

Knox Agricultural Advisory Committee
Meeting of May 17th, 2022
Knox Town Hall

Summary

Present: Earl Barcomb, Jay Francis, Betty Ketcham, Gary Kleppel, Brian Wilson
Absent: Ken Saddlemire, Evan Taylor

Old business

Traffic calming on farm roads – Progress & next steps: Gary Kleppel reported that he was waiting to here from Albany County DPW re: progress toward installing signage on the roads that the AAC had identified as heavily used by farmers. Committee members suggested that we talk to Supervisor Pokorny about moving ahead with signage for Town roads.

Change in Knox zoning ordinance re: farm abandonment: A considerable amount of time was spent discussing the Planning Board's (PB) proposed modifications to the Abandonment Clause in the Town's zoning ordinance. This clause relates to agricultural land uses in districts that became "residential" when the Town adopted the ordinance but were grandfathered in as agricultural so long as the parcel(s) was used for farming. If the parcel was not farmed in five years, it would be considered abandoned and would revert to the current use (e.g., residential). The change in the ordinance would reduce the time-till-abandonment to three years. This is because the PB proposal is to change all non-conforming uses from 6 months to 3 years and to eliminate the section in which non-conforming ag would be considered abandoned after 5 years. That means non-conforming ag would be incorporated as a general non-conforming use and abandonment would occur after 3 years. In its April meeting the AAC voted to reject this proposal and to suggest to the PB that, given the importance of farmland and farming to the Town, the region and the nation, farmland should never be considered abandoned. If the PB felt that abandonment was necessary, then it should not occur in less than one generation (25 years). If that was not satisfactory, then the AAC suggested leaving the time-till-abandonment as is (5 years). The committee unanimously opposed the change to 3 years, as will occur if the changes proposed by the PB are approved. Kleppel presented these recommendations to the PB on May 12th. The PB requested that the AAC study this issue to determine how other communities handle abandonment of farmland when the farm is in a non-agricultural district. The PB also requested that the AAC consider criteria and thresholds for farms in residential districts.

The AAC discussed this issue at its May meeting. It was decided that Gary Kleppel would look into the question of how other communities deal with farms as a non-conforming use. It was also decided that the committee would develop a set of Good Agricultural Practices for Knox, with an emphasis on farms in non-Agricultural districts. Further, the AAC will consider ways that Town and County Ag districts can be aligned and how residential parcels can be converted to agricultural parcels.

Attracting & keeping farmers - Agri-business development: Gary Kleppel reported that Berne-Knox-Westerlo High School will reschedule its Agri-business panel because of low interest by businesses.

New Business

There was no new business.

Comments and discussion

It was suggested that the AAC look into how to create agricultural easements. The committee will hold a seminar on easements in the future.

Amy Pokorny made the committee aware of opportunities for funding for road safety through Assembly member Fayhe's office, barn restoration grants, and a Farm-to-Market museum in Rensselaer County.