

AGRICULTURE AND EXTENSION EDUCATION COMMITTEE  
LAND AND WATER CONSERVATION COMMITTEE  
PLANNING AND ZONING COMMITTEE  
MEETING MINUTES  
Conference Room 1, County Annex  
Stevens Point, WI 54481  
June 28, 2016

Members present: Marion "Bud" Flood, Bob Gifford, Charles Gussel, Barry Jacowski, Matt Jacowski, Julie Morrow, Dale O'Brien, Larry Raikowski, Jerry Walters, Gerry Zastrow

Member absent: Roger Bacon

Others present: John Jadzewski, Ron Hensler, Paul Onan, Farmland Preservation Ad Hoc Steering Committee; Ida Frizzell; Ken Schroeder, UW-Extension; Steve Bradley and Patty Benedict, Planning and Zoning Department, Land and Water Conservation Division.

1. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 6:00 p.m. by Planning and Zoning Committee Chair B. Jacowski.

B. Jacowski read the Public Notice statement: Members of the public who wish to address the Committee on specific agenda items must register their request at this time, with such comments subject to the reasonable control of the Committee Chair as set forth in Robert's Rules of Order.

2. Discussion – Preliminary Draft of the Farmland Preservation Plan Recommended by the Portage County Farmland Preservation Ad Hoc Steering Committee on April 18, 2016

Schuler distributed copies of the resolution establishing the Farmland Preservation (FP) Ad Hoc Steering Committee and the section of State Statutes with the requirements for the Farmland Preservation Plan (FP Plan). In the mid 1980s, he explained the State required counties to have a FP Plan. In 2009, the program was reorganized as the Working Lands Initiative. Counties were provided funding to update their FP Plans. The FP Ad Hoc Steering Committee was formed, recruiting volunteers from across the agricultural industry, as the primary authors of the draft FP Plan. Schuler said the draft FP Plan forwarded to the Committees is close to meeting the statutory requirements, according to preliminary discussions taking place with the Department of Agriculture, Trade, and Consumer Protection (DATCP). The three committees are being asked to review the draft FP Plan, make certain they understand the policies and recommendations, and are responsible for forwarding to the full County Board for adoption. Schuler stated another one or two meetings will be necessary to make sure members understand the plan and agree that it represents the best interests of Portage County.

Schuler said State Statutes call for two components: 1) a written plan describing the agricultural industry and policies and actions to support, promote, and preserve the agriculture industry in the future, and 2) a map depicting areas having farmland to be preserved. The State requires the use of objective criteria in developing the map. The Ad Hoc Steering Committee chose a number of criteria, including existing exclusive agricultural zoning, town land use plans identifying long term, high value agricultural land, and natural resources areas as a starting point. The maps will be done on a town by town basis at the next meeting and an overall map will be provided. Several towns have weighed in on their maps and will identify the land they want to be considered for preservation.

Chapter 91 has two sides. There is a tax credit program run by the State. Land must be mapped as a FP area in order for agriculture operators/landowners to be eligible to participate in the program. The other side is a more general view of how the County feels about agriculture and what it is going to do to help perpetuate it.

Schuler invited the Ad Hoc Steering Committee members to describe how the FP Plan came together. Jazdzewski said the Ad Hoc Steering Committee was a well-represented group involved in various aspects of agricultural. A lot of time was spent in discussions and ultimately consensus was reached. He feels the Ad Hoc Committee did what they were charged to do.

Schuler referred to his memo. A couple of areas need input. The Agriculture Tourism section is one. Sara Brish, Stevens Point Area Convention and Visitors Bureau, has done a lot of work with groups locally and throughout the state related to agriculture tourism. She will make a presentation at the next meeting. B. Jacowski said the Ad Hoc Steering Committee had discussions on agriculture tourism as a blossoming industry and feels it is important to include in the Plan. Schuler said a large reason to focus on it is that it creates an opportunity to establish some policies that give the County Board flexibility should they want to pursue or support certain types of opportunities. Thinking about it with a long term view will be beneficial.

