanted this land not to be developed. Making money isn't really the why the Town purchased. It is to provide opportunities for local, sustainable ag. It hits well! I am pleased with the convo and where we are going. I think we are going to land some place that the Town can be proud of. Also, we (the advisory committee) are the ambassadors in the community, in the end. Also the resolution about the use of the Farms and Forest, this is consistent with what the money is intended to be used for.

Q: Put the resolutions on the website! When were the decisions made? Where is the timeline? This should be made public.

*\*\* Please see the Town of Bethlehem Website: [www.townofbethlehem.org](http://www.townofbethlehem.org) (Select “Open Space Planning” on left column menu, then click on Prop 2 for a full listing of all public materials regarding the acquisition).*

*\*\* Alternatively, please visit the project website: [www.historicheathfarm.com](http://www.historicheathfarm.com) (Select HHFAC from menu at top, then Select “Meeting Materials” to see a full listing of all public documents pertaining to the acquisition and the advisory committee’s work).*

- Rob: Let’s for a minute compare this project to other Town projects. For example, in the Kenwood Traffic Calming Plan, we go through several options that can happen. Recognizing that timing, funding and other elements requires a breadth of options for flexibility. Now, the Town board has tasked us to move forward on the plan. The Plan provides guidance on how implementation is executed going forward. There will always been unknowns, but the plan was really intended to show what we aspire to achieve.

**Breakdown of the Agricultural Areas:** (see attached map for specific locations)

**Agricultural Area 1:**

Dale: a park is a good idea there. If you look at the demographics, apartments, sidewalk. I think it is a great idea. While I appreciate Marks comments on our original intent. The public down in Selkirk look at this different. We like the idea of parks, we like the idea of helping to establish new farmers, but I think they are more interested in entertainment.

Bobbie: why not lease until the park gets develops?

Dale: will the park be developed sort of quickly?

Rob: No, it will take time and we will certainly need to consult Parks and Rec on what a realistic timeline is given all their other major projects at the moment.

Dale: Ok I would be okay with that. If you tell people we are going to put a park here, there is more commitment to the “model” you are putting forward. Is it going to cost the Town any money? I’m just suspicious.

David: We have complete disagreement. I would like it if we could start to discuss how we are going to square our circle? We are running out of time. Let's spend the remaining time, to get to the report.

Rob: Knowing where people stand on the agricultural focus areas options, is a good starting point.

David: We don't need 100% committee on each, obviously we don't all agree. What do we end up with? Rather than just rehearse that?

Bobbie: We should go through each area to make sure that what we have captured accurately reflects where people stand.

David: I don't think the right categories are up there. We need to make new options. It bothers me that if I want an incubator in town, then the Town has to own it?

Rob: Not necessarily, that is just one version of a model we are discussing.

### **Agricultural Area 2:**

Bobbie clarified what the options are:

- Option #1: Lease to a farmer again in 2025, while continuing to explore opportunities to create innovative land access opportunities.
- Option #2: Town maintains ownership and continues to lease for agriculture
- Option #3: Protect with an easement and then sell for private farm use.

Tom: I like options #1 the best now (Lease for Ag in 2025), let's run through these quick, I think this is helpful.

David/Dale: I don't understand, there aren't enough choices, I don't want to get involved in these complicated options.

David: What does transition mean?

Zan: in my mind, based on all of the discussions we, this committee, have had, that means exploring further, with all the orgs that exist, to continue to explore how to best approach creating land access opportunities, because there is a myriad of ways forward. Exploration with all the organizations, move the Town forward in determining the best approach, so this helps to "square the circle" of what we are recommending.

Rob: Remember, we are just trying to take a temperature on the committees feeling towards the current options we have set forth through discussion.

David: then I like option 1 and option 3

Stuart: the town was given or took the land locked adjacent to Area 1?

Rob: yes, that parcel was acquired from the Albany County Land Bank

### **Agricultural Area 3:**

Kristen: I am open to historic registry as well. I think we should at least explore the historic registration and get more information and know the pros and cons.

Dale: I am on the fence about whether we should even continue to explore whether historic registration is possible. I would like to see more options. But other options too.

David: what kind of other option?

Dale: Combine option 1 and 2?

David: likes that idea

Bobbie: they are 2 individual options items, they aren't necessarily dependent on each other.

Stuart: I try and think about what is actually feasible. Are these things feasible? If don't think the building structures are eligible for historic nomination, it is too complex to move forward to that as an option.

Bobbie: should we add an option for demolishing barn? Again, this exercise and these visuals are intended to take a temperature of the committee's disposition. As far as taking the temp on this option, not the whole option. Where do you stand?

