

# **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 21, 2009**  
**Waterloo Town Hall, N8193 STH 89**

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

**Chairman Molinaro began the public information session at 7:03pm. Molinaro explained the history of the Commission, donation of easements, purchase of conservation easement, and current County Land Use Plan.**

**Tom Lyons spoke and explained the Work Lands Initiative. Lyons will be on the State Committee for the State wide PACE Program. Lyons explained his involvement over the years in agricultural enterprise. Explained that other counties are looking in this program such as Rock, Waupaca, Walworth, Bayfield and Lacrosse.**

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.**

7:25

Testimony from a landowner who has put easement on his/her farm

**Bob Rohloff from the Town of Dunn is a hog producer. They are located only 3 miles to the beltline. The farming operation has been in the family since 1866. Rohloff explained the challenges of being a hog farmer so close to an urban area. Rohloff explained the history of land use and the PACE program in the Town of Dunn. Rohloff has been on the Town of Dunn Plan Commission since 1980. He sees the PACE program as another tool in land use planning. The larger farm tracts were being split up and it made it challenging for farmers because instead of renting**

from oneland owner, you were renting from several. Rohloff sold his development rights, and with the sale, brought additional agricultural lands.

There was a question from the audience if it's harder for property owners to sell their land with the conservation easements on them. Rohloff explained a situation where an individual who had 160 acres in size built up a horse facility but did not live on the land. They sold the development rights to the Town of Dunn. Two years ago, that farm with 160 acres and two commercial grade boarding stables on them sold for \$1.2 million. The audience asked if the easements are standard or customary. Rohloff explains that each person is different on what they foresee in the future on what they will need. For example, they expanded their building area for agricultural structures on the easements so they could expand their operation.

7:40

Q&A

8:00

Test driving the selection criteria

Additional citizen feedback

Molinaro explained urban service areas, and that the Commission will use the Jefferson County Land Use Plan urban service areas. Molinaro explained that we are hoping to have the final criteria by the middle of October, and then will be accepting applications. Holterman explained the proposed criteria, and then goes through each section with the audience. There was a question from the audience that if there is an approval from a board on these easements. Molinaro explained that this is a voluntary program and is only between the County and the owner, yourself not the neighbors. Molinaro explained that the Commission has a lot of positive feedback from the Township. Molinaro went to the County Town's Association meeting and explained the program to them. There was a discussion between the Commission and audience on the benefits of organic farming versus conventional farming. An audience member points out that the Commission already requires conservation plans as part of the criteria and doesn't need additional categories. She states they needed to look at the land not the crop's value. A member from the audience asked the Commission if they have looked at other similar programs to review their criteria. Molinaro explained that they looked at many and took pieces of each of them. Rohloff explained the Town of Dunn's application process and criteria. They approached it differently because they are trying to slow annexation in the Township. They gave more points to lands closer to urban service areas. There was a discussion between the audience and Commission on the value of preserving lands closer to urban areas versus out in the rural areas. Molinaro explained that UW-Madison is helping the Commission on mapping the criteria.

8:30

Close/Thank You by John Molinaro

Adjourn at 8:45 pm.