

Town of Red Hook

**Agriculture and Open Space Committee**

**Minutes of June 25, 2013**

**Attendance:** Co-chairperson Norman Greig, Co-chairperson Pete Hubbell (7:07), John Hardeman (7:13), Richard Biezynski, Ken Migliorelli, Marina Michahelles, Town Board Councilman William O'Neill (liaison) and Secretary Linda Keeling

**Absent:** Michael Grady Robertson and Mary Ann Johnson,

**Guests:** None

**Location:** Red Hook Town Hall, meeting room.

**Meeting Opened:** The Co-chairman Pete Hubbell opened the meeting at 7:08 pm.

**Minutes:** There was a quorum.

*John Hardeman* noted that on page 3 it should be “Chuck” not “Dave”.

**Motion:** *Richard Biezynski* motioned to accept the minutes of April 23, 2013 as corrected, *Pete Hubbell* seconded and all agreed.

Note: The July 23<sup>rd</sup> meeting was canceled.

**Old Business:**

1. **Dutchess Land Conservancy brochure:** *Councilman Bill O'Neill* presented a copy for the group from the Dutchess Land Conservancy entitled “Working to Save Critical Farmland, Gaining Ground” 2013, 27 pages. It states it has protected 36,000 acres of Open Land in Dutchess County with over 1000 acres in Red Hook. Pages 4-10 describes over 600 acres of Red Hook farms protected: Northwind Farms, 195 ac., (Biezynski family), Migliorelli Farm, 800 formerly plus 28 ac., (Ken Migliorelli), Three Pond Farm, 61 ac., (Streichlers, next to Mead Farm), Missing D Farm, 16 ac., (Harrison-Jones), Trezza Farm, 115 ac., (Al and Gloria Trezza), Panorama Farm, 67 ac., (Ronnie and Allan Jones), Greig Farm, 156 ac., (Jim & Corina Greig), Sturges Farm, 34 ac., (Peter & Nydia Sturges) and Karpinski Farm, 31 ac., (Joanne and Chris Karpinski). This provides a contiguous land mass for future farming needs.

2. **Ag Letter to Government Officials:** *Chairman Pete Hubbell* presented a draft letter addressed to Senator Gipson and Assemblywoman Barrett regarding two issues impacting the economic future of our farms and families:

A. High taxes of \$38.41 per acre compared to the US average of \$12.34 per acre and suggested a cap from 10% to 2%.

B. Farm Works Fair Labor Practices Act and its relationship to Nature and requesting Senator Gipson to vote No.

*Co-chairman Pete Hubbell* also presented 4 background article sheets for the group to read:

a. “*Ag Advocates Applaud Movement on Tighter Farmland Assessment Cap*” by Joanna Richards  
[www.Wrvo.org/post/ag-advocates-applaud-movement-tighter-farmland-assessment-cap](http://www.Wrvo.org/post/ag-advocates-applaud-movement-tighter-farmland-assessment-cap)

b. “*Farm Bureau Seeking Agricultural Assessment Cap Reduction*” by Matthew Dondiego, June 4, 2013  
[www.legislativegazette.com/LPprintwindow.LASSO?-token.editorialcall=84000.113122](http://www.legislativegazette.com/LPprintwindow.LASSO?-token.editorialcall=84000.113122)

c. “*Assembly Bill Attacks New York Agriculture*” June 2, 2013  
[www.watertowndailytimes.com/article/20130602/706029975#.Ua30mkZx10c.email](http://www.watertowndailytimes.com/article/20130602/706029975#.Ua30mkZx10c.email)

d. “*Finding Footing on the Farm, Big Leap from City Life to Working the Soil Offers a Rocky Road*” by Kristen V. Brown, June 6, 2013 (Hart and Simmerly rent 8.5 ac. at the Klose Farm, Red Hook)  
[www.timesunion/local/article/Finding-footing-on-the-farm-4568987.php](http://www.timesunion/local/article/Finding-footing-on-the-farm-4568987.php)

3. **New Member:** *John Hardeman* asked Chuck Mead but he is not interested. There were other names suggested but none that would agree to serve at this point.

4. **Farm Fence:** *Bill O’Neill* stated the town board made a fence referral to the Zoning Review Committee (ZRC) Chairman, Susan Simon, in order to review the present law and make adjustments as needed. The proposed Resolution was sent to Susan Simon. Zoning Enforcer Steve Cole researched the issue with the State Ag group in Albany and it states that a fence is a structure so covered by zoning.

*Norman Greig* stated the Ag Committee should set the tone of what should be done as it applies to farming in Red Hook rather than rely on what Albany says. A Resolution was written by his attorney and the town is sitting on the issue from the initial letter from the Ag Committee six months ago.

