

Town of Caroline
Agriculture Advisory Board
November 3, 2022
Caroline Town Hall
7 pm

Attendees: Town Board Liaison Katherine Goldberg, Members Don Barber, Erica Frenay, Pete Hoyt, Wil Lawrence, Matt Mix
Welcome guests: Jonathan Bates, Greg Reynolds (part-time), Monika Roth, Cal Snow

The meeting agenda was distributed to the “Caroline Ag” google group in an email from Ms. Frenay on October 30, informing the group of the grant from New York State for developing a municipal agricultural protection plan (“ag plan”). The email also contained a draft vision statement which generated considerable email discussion. An additional agenda item was added by Ms. Goldberg in her November 1 email to the group.

Feedback on the vision statement

From the October 30 email:

Vision

The Town of Caroline is a place where diverse agricultural enterprises thrive.

This includes gardens, small and medium farms, and the associated ag businesses necessary to support them.

Agriculture is a more central part of our Town’s identity, culture and pride.

There are more people in our Town starting land-based businesses. Town residents have an appreciation for the people who grow food, fiber, and medicine, and some understanding of how these crops are produced. An increasing percentage of food grown in Caroline feeds residents of Caroline, growing the strength and resilience of our local food system.

Farmers and landowners in Caroline have the responsible autonomy to steward and realize profit from their land.

We support freedom from unnecessary regulation for all agricultural pursuits and sales. Our community embraces the concept of “Food Freedom” and helps open new markets and opportunities for locally-produced products to feed local people.

Comments by email addressed several concepts: autonomy vs regulation and to what extent farming is a property owner’s right; the concept of food freedom/ food sovereignty; and the need for farms to make money. Discussion continued

during the meeting on the content and use of the vision statement. It was agreed that a preamble about current conditions would support an understanding of how a transition to those stated in the vision could be accomplished. Ms. Frenay agreed to further revise the vision statement, while the general agreement was that the group could continue to revise the statement as part of the ag plan process.

Changes to This Group

Prior to the discussion of the vision statement, it was noted that our chair, Andrew Dygert, has stepped down. The group thanks Mr. Dygert for his service and for his part in the initiative that led to the formation of this group and for his leadership in establishing an open and welcoming committee culture. Ms. Goldberg suggested that the group not elect a chair at this meeting. Other changes were part of the discussion about the ag plan process. Ms. Goldberg explained that the State requires an Agriculture Plan Steering Committee to develop a plan for the Town Board's consideration. She asked the group to decide whether the current group should become the steering committee or whether the steering committee would be a separate group. It was emphasized that participation in developing the plan would not be limited to the officially appointed members of the steering committee, that it would likely take two years to develop the plan, and that five members with a maximum of seven or nine was generally recommended. Members asked for assurance that there be no barriers to participation and input from the public. They also asked that the final plan be considered a fluid document and contain specific follow-up actions so as not to "sit on the shelf." Ms. Goldberg agreed to send out an email to the google group asking for those who wish to participate as members of the steering committee to respond so they can be formally recognized by appointment by the Town Board. (The email went out from Ms. Goldberg on November 3, shortly after the ag committee meeting ended.)

Expectations and Process for the Ag Plan

A hand-out from the New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets (NYSDAM) was distributed at the meeting. This document is available at https://agriculture.ny.gov/system/files/documents/2019/07/GoodPlan_County.pdf. The title is "What are the Key Elements of a Good County Agricultural Protection Plan?"

Ms. Roth briefly highlighted many of the items on the hand-out. She explained to the group that the first step is to ascertain what agriculture and conditions currently exist in the Town and suggested that some of the information would be readily available and some of it would require time and effort from the steering committee members. It has been arranged that Ms. Roth will be under contract with the Town to provide direction during the planning process.

Agriculture Event

This item was not discussed due to running out of time. The intent was as stated

in Ms. Frenay's email--"to brainstorm an initial celebration/community forum/ food tasting/skill-sharing event (or whatever we want it to be!) centering farmers and farming - for sometime this Winter."

The group is expecting to meet on December 1 at 7 pm in the town hall (first Thursday of the month).

Respectfully submitted,

Wil Lawrence

Ad hoc Secretary
