



*David VanLuven*  
*Town Supervisor*

*Robert Leslie*  
*Director of Planning*

**TOWN OF BETHLEHEM**  
*Albany County - New York*  
445 DELAWARE AVENUE  
DELMAR, NEW YORK 12054

**HISTORIC HEATH FARM ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

Lauren Chiyoko Axford, Open Space Coordinator  
laxford@townofbethlehem.org  
(518) 439-4955 x1106

**MEETING SUMMARY**

**Monday October 7, 2024**

**4:00pm-6:00pm**

Delmar-Bethlehem EMS Building, 2<sup>nd</sup> floor  
114 Adams Street Delmar, NY 12054

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

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

**Meeting Commenced: 4:00pm**

Presentation by:

Andrew Rickert, Varsity Cross Country Coach & English Teacher  
Bethlehem Central High School

Andrew reached out to Lauren after exploring the Community StoryMap with his ideas of how the effort could be enhanced with perimeter trails for cross country running and walking. He was inspired by a visit to Pitney Meadows Community Farm in Saratoga Springs (see presentation for several site photos of the farm), and put together a concept and presentation entitled:

Run Wild Live Free: Andrew explained that his concept proposal was intended to:

- Increase accessibility to the land by creating pathways that will allow residents to more fully appreciate and engage with nature.
- To create a hub for community events
- To provide a source of revenue, fundraising, and stewardship, to grow community buy in

His presentation touched on the following points:

- There are many benefits to running on soft surfaces
- Heath Farm offers something different than other locations in Town (see presentation for reasons)
- Example Maps of a future heath farm trail
- Displayed maps and photos showing what a trail system could look like
- The “ideal” scenario would be 3.5 miles of crushed gravel paths 8-10ft wide with 2-3ft mowed grass border.
- These features enjoyed by hikers, dog walkers, residents, and cross-country athletes.

- Hosting a 5K would be great, but a partnership would be needed to provide parking
- Additional road crossings would be necessary (perhaps an underground culvert/tunnel under Wemple Road eliminate another crosswalk is possible)
- Educational placards could be strategically placed to provide insight and outreach
- To be able to enjoy the open vistas of the land while you are running, walking- many people would enjoy that.
- Many sites are starting to not host sectionals- (like SPAC) too many parents parking on grass, so there is a need for additional meet sites if the Town was willing to consider it.
- Trails could be used in the off season for cross-country skiing
- Pitney Meadows has a Community Hub which provides a place for a whole spectrum of STEAM and recreation opportunities.
- Town of Saratoga offers some of their youth summer programs on the Pitney Meadows Farm property.
- BCHS has on average 80 runners in fall/winter and 120 (track) in spring.
- Andrew has also been speaking to other school faculty about their interest in the future of the Heath Farm for the benefit of their students. There is a lot of interest from the Environmental Club Advisor, as there could be real potential to help encourage lifelong stewards of the land, through the student body.

**Q: Would it be open to the RCS students as well?**

**A:** Absolutely. The farm is in the RCS school district, but also close to several others, including Bethlehem. If a school wanted to host a meet, the Town would then rent per event (any school, public schools, and local colleges, etc.).

**Q: Mostly down by Clapper or up at Wemple/Glenmont?**

**A:** The Clapper Road parcel is big enough for more competitive meets, and the area in Glenmont would be more oriented towards pedestrians, general public, families, and not really competitive meets. The trails could be a very little footprint, yet really open up a lot more opportunities.

**Q: Is the Pitney Meadows Community Farm example similar in that there is active agriculture happening besides recreation on a perimeter trail. Have they integrated both uses in a way that isn't problematic?**

**A:** The farm is directly across from the high school, Pitney is about a 1.7 mile loop, 8-10ft wide. Seems like there is definitely very active agriculture, a community garden and a greenhouse.

**Q: What would it cost to do a trail like that?:**

**A:** It really depends, would depend on the characteristics of the land. Could create a tremendous amount of revenue. Could pay for itself in a couple years.

**Q: Is maintaining such a trail something you could engage the HS students in?**

**A:** Absolutely, they all are looking for community service hours too, as a requirement of graduation. Plus, these trails would be highly visible and used, so I think there would be a lot of interest in completing community services requirements this way.

Lauren and the committee thanked Andrew for his time and contribution to the planning effort.