B. Jacowski said the Ad Hoc Steering Committee made sure all farms - large, small, commercial operations, truck garden sales - were represented in the FP Plan. The Ad Hoc Committee's representation ranged from small operations to large, family run farms, corporation farms, Del Monte Foods, McCains, Roberts' Irrigation, ag finance; all corners of agriculture were represented. Staff worked hard to put together a lot of information in the document so as the lay person is reading it, they understand how agriculture came to be in Portage County, how important the ag economy is, and why we're proud of our agriculture.

Schuler asked supervisors not involved in the process if they have any questions on the reason for this project and how it was put together. In order to be comfortable moving forward, it needs to make sense, both to meet the statutory requirements, and to put the County Board in a position to be supportive of the industry.

One thing that was felt to be very important - the Groundwater Management Plan (GMP) update process is also taking place at this time. The Ad Hoc Committee feels it is important to express how water is important to the industry, how it is used, how it has been used over time, and the philosophy of how water is incorporated in agriculture, to be able to give full context to the discussion. County Board supervisors are going to have to make policy decisions in the GMP that do not conflict with the FP Plan. There are competing ideals for promoting and making agriculture very strong. The Ad Hoc Committee believes the level of agriculture in the county is going to continue in the future at the current level or even greater. It is not an industry in decline, and needs to be supported in a sustainable way going forward. That becomes a very important part of the groundwater discussion, through any planning document, because all these plans are related. Schuler noted the same group of committees will be reviewing the GMP, currently with the Groundwater Citizens Advisory Committee (GCAC) for initial drafting. They are getting very close to wrapping it up to get public feedback and within a few months will make a recommendation to these committees.

B. Jacowski said some members of the Ad Hoc Committee have attended GCAC meetings and, with the guidance of staff, both committees have worked to try to make well blended plans. Walters asked whether the GCAC has been privy to the FP Plan. Schuler said GCAC has not had a specific discussion of the FP Plan, but have been included in the progress along the way. B. Jacowski said staff has tried to make sure that the two committees were both getting the same information and

working parallel, so the two plans do not contradict one another. Schuler said there are sections in the FP Plan that reference the GMP and vice versa, so information isn't redundant in the plans. For instance, the statistics on pumping do not belong in the FP Plan, but belong in the GMP. How water is used and the different types of users and volumes are in the GMP. If you want to learn about irrigation, the FP Plan contains the history, the nature, the types, and the technology.

Bob Gifford said it is obvious that a lot of work went into the FP Plan. He was part of an ecomunicipality exercise from 2006 to 2008. Some of the principals that the ecomunicipality movement was based on were not encroaching upon green spaces, use already urbanized areas in the most intense way, don't knock down buildings and build new ones, and repurpose buildings when feasible using updated energy standards. B. Jacowski noted the Ad Hoc Committee had long discussions on infill. Instead of developing to the east into farmland, the City is encouraged to repurpose and fill in.

Flood asked when the towns will have a shot at the Plan. Schuler explained this is a County plan. One of the discussion points throughout the process was that in a lot of the planning documents, the County doesn't have a consistent voice. The County has to set forth an opinion that it is important that development take place in areas where it does not impact huge chunks of agricultural land. In that regard, it is going to be more County than town. The County's land use planning is based on town opinion and actions. The true implementation of the FP Plan is where is exclusive agriculture zoning going to be? That is an exercise for towns. The first part, putting the plan together, has the County's idea on how to make agriculture sustainable long term and a general idea of where good lands are that should be preserved. The second stage, that we will go through as a group, is adopting an exclusive agriculture zoning district that the State will sanction, and qualifies landowners for tax credits. The towns will have their say. In light of what exclusive agriculture zoning means, town boards will indicate if they want to apply that anywhere in the town. Towns must fine tune their map to make sure that the properties they want to be eligible are included. Flood reiterated that input will come from the town. Schuler answered yes, more on the zoning implementation side, on a town approved map, with guidance from the County.