Kristen: We should put that option in the report and why we would NOT recommend demolishing the barn?

David: Would we have consensus if we underlined explore potential of historic registry nomination, but not commitment to? If we just explore, not commit, 1 and 2 are saying the same thing.

Suggested Revision:

Ag area 3 Option 2: Working for secure funding for USE (take off renovation)

David: This is a non-farmable parcel. We keep talking about the barn. It is a symbol of the project, but not something that is going to be farmable. It is a good center piece for the whole project. We need to market this and we need to have something that appeals to everyone. But in and of itself, I don't think it flies.

Bobbie: so do we want to take a temp on these options?

Option #1: Mark (1), Kristen

Option #2: David (2), Dale (1 and 2), Kristen

Option #3: no one wants anymore, but leave it because it indicates consensus

#### **Agricultural Area 4:**

Kristen: I think most, if not all parcels, should be protected with an easement.

Mark: (reads the purpose of the Farms and Forests Fund from the Town Board resolution). To recap, the primary focus should be continued agricultural activity.

Bobbie: I think that leasing the land to get it into use by multiple farmers is a great idea. That, or protect and sell it for private farm operations.

David: why are we restricting option 1 to the listed uses? We have a whole menu of possibilities, so why this parcel? Why not another?

Mark: Area 1 lent itself to a park, so that was the option on the table, Area 2, is adjacent, and 3 has some wetlands.

David: I would rather see A2 to have all the options listed in Ag area 4. It would be great to have these things next to a barn.

Mark: 4 would be a great place to, because it is right next to the barn.

Bobbie: I like the idea, but I don't know if some of the uses in Option 1 would be good to have right next to a park. Maybe some things should be less visible or accessible to the apartments.

Rob: I think it would be helpful to include the language in the report such as: agri-voltaics requires X acres of land for a feasible array, and the report will where it does or doesn't work.

Stuart: I am unclear as an

David: does everyone agree to take agri-voltaics out of here?

Bobbie: I feel like we need to keep it in. It is only 1 of the options.

Dale/ Stuart: Agri-voltaics has been overemphasized.

Dale: agrees to move to column 1.

Stuart: are we all in agreement? To remove protect and sell from the option? I don't think this is a recommendation that can come out of the committee.

Mark: nothing saying we cannot buy-protect-sell.

Bobbie: creating opportunities vs. creating access to land. We want to do an incubator. We don't know what they want.

David: I like options 2 & 3

### **Agricultural Area 5:**

Gabby: as Rob mentioned, we will prioritize our options. Ideally, I would love to lease with the partnership opportunities, but if that wouldn't work, I think we should protect and sell. Protect and sell could be a plan B.

Stuart: This is our recommendation for our priority. But the Town might do something completely different. So just keep that in mind.

\* Details at the bottom: Changed to "community uses"

Bobbie: I am in favor of the Town retaining ownership of all the Glenmont land and protecting and selling all the Selkirk land

### **Agricultural Area 6:**

Bobbie: Put in the 3<sup>rd</sup> options as it is the bigger piece

Zan: I want to move to option 2. Land use means farming. It is hard for me to imagine option 1 being as effective as an option based on all the things we have discussed. Though option 2 and 3 are more probable

David: I like 2 and 3 – for the sake of the discussion, what if they don't work? Are we opposed to 1?

Gabby: I like 2

Mark: I like 2 and 3

Stuart: starting with an incubator, they often start small, if successful, they will need to expand to more land. Do we want to encumber it so farmers are without an expansion opportunity? Or do we want to maintain flexibility for future expansion?

Rob: Also, does the Town partner with a nonprofit for them to lease and manage expansion, or does the town manage all the leases to the new farmers. David is looking for a description of that in the plan. For example, "protect with easement and hold for incubator expansion, while continuing to lease for farm use".

Stuart: Here is one more opportunity. Is this a big enough space for a farmland investor that would want to come forward to hold the land and then provide those opportunities for new farmers? This way, we could still sell and still have the intended outcome realized.

David: One request. It would be helpful to put the acreage on the map of the focus areas. Also, I would like my farmland investment group to present to HHFAC. To explain their mechanism. A piece that is missing from our discussion is national trends in farmland investment. Is there 10 minutes for presentation?

### **Next Steps:**

- Lauren will update the map with approximate acreages,
- Bobbie will revise the visuals according to the meeting discussion.
- We will continue where we left off at the next meeting on 10/7/24, 4-6pm

**Public Comment:** None

**Meeting Adjourned 9:14am**