The Town Supervisor was able to attend the first hour of the meeting, and addressed the committee:

- I thought it might be good for me to stop by and share how I have been looking at the role of the committee and process:
- The committee should be thinking about this project at a super high level.
- The most critical goal of protecting the land by purchasing it, is complete. That was our primary goal and we accomplished it. What that gives us is time, and everything we do beyond the purchase, is even better.
- I encourage you to stick with the high-level recommendations and a broad vision.
- Implementation is going to be taking place over the course of years (could be decade), we don't need ultimate detail right now.
- What we do on the land, is going to be shifting and adapting to the needs and interest of the community. For example, I never had thought of a cross-county use.
- As you are making recommendation, make sure you have flexibility.
- The Plan should be resilient and adaptable.
- Town's job is to execute implementation: protect the land by purchasing it, stabilizing the barn (not restoring or re-use at this point), so it can remain in existence and reused in the future to help implement the vision.
- We want to keep the land in active agriculture (and we are not farmers).

#### **#7 Wooded Area- Off of Wemple Road**

Options discussed:

- 1- Protect and Sell.
- 2- Maintain ownerships, partner with orgs to pursue education, ag and recreational uses.
- 3- Lease for Ag 2025, continue efforts to transition to increase land access opportunities.
- 4- Seek grant.

Bobbie: would like to see all of the Glenmont parcels maintained by Town ownership.

Stu: in light of what David just said, why is selling even on the table? His described long-term horizons seem to me that he doesn't want to sell anything.

Zan: But if the Town protected the land under an easement and then sold at the ag value, that is still in line with what he was saying. Personally, I like #2,3,4.

David: #1-4

Kristen: #2-4

Tom: #2,3,4

Dale: #2,3,4

Mark: #2& 4

Bobbie: Just remember, this is a temperature taking moment, with some of these considerations coming to light, we have these options to consider, this is a gauging exercise.

Stu: some of the options, recommendations to the Town board are going to be to gather more information about certain things. There should be in a list of topics that the Town should investigate and find out more about, to make future decision and recommendations. I think it would simplify the future report to have this as a comprehensive list.

**Q: Should the woodland habitat be maintained as a woodland habitat?**

Dale: - wildlife is prolific, they are all using this area. I don't think people [in Selkirk] would welcome increased visitors, traffic, and cars. Maybe certain pieces would be interesting to explore more public uses, like in Glenmont since there's greater visibility and access.

Gabby: Accessibility to and within the site is really important.

**Focus Area #8:**

Let's talk about the tillable area options:

Option #1 Lease for Ag in 2025, but continue efforts to transition to increase land access opportunities

Option #2- Maintain ownership by TOB & lease for Ag (combining to #1)

Option #3- Protect with easement & Sell for Ag use.

Zan: the thing that concerns me with the idea of selling, is that: would it just be the highest bidder to get to purchase? Most of the farmers we are talking about wouldn't be the highest bidder.

Bobbie: If the town retains ownership, we would be reserving areas for expansion of farm incubator farms. It maintains the flexibility for the future, and just because we recommend they don't sell now, it can be something to be explored in the future, if warranted.

Zan: This is a unique opportunity to offer access to land that doesn't have a commonly problematic hierarchical power dynamic between land holder and lessee.

Lauren: young farmers are interested in long-term leases with purchase option. Flexibility on both ends of the equation.

**Q: Is selling a last resort? Is anyone opposed to selling?**

Stuart: I would like to change the word "Option" to "Opportunity". Would you keep it in the overflow, expecting that an incubator is possible in the future? Would we want to maintain ownership in case for future opportunity? Say, hold it for 10 years, and then reassess the situation?

Dale, Stu, David: If it is a good opportunity that comes along to sell, let's explore.

Mark: not ruling out selling I would like to see it remain for an incubator, but if a nonprofit wants to purchase it, perhaps then we would consider selling. I am not looking to sell right now.

Bobbie- I do not think we need to sell it, think it is an asset.

Gabby: I do see value in the revenue from the sale of land for something like an educational area at the Heath Barn/Farm.

Kristen: could we list in priority.

Bobbie: in my estimation, if you need the \$\$, the best approach is retain ownership of the Glenmont land, and then sell Selkirk. But also, there are grants out there that could help to avoid a sale.

Stuart: We would be ill advised to think there would actually be an incubator farm. There is no nonprofit, the town is already committed to not managing the property. I am in favor of an incubator, but it is really hard, so it would be terrific to pull it off, if we can't ID the nonprofit or the farmers, I think it [sell] should be in the mix.

**Q: Bobbie: Does anyone feel very concretely about “don't sell”? If not, then we can take the temp and then move on. Maybe we come to a “Sell if the right opportunity comes up” recommendations.**

Rob: in our discussion of the incubator, as you look at all the land, have you exhausted the incubator.

Mark: Would everyone agree that an incubator option would be the best way to meet the requirements that we are looking for? If we can create an incubator opportunity with this property? Do we all agree that an incubator is a good idea?

Stuart: Yes, from what I know now, the most reasonable thing is to go forward with an overarching goal of having an incubator: land use, style of farming, good land protection.

Mark: there are models out there. They can be challenging, but there are models out there.