Walters said the City moving out to the east wasn't considered urban sprawl because it was in their land use plan. He asked whether the FP Plan can be a tool in the future that the County will be able to use to contain sprawl. B. Jacowski said no, because of extraterritorial boundaries. However, Schuler said this is a place the County can express its opinion and try to negotiate and influence discussions. According to State Statutes, the Villages and City are completely autonomous and they can plan however they feel, but the FP Plan can provide a way for the County to make comments. We might not have a lot of say in that area, but other policies can focus on how zoning regulations can stay out of the way of farming to a certain degree, or the type of land use patterns you'd like to advocate to allow farming to be viable in unincorporated areas.

Walters said there is no way to protect farmers from themselves. Schuler said that has never been the case and it probably never will. B. Jacowski said dollars still drive the world. Walters said that is his point. Schuler said Walters brought up an interesting thought line.

Schuler said the background in the FP Plan got as extensive as it did, because there had never been a document in the County to educate people about what is grown in the County. One section starts with a paragraph listing everything the County produces to some degree, large or small. A 10 year trend is shown for the major crops. There is a need to educate everyone in the County about the importance of the agriculture, explaining what the industry does, what it needs to do, and what it should do in the context of resource use. There are always going to be those that think agriculture gets in the way or it consumes resources that it shouldn't. Schuler suggested the committees think

about some things they can do. He believes it is the County's role to be aware. Going forward, he feels it would be nice to have some sort of an annual meeting to keep the County Board aware of what's going on in the agriculture industry, what's new in irrigation, crop development, etc. To implement and get value out of the plan, it would be beneficial to invite local experts to talk to the County committees so the County Board is always up to date with one of its primary industries. You will always be interested in what is currently being sold for profit. Profit drives a lot of agriculture decisions on what to produce. What is going on in the industry? What are the new technologies coming up? Is there a crop or something that is not popular now, but there may be a window opening that could be a really progressive and money making opportunity? Are there certain crops that we could advocate, through assessment of profitability and resource use, that are better for long term resource care, whether soil or water use, length of growing season, etc? We aren't going to tell anyone what to do, but there needs to be a way to get that information back to the County so we can know if there is any step we can take, through County actions, to help. Walters sees the FP Plan as an education tool to teach the County supervisors, so they can share with their town and village officials. Schuler agreed and added the FP Plan can identify actions you might need to take to help from an economic development standpoint to support the industry that everybody agrees is important. You could have a basis for weighing in on a bill if something is presented to the State legislature. It is the only vehicle you have for doing that.

Hensler said one of the things that is very important to the agriculture of Portage County is several crops, from cranberries to irrigated crops, reach far beyond county and state borders to national and international markets. They have high importance as Portage County ranks high, nationally, for several crops. If irrigated agriculture goes by the wayside because it is not profitable anymore, there will be a lot of hunger out there. B. Jacowski said the Central Sands Region is listed by the Department of Defense as one of the regions to be protected in a time of war because of the ability to produce mass quantities of food and fiber.

Schuler emphasized, for the supervisors that haven't been part of the conversation, this is not a document meant to regulate the agriculture industry. It is a document meant to describe it, find a way to support it, and advocate for it. The County is not going to tell anyone what to plant, where to plant, how to plant; just like we're not going to tell people what to do with their water through the GMP. The focus is to make sure agriculture can continue at the current or an enhanced level in the future, finding ways to accommodate and support it. That is where you get into the discussion of resource sustainability with the water section of the FP Plan. The two cannot be separated. We want to make sure we talked about it as much as possible to support and identify unique aspects of it.

Zastrow asked about plans for a four lane road from Crossroads Commons to Amherst and whether there are plans for a bypass. Schuler said the discussion has been going on for 20 years or more. M. Jacowski believes the public comment period ends either the end of June or beginning of July. Schuler said the last he heard, it may be a dead project. Zastrow asked whether that was taken into consideration as a possibility in the FP Plan. B. Jacowski said road building and any encroachment, whether urban sprawl or commercial development, on farmland was talked about. It was noted that one third of a mile of divided highway takes 40 acres. Schuler said had it been more of a pressing idea, there would have been a lot more discussion on splitting of acreage and owners and how you access back and forth. Because it seemed like it probably wouldn't happen, the idea was there, but the immediacy was not. M. Jacowski said the DOT just had a public meeting, seeking public comment last month. It was determined that a new route will only take 30% of the traffic off the current Highway 10 corridor so they figured it wasn't worth it. Schuler said another aspect is that the cost would be an additional \$100 million. Schuler's suggested that Zastrow follow up and, if the

committees wish, recommendations can be added to the plan. The entire document, and particularly the last 20 pages or so are up for discussion.

