

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 September 14, 2009

Activity Center, Jefferson County Fair Park, 503 North Jackson Ave

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

Dan Paulson talks about the Working Lands Initiative. This program is a way to preserve farmland for generations but it is voluntary and not for everyone. Paulson went to the East Coast to Maryland and Pennsylvania to see how they are preserving farmland, and he recognizes we aren't like the east coast. Maryland has over a million people in a county, but why wait until we get crowded and then say we ought to save farmland. We need to look at the infrastructure of agriculture such as fertilizer dealers, implement dealers, etc. Molinaro introduces Sharon Schmeling County Board Chairperson. Molinaro stated to the audience that this program is voluntary.

7:10

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

Jim Welsh from the Natural Heritage Land Trust provided a power point presentation explaining, in general, a purchase of development rights program. Welsh stated that the Town of Dunn has purchased 23 farms and 23 are currently on the list waiting to be brought out. Town of Windsor just started their program, and 21 landowners have currently applied. Welsh indicates that there are many sources of funding such as the USDA, State programs and then County funds. Welsh explain if you donate conservation easements, there are tax incentives.

7:25

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

The Commission replayed the video taken from the August 31, 2009 Palmyra forum of Steve Ruh from Kane County, IL.

8:00

Test driving the selection criteria

Additional citizen feedback

Molinaro told the audience that this is the second of these meetings, and at the first meeting an audience member mentioned what happens if our Township is more restricted than the County. That is an issue we need to discuss as a Commission. Molinaro stated that he hopes to have the criteria and application completed by the end of October. Holterman introduces herself to the audience. Holterman explained the proposed criteria, and then went through each section with the audience.

Holterman explains that a property owner would get more points if the land is located the furthest away from the city and village. A gentleman asked if you have a tree farm that is in the American tree farm system, does that qualify. Welsh explained that the Federal program may not fund that but the County could. Molinaro explained that at the last meeting, there was a question on woodlot and will have to take into consideration the presence of woods on working land. Molinaro explained urban service areas, and that the Commission will use the Jefferson County Land Use Plan urban service areas.

Molinaro points out that there was a category for an organic producer, and explains that the Commission will have to find criteria that is solid and not changeable. Holterman explained the rating system and points. Molinaro explained that the UW-Madison has been working with the Commission and has a computer program to put in our rating system which than can produce maps. Steve Grabow mentioned that the Commission had a graduate workshop from Professor Kurt Paulsen. They did some work looking at trends in agricultural within Jefferson, and looked at different strategies including the PACE program. Grabow explained the computer program works with the criteria.

Welsh asked the audience if the Commission should protect the biggest farms or the best soils? One audience member stated he believes it the best soils. Another stated that if the Commission started putting criteria such as organic you are saying that one farm practices is better than another. An audience member asked what the definition of protected lands was. Molinaro explains the GHA program as an example.

A gentleman asked if there are going to be workshops to help fill out the application forms so the farmer can come and work with you to complete the application. Molinaro stated we haven't thought this out yet, but he believes that he would work with each individual landowner, and if there is a large amount of landowners they will possibly do a workshop. Molinaro asked Welsh how it's done in other communities. Welsh explained that in Town of Dunn and Town of Windsor, the landowner is required to fill out parts of the

form, and then the Town answers more of the detailed questions such as if they are close to the urban service area. The Town doesn't ask the landowner to answer all the questions. An audience member suggested that the Commission may want to consider how much investment they have in the farm such as Holterman has more investment in it for farming their farm. Welsh asked is there any objective criteria to compare farms on that basis. Another audience member points out that the question which states if you have a conservation plan on file indicating if you are a good land steward vs not a good land steward. There was a question on other restrictions on the easement other than just agricultural such as agri-business, dog kennels, horse barns, etc. Nass stated that those examples are in the agricultural zone and would be permitted. Welsh stated that some programs have their own restrictions on what can be done on the property. For example, a riding arena would not be allowed if you get funding from the Federal Program because the Federal Program does not consider horse back riding as an agricultural activity. Molinaro explained that each easement will be unique depending on where the grant source is coming from and what the owner would like to protect.

8:30

Close/Thank You by John Molinaro

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

Adjourn at 8:36 pm.

A QUORUM WILL BE PRESENT BUT NO DECISIONS WILL BE MADE