



David VanLuven
Town Supervisor

Robert Leslie
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TOWN OF BETHLEHEM
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HISTORIC HEATH FARM ADVISORY COMMITTEE

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MEETING SUMMARY
Wednesday November 13, 2024

8:00-9:00am

Delmar-Bethlehem EMS Building, 2nd 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: 8:00am

Approval of past meeting summaries: Meeting summaries from 8/21/24, 10/7/24, and 10/16/24 were unanimously approved.

Vision Plan Review:

Dale: I'm concerned with the stabilization of the barn and the costs.

Rob: I can provide some clarification for the stabilization bid. The bid came in at \$650K and the Town is looking at 3 funding sources: capital reserve fund, ARPA, and operating Funds.

David V. would those funds be available for other projects and uses if not being used for stabilization? The store has been removed from the stabilization bid?

Rob: we had 1 bid for whole complex and then an alternative bid that deducts the store from the barn structure. The store is structurally independent of the barn, and is not architecturally significant, so the Town is proposing to stabilize just the barn.

Stuart: originally when presented to us, it was of local historic significance.

Rob: stabilization now, or not, for the store, will not change future potential for historic nomination registry, should the Town choose to pursue it.

Stuart: what about not including the silo?

Rob: The silo is considered a local iconic structure piece, local significance of the corner, important to stabilize. Not for functionality as silos are rather obsolete. Stabilization of the barn lends itself to future farming activities.

Stu: the silo is not or will not ever be functional.

Bobbie: when the Town bought the land, the decision was either to stabilize or tear it down. Both costs money.

Mark: The reason for stabilizing the silo, is for the historical look of it. I went up to Pitney meadows and they have a beautiful silo.

Dale: is the silo historic? Are you going to spend more money on the silo?

Rob: our committee has been discussing agricultural center or farm incubator. That has occurred over the last 4 meetings, and there is a need for a structure for that use. The Town is looking at its current asset, if there is an opportunity for the reuse. Your role is focused on the opportunities for the property.

David: page 20 Barn: insert one sentence that the HFAC had no role in its stabilization.

Mark: the Town is now stabilizing the barn.

Lauren: Since we all agree that stabilization is out of the scope of this committee's task and we have spent a lot of time discussing it, please attend tonight's Town Board meeting if you want to learn more. Let's move on to the vision plan draft and hear your comments and feedback.

Kristen: we should address parking needs, or at least mention the accessibility by parking.

Bobbie: should add in a new paragraph about parking and access.

Stu: we should raise the issues that need to be decided going forward.

David: I suggest we remove the timeframe or horizon of 10 years. Is it up to us to provide an estimate for implementation?

Rob: the background on this, 2 meetings ago, we had David VanLuven attend to provide clarification, and the timeframe horizon is what he mentioned. 10 years was considering the time to build partnerships, secure grant fundings, etc.

Mark: I don't think he wanted to say it is going to be exactly 10 years. He acknowledged that this was a long term approach.

Bobbie: Procedural thing: Switch Ag District from B to A. Since that comes first.

Gabby: the 4 bullets on page 18, the 3 bullet, the town should remain flexible. Wants to keep it as should instead of could.

Stuart: if the Town retains ownership, it will continue to prohibit the use of pesticide. They have to be careful in the land use decisions to make it so that the vision can be followed. Want to leave the door open for flexibility for the future. Like for housing for potential farmer.

Dale: we just want to offer options instead of telling them exactly what to do.

Bobbie: recommendations should go to the top of the section, then talk about the details and the discussions, and the guiding principles, could be rolled into the 4 bullets under recommendations.

David: I read that paragraph where the report is skewed against the selling of the land.

Mark: it doesn't say "the Town should keep the land".

David: The report is one sided.

Zan: this is a semantics and interpretation issue. Partnership does not exclude a sale.

David: this report as it stands does not.

Lauren: you all have a copy of the draft vision plan. If you haven't already, please send me your comments, feedback, revisions, etc. individually. I will compile and revise the draft accordingly. You can provide your feedback in several ways: 1- track changes and add comments in word doc. Please save with your name in the file! 2- write on your hard copy and drop off to me at Town Hall, 3- just email me your thoughts in a bulleted list.

Stuart: it is unclear to me, how does the Town see the decisions being made in light of the vision plan. What is the plan post vision plan? Let's make time to discuss this at the last meeting.

Bobbie- FYI- the table of contents, is hyperlinked.

Public Comment:

Linda Jasinski: after 30 years following what the Town spends our tax payer money on, I am concerned about the amount of tax money that it is going to take to keep this going. Has anyone explored how much it would cost to just tear the barn down and build it brand new?

The other thing that scares me is perpetuity. For example, on our property, I know what is needed now, but my daughter may have different ideas down the road, and further down the road her children might have a completely different idea of what is needed.

We need to keep flexibility. We need to be able to change with the times. I don't even know that perpetuity holds- what is to stop the Town in 2-3 generations from saying, we want housing here and just doing that?

I do not think that the government should own farmland. The Town should find a way to get it back on the tax roll, put some protections or deed restrictions in place, but then get it back into private farm ownership. People who farm should not be under government control.

Mike Waldenmaier: I would second what Linda has said. 307 acres purchased by the Town that have now been taken off the tax roll. There should be an option and opportunity to put protection on the land, and to sell to a farmer.

I know there are asbestos concerns, how much are we going to spend to get the rest of the asbestos off. The planning board just had a meeting about the cell tower. I made a suggestion that the Town should put the cell tower behind the barn. Use the revenue from the cell company \$\$ to help supplement the costs of the barn. Do we know how much it cost to do the initial asbestos clean-up? How much is it going to cost to clean up the rest?

Ross McTavish: This is the second meeting I have come to and it seems to me the Town should have done this process before they bought the farm. There is so much acreage there, but only one farmer is using it. A recommendation or decision needs to be made. Why aren't you saying this is what you should do? You wasted all that time.

Bob Keefe: I appreciate all this volunteer time and effort. To see a group that has such varied expertise and intelligently get past these impasses. I am really in favor of finding ways of getting first time farmers on the land to farm. Affording land to buy for first time farmers, whether or not Heath farm is going to address that, it is a good first step. As far as sale to private entity, they would need to work within the confines of what the HFFI is promoting, correct?

HHFAC Responses:

Stuart: this purchase was a one-time opportunity from a developer who for years, had a plan for strip malls and housing on the table. The Town had to seize the opportunity when it arose, there was no time to pre-plan. NOW, our opportunity is to create a vision that someone can go forward and do. Also, there is a big difference between recommendation, and decision. We are only charged with the recommendations. If you want to read about decisions, those would be the resolutions coming out of the Town Board meetings (like tonight's Town Board meeting).

Tom Seymour: the Town is stabilizing the barn for now, to give potential for future use. Just to clarify.

Next HHFAC meeting is: December 11, 2024 8am-9am @ EMS Building

Meeting Adjourned at 9:00am