Regarding a timeline to complete the process, Schuler said the plan will not be presented to the County Board until DATCP approves it. It is recommended that the three committees conclude their work, and then hold a public hearing. Schuler feels the committees' work on the plan shouldn't take more than a couple of meetings. The plan can then be forwarded to the State as a final version. DATCP will either send a letter of approval, or what we hope is a very short list of things that need to be changed. Based on the feedback from the State so far, we are on the right track.

Tonight's meeting is to bring up any questions about the plan and talk about what needs to be accomplished at the next meeting. Sara Brish is here next meeting to bring agriculture tourism information forward, and we will talk about the type of things you'd like included. Schuler mentioned the (Anticipated Changes in Agriculture ) Section pointed out in his memo, asking how the committees would like to expand on that. He suggested a page by page review of the last 20 pages, because that is really the meat and potatoes. He also welcomed questions on the first 50 pages, which is all background information.

Dave Walkowicz, Town of Belmont Chair, stated he is here on behalf of people in his town who have asked him questions. He is here to find out as much as possible about the FP Plan.

(6:45 - Morrow left the meeting, Gussel arrived.)

Gifford said he is glad to see focus on energy, efficiency, conservation, and doing more work with less energy. He talked about fossil fuel use and fracking. He suggested that Portage County take part in a mobility management facilitation to encourage regional mass transit. The surrounding rural counties all face the same kind of problems with keeping a young work force in the community to succeed aging workers. A lot of college graduates can't stay here because they can't make a living, pay student loans, own an automobile, and drive to work every day. How are you going to keep people like that in a farm incubator environment if they don't have a way to get around? Schuler said there is a community wide discussion about that in terms of what needs to be done to retain a workforce. A worker shortage is expected over the next 20 years. Facts contained in the FP Plan show a steadily rising average age of worker or operator in the agriculture industry. Figuring out how to maintain workers for succession is a side issue that goes into the community planning part of it. What type of access do you have? How close can you live to where you work? How do you create the pool of people who can fill the jobs? It is all tied together.

Schuler said the next meeting will be a very active working meeting, considering new information, acknowledging the work already completed, making changes where people feel it is needed, and try to get into a position of completion.

M. Jacowski feels the group can have the presentation on agriculture tourism and get through the 20 pages at the next meeting and then get the draft to DATCP. B. Jacowski said Zastrow brought up a good point. The Ad Hoc Committee discussed how important roads are to get produce in and out of the county. He feels the FP Plan should touch upon not building unneeded State and Federal roads or choosing a route with the least impact to valuable farmland. Schuler said we have limited say. B. Jacowski acknowledged we don't have control, but he would like to make a statement.

Schuler referred to the bottom of page 66, Land Use Issues Related to Preserving Farmland – (needs further discussion by governing committees). This is an area where staff can take some of

the ideas expressed at this meeting and bring back some ideas for this section to review at the next meeting.

Jazdzewski asked whether the updated town zoning maps must be completed when the draft goes to the State. Schuler replied no, the objective criteria indicating the best areas are included in the draft plan. It is up to the towns to determine how much of the areas they want to use.

3. Next Meeting Date

The next meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, July 26 at 6:00 p.m.

B. Jacowski thanked Ad Hoc Committee members in attendance, noting everyone did a great job. Jazdzewski thanked the staff for their work.

4. Adjournment

Motion by O'Brien, second by Flood to adjourn. Motion carried by voice vote. Meeting adjourned at 7:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Patty Benedict, Recording Secretary

Minutes approved at July 26, 2016 joint Agriculture and Extension Education, Land and Water Conservation, and Planning and Zoning Committees meeting.

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B. Jacowski, Planning and Zoning Committee Chair