Dale: is the Town own it, will the Town have to put more \$\$ in?

Lauren: Aside from stabilization of the barn, the Town is NOT interested in investing additional \$\$\$. That is why we would aim to partner with other entities and seek to secure funding for implementation actions. Think of this as the Town creating a “shovel ready project” with the completion of the Vision Plan and a stabilized barn.

Zan: we don't know what agriculture will look like in ten years. We are transitioning land at a rate of loss that is so huge that there might not be farmland left. If we zoom out, the Town of Bethlehem is maintaining flexibility to meet future climate change and food system

vulnerabilities. I could immediately see those opportunities as ones that provide greater foodshed security, if we have a foodshed working on 300 acres, that is such a positive for the future of our community. We have a chance to make a really innovative model but we don't even know what the model is going to look like exactly. But that is okay if we still have ownership, because we will have the flexibility to respond to an uncertain future.

David: There are so many exciting things happening in the Hudson Valley that are privately owned, why not keep all the options open?

Bobbie: when it is a publicly owned property, everyone had a stake and the ability to vote on what happens. As soon as you sell it off, you no longer have that interest, because it would be private property.

Rob: Pros and cons for various options can be incorporated in the plan.

Stu: the Town owns the land, the town needs to be very careful about the terms of the easements that are put on the land. The wording of the easement could create more problems. The research into the agricultural easement must be done carefully.

**Q: Can a municipality have Ag District status for protection to whoever is farming?**

A: Lauren: Yes. The Albany County Farmland Protection Board has communicated on numerous occasions that even though we are a municipality, enrollment of these actively farmed areas in the Ag District would strengthen the Right to Farm protections of anyone farming the land. This might be really important seeing that there are 96 new residential units across the street.

Bobbie: So everyone aside from Dale and David, thinks we should keep exploring the concept of maintaining ownership?

Zan: we are getting hung up on words, but agricultural education and access seems to be the main vibe of what we are all interested in. We are interested in the future of ag and the doing of ag. Zooming out to the overarching impact of an incubator is maybe a better way to look at: It depends on who comes to the table. It depends on the organization, the farmers themselves.

Mark: The Town would be looking for some other entity to run the incubator, like a nonprofit organization.

Dale: I think we agree conceptually, but not in detail.

Bobbie: Yes, exactly.

David: to take the temp again, anyone opposed in principal to some sort of private owner of the land, nonprofit or otherwise?

Bobbie: I would rather not sell, but we shouldn't remove the option of selling. Let's keep it intact for that expansion idea. But don't take anything off the table, so if anything comes up, it can still be considered.

Stuart: Eye opener to me was that at Molly's recommendation (from AFT), I viewed all the bios of 25-30 individual farmers on the AFT website who are interested in farming opportunities in this area. I was confused as to what kind of opportunity the project could afford for them, but did learn there is a real housing need.

Bobbie: ClearPath for Vets might have some knowledge of veteran's orgs that have put in tiny homes. What does farming look like in the future, and those people need homes to live in. It is best to have the farm where you live.

General: Housing needed but to recommend that the Town think of, shared resources would be incredible, farmers need to be able to live either on or very close to the area they farm. Long term lease is key, because if I can't rotate my crops, spread manure, I am not going to buy seed, etc.

Stuart: a beginning farmer has a really big hill to climb, housing is a big challenge- here are the issues that come along with the recommendation of the agricultural use and these are the hurdles. To make an incubator work, the people need to be able to live here.

Bobbie: are we going to make recommendations on the structures?

David: I think we shouldn't really go into the structures, just mention that they exist and that warrant further investigation.

Bobbie: Let's forget about the houses, and when we speak about the land, and say keep the idea of maintaining ownership. Incubator and housing recommendations will be more global.

David: this Thursday, Dale and I going to Schaghticoke for a silvopasture tour, 4-8pm 2 more seats in the car, please feel free to join us!

### **Public Comment:**

Barbara Silber: We are neighbors in the Brightonwood subdivision down Wemple Road. I have a suggestion to generate nice income for the parcel, it is to invite a Verizon cell tower on the property near 9W. Verizon has signed an agreement with the Elsmere #2 Fire House proposing to put 125ft cell tower on Feura Bush Road/Wemple Road, but it doesn't have the fall clearance it needs (it needs a variance for 5G). If you take into the account that the area said they need a 5G cell tower, these parcels would be the perfect place, won't obstruct the road, plenty of area for clearance, all income, \$1200/month, would be good for the Town

Kathy Newkirk: 331 Clapper Road I just want an explanation of R5? I have lived there for over 60 years, the little ravine behind my house is all open space with plenty of wildlife.

**Next HHFAC meeting is: Wednesday October 16, 2024 8am-9am @ EMS Building**

**Meeting Adjourned at 6:00pm**