

# Farmland Conservation Easement Commission Minutes

## Public Information Sessions

Members: John Molinaro (Chairman), Margaret Burlingham (Vice Chairman), Steve Nass (Secretary), Daphne Holterman, and County Board Chairman Sharon Schmeling, ex-officio.

**7 p.m. – 8:30 p.m. on August 31, 2009**

**Young Community Room, Palmyra-Eagle High School, 123 Burr Oak Street**

Agenda

7:00 pm

John Molinaro: Welcome and purpose/format of meeting and overview of Farmland Conservation Easement Commission's work on PACE program

Dan Poulsen: Working Lands Initiative/the need to protect our farmland and farming economy

- 1. Chairman Molinaro began the public information session at 7:04pm. Molinaro explains the history of the Commission, donation of easements, purchase of conservation easement, and current County Land Use Plan. Molinaro explains to the audience that the Commission wants feedback from the community on the proposed criteria to purchase development rights. He explains that the County has set aside \$250,000 with the hope of getting matching funds from the Working Land Trust.**

**Dan Poulsen speaks and explains the Work Lands Initiative. He states that the Governor set aside monies to buy development rights. The State is forming a Council to work on the purchase of development rights. Poulsen explains that in 1977, the State passed the Farmland Preservation Law that was a tax law, not a preservation law. The law was based on income, and it wasn't a true preservation program. Poulsen believes that the new working land program is a true preservation program and will preserve farmland.**

7:10

Presentation on Purchase of Agricultural Conservation Easements by Jim Welsh, Natural Heritage Land Trust

- 2. Jim Welsh from the Natural Heritage Land Trust provided a power point presentation explaining, in general, a purchase of development rights program.**

7:25

Testimony from a landowner who has put easement on his/her farm and Q&A

- 3. Burlingham introduced Steve Ruh from Kane County, IL. Steve Ruh is a farmer that sold development rights to Kane County. Ruh explained that his farm is west of Chicago, which has a lot of development pressures. Kane County started the program in 2001 which receives funding from the River Boats and Federal dollars. Ruh passed out an information sheet outlining the program. This family had help from the American Farmland Trust and they preserved approximately 380 acres. Ruh then took questions from the audience. There was a question on what type of criteria Illinois has. There could be no liens on the property, and each deal was negotiable. Ruh stated that his neighbors went into the program, and it was easier for him to go into the program. It took him 18 months to negotiate the easement. Kane County has a full-time staff person running the program.**

8:00

Test driving the selection criteria

Additional citizen feedback

- 4. Holterman explains the proposed criteria, and then goes through each section with the audience. The Commission has talked about cropland, pasture, and grassland as being work land. Wood lots would not be included in that, but would only be one section. The average size of the farm in Jefferson County currently is 170 acres. There was a question on how the criteria affects only a portion of the farm, if you were only giving a portion of an easement. Molinaro explains that individual cases will be different depending on the location of the property. There as a question on what if the Township is more restrictive, and there aren't as many splits available. Molinaro explains that they would only purchase the number of splits available. Molinaro explains that zoning is temporary. The person's point was that larger pieces of lands which you want to protect may have less lots than smaller pieces. Holterman explains that this is only 1/3 of all the points given. The person is concerned that if you have too much weight on the splits, larger owners are discouraged.**

**Holterman moves to development pressure which is 30 points out of the 100 points. Molinaro explains that you don't have to give up all of your development rights, but if you give up more, you get more points. Molinaro explains that the goal of the Commission is to keep working lands close to each other so it's easier to rent lands. John Kannard questioned if the Working Lands will eliminate development rights on parcel less than 20 acres. Poulsen could not answer the question. Molinaro asked Staff if she knew about this 20 acre restriction. Staff explains through the Conditional Use process that the State does restrict homes on parcels less than 20 acres.**

**Holterman moves to Section 3 of the criteria and explains each category. Molinaro asked the audience what "other" criteria should be added to this section. An audience member stated that pasture-based production should be added to this because it is environmentally friendly and nice to look at. Greg**

David suggested a category for jobs per acre, for example 4 jobs on 15 acres versus 3 jobs on 800 acres. There was a suggestion of rolling acreage vs. flat lands because rolling hills have more scenic value. Molinaro explains that the Commission did discuss this possibility, but after discussion, it was more of an objective criteria. A suggestion from an audience member was that it accorded to him that many of items in the other section may be temporary such as organic. Today the farmer may be organic, but in the future, they may not be. Welsh asked the person if he thought there was value in them or remove those items. His comment is how do you know it will remain the same. Another audience member thought that we should get back to the basics and save the most highly productive farmland, and protect as many acres as we can. He stated that we don't know what types of technology will be in the future, and you don't want to limit the farmers. Molinaro believes that items that are temporary should be looked at again. A comment from a farmer was that buildings can be torn down any day, but you cannot change the land. There was a question about annexations. Molinaro explains urban service areas, and that the Commission will use the Jefferson County Land Use Plan urban service areas. Molinaro discusses the use of maps through the University of Wisconsin-Madison. There was a question about highway corridors and the State condemning lands for highway purposes. Welsh relates a story in Dane County about utilities that went through the Town of Dunn. Molinaro explains they have no control over the state purchasing lands for highway purposes. Holterman explains section 4 with bargain sales and tax deductions.

8:30

Close/Thank You by John Molinaro

**Molinaro states he hopes the program will be in effect by the end of this year.**

**Molinaro explains to the audience that this is a voluntary program.**

**A QUORUM WILL BE PRESENT BUT NO DECISIONS WILL BE MADE**