*Bill O’Neill* stated the ZRC meeting review is pending. A few members from the Ag Committee should sit in on the ZRC meeting to answer questions on this issue. Regarding the Escrow issue, he met with Planning Board secretary Paula Schoonmaker and the applicant will be notified if escrow is needed. Charges would have to be addressed on an individual basis and show that the consultant is charging higher fees than they should.

*Norman Greig* said he understands the structure. He views it as punitive and believes whenever there is no control over the fees; it is ripe for graft and corruption. The town hires a planner and engineer, then a second opinion engineer is hired by the applicant and the applicant pays twice.

*John Hardeman* stated large applicant proposals hired their own engineer. Previously, it was the discretion of the Planning Board as to whether or not to have the applicant duplicate this fee. Now everything is sent to the town engineer and planner consultants. He doesn’t feel a planner is needed at every meeting.

*Norman Greig* feels this is a profit motivation for the town. If 4 applicants are on the agenda and the fee is \$1000 from the planner, every applicant is charged that fee. He feels the Planning Board relies on the planning consultant to make all the decisions.

*John Hardeman* feels the town's planner stretches the billable hours with talk. He feels the planner should be from out of the area.

*Norman Greig* referred to looking at the history of businesses thriving or not during the last 5 years. The routine legal, planning and escrow fees have gone sky high. He wants a graph of these expenses from the Planning Board. No one takes responsibility on this board and defers to the paid professionals. Now the town attorney and planner are at every meeting. When legal fees go from \$14,000 per year to \$365,000 per year there's a problem.

*Bill O'Neill* retorted that the town does look at the expenses for example Common Fire's assessment challenge and zoning changes.

*Norman Greig* stated taxes are a huge issue for him as a farmer and the town expenses are out of control. How the town spends our money is a huge issue for him as a farmer. He stated that how the town is spending money on experts is out of control. Even under a F.O.I.L. request the numbers are not available.

*Bill O'Neill* stated the town is not over spending on consultant fees. The town spends when grants are available. As liaison he will get a 5 year graph of the fees for lawyers, planners and escrow fees.

*Ken Migliorelli* stated GreenPlan charged the town and the applicant. There is a lack of transparency. He would like to know what is paid directly to the planner by the town and what the applicants are paying to them.

### **NEW BUSINESS:**

1. **McKeon's Emailed Letter:** *Chairman Pete Hubbell* and the others felt that perhaps Robert McKeon might be better able to write a letter and/or address officials in Albany regarding the farm taxing issue. Richard Biezynski stated that Vermont has a 5% circuit breaker.

*Bill O'Neill* felt that Robert McKeon should be invited to a meeting so the group can ask questions and input on the letter.

*Pete Hubbell* will contact Robert McKeon to come up with a draft letter and make a presentation to the Ag Committee members who can review and sign it as individuals.

2. **Kesicke Farm:** *Bill O'Neill* noted that the Kesicke Farm has applied for a PDR Application. The \$3.5 million 10 year bond is running low. \$2.6 million was borrowed, leaving about \$900,000. The Community Preservation Fund (CPF) is at about \$1.5 million. The Klose Farm is pending. The finances would be: 25% town, 25% USDA, 50% Scenic Hudson. There's probably enough money to cover the two projects.

*Pete Hubbell* indicated that commercial sales are hit very hard being over the median sale price.

*Bill O'Neill* left at 7:42 pm.

3. **Feller Farm:** *John Hardeman* relayed information from realtor agent Paul Fredrick's difficulty in selling the Feller Farm property. There are 16 acres on the south side with a place for a barn but has no house site and on the north side has a home and 6.3 acres. The proposal is to take an acre and a half for the house site and make a lot line adjustment on the 16 acres. Scenic Hudson is fine with this proposal. They admitted they made a mistake and should have allowed a house site on the 16 acres. Planning Board Chairman Chris Kane will not entertain Paul Fredrick's proposal which would create two separate farming parcels. She shut off the proposal and did not take it to the Planning Board. The group discussed the proposed action and made a motion.

**MOTION:** *Norman Greig* made a motion that since Scenic Hudson is the holder of the easement and they are comfortable with the proposed realignment of the Feller Farm acreage into two separate parcels with a lot line adjustment, this should be done by the Planning Board to allow for the potential sale of this property to encourage farming on smaller parcels. *Rich Biezynski* seconded and all agreed.

Co-chairman Pete Hubbell would like the secretary to send a copy of the motion to Paul Fredricks. A letter should be sent to the Planning Board from the Ag Committee.

**Motion:** *Norman Greig* motioned to adjourn the meeting and *John Hardeman* seconded. All agreed.

**Adjournment:** The meeting adjourned at 7:52 pm.

**Next meeting:** The next regular meeting will be the **4<sup>th</sup> Tuesday, August 27, 2013 at 7:00 pm.**

Respectfully submitted,

Linda J. Keeling, Secretary

Approved August 27, 2013