

**Dryden Conservation Board
February 27, 2018**

Members Present: Peter Davies (chair), Bob Beck, Timothy Woods, Jeanne Grace, Craig Schutt, Gian Dodici, Mike Richmond, and (at 7:20) Nancy Munkenbeck

Liaisons: David Weinstein (Planning Board), Kathrin Servoss (Town Board), and Ray Burger (Director of Planning)

Guests: Gillian Cowley (Cornell Senior, doing her senior thesis on attitudes towards conservation versus political affiliation)

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 PM.

Minutes are still in progress, so will address that next month.

Additions to the agenda:

- Appointment of a liaison from this committee to the Planning Board

Reports received

1. Planning Board
2. Agricultural Committee
3. Environmental Management

Environmental Report

This report was just recently submitted from S. Bissen. P. Davies stated that the EMC is dealing with UNA's (Unique Natural Areas) and there will be a public presentation in the Borg Warner room of the library on March 15, 2018 (5pm-7pm). He thought that might be interesting so some of the group might want to attend. One of the speakers will be B. Beck talking about the Malloryville bog. D. Weinstein said he's talking about how the UNA survey provided the impetus toward the eventual protection that B. Beck was inspired, in part, because the survey sought to identify where our unique areas are and he found that there was Malloryville bog on the list and not protected and took it from there. It was stated that this is the fifth edition; the UNC Committee of the EMC has been redoing the boundaries in batches. This will probably be the last batch, all of the UNA's will have their boundaries redone and justified. The reason for each boundary will be indicated. Back in the 90's when this was started they were using topography maps, now they have aerial photography so they can see where a boundary cut across a farm field and all those types of things are being corrected.

Agricultural Report

P. Davies said that C. Schutt's report basically shows alterations and adjustments to the Agricultural Report and C. Schutt said yes, that's correct. C. Schutt said that he expects the Town Board will approve it at their March meeting.

Planning Board report

D. Weinstein reported that the issues they worked on last month weren't directly related to issues the Conservation Board deals with.

New Business

Sometime before the Conservation Board's next meeting, Rebecca Schneider is going to be speaking to the Highway Department about ditch maintenance and P. Davies hoped some of the Conservation Board members could attend. G. Dodici said that she'll be talking about ditch maintenance, best management practices to prevent erosion, run off, not over digging, and putting in appropriate stabilization measures. He said her presentation is tentatively scheduled for March 21 at 1:00 pm. The building hasn't been confirmed but will probably be at the Highway Department's meeting room. G. Dodici thanked C. Schutt for coordinating this with R. Young and said when he receives confirmation from R. Schneider regarding the time and exact place he'll forward the message to B. Avery and have her forward it on to the various Boards.

P. Davies said he'd received a call today from R. Burger requesting our input on a solar project called the Delaware River Solar Project. The project will be located at 2243 Dryden Rd, 3.3 MW. R. Burger said it will be on two parcels subdivided out of the larger Evan Carpenter farm. P. Davies said that the maps were previously sent out and essentially it runs between Ferguson Rd. and Dryden Rd. He said in his opinion that's rather a nice vista, but he doesn't believe it will take over the whole Ferguson Rd. R. Burger said Rt. 13 is pretty much the topographical screen for most of it, but the view shed from Ferguson is impacted so they will be putting up screening on the north, south and east side. P. Davies said that on the south side they will have to keep the trees cut to keep the sun on the panels. He asked if this solar project is going on to land that is currently producing various crops. R. Burger said yes, the land has been in production for the last several years at least. P. Davies said that while looking at the map part of it was in a pink line and part a red line and wondered what the difference was. D. Weinstein asked if those are the two parcels. P. Davies said no, they were labeled differently. N. Munkenbeck said that when she read it, it sounded like the part that is solar will be closer to Rt. 13 than Ferguson and asked if that was true. R. Burger said yes, partially as a benefit of the new amendment to the solar law where the internal lot line buffers were compressed, so they've been pushed back away from Ferguson Rd. The landscaping that was along the fence line wasn't moved so actually they will be able to grow taller trees there screening as much of the field as possible, but preserving the distant view. N. Munkenbeck said she read that it was a 115 acre

field. R. Burger said yes, that 22 acres of it will be fenced in by these two arrays. N. Munkenbeck said that there's actually like over 70 acres that will remain as whatever or will some be a buffer. It's all agricultural, but some of it is a wetland. N. Munkenbeck asked if they were considering doing any grazing in there. They said they didn't want to have any livestock corridors, but one of the lovely things about the livestock corridors is that it creates smaller units for rotational grazing to occur. Since you're not able to subdivide it reasonably it's hard to do any kind of rotational grazing in one big solar array. D. Weinstein said they're trying grazing on one of their other properties and if it works, they'll consider it. P. Davies said that it looks, according to the map, that the arrays are put on the better land for agricultural purposes. R. Burger said he thinks they've been rotating; he thinks the whole area has been in crops. P. Davies thought it might be nice to sow it and pollinate it with native wildflower plants. N. Munkenbeck said she thinks Cornell tried that at their facility near the airport, and she doesn't think that was very successful. She said that pollinating plants tend not to be good grazing plants, so that wouldn't be compatible with the grazing. Secondly, if you're not grazing it, you have to mow it. A number of the pollinator friendly plants would need to be mowed more than yearly. If you're going to plant it with something it should be something that is really low growing and takes over not letting anything else grow. G. Dodici asked what the developer is proposing as ground cover. R. Burger said they have a seed mix that's a pollinator friendly mix. That would need to be mowed if the area wasn't being used for grazing. It was asked if the company is planning on elevating the panels high enough so that grazing would be an option. R. Burger said yes, that it would probably be 2' to 8'. N. Munkenbeck said you could graze it with sheep that aren't huge and that aren't amazing jumpers. T. Wood asked if the plan for the land is for multi-use agricultural and solar. R. Burger said yes, that was an offer that was recently made, but he wouldn't count on the "ag" grazing use, but that is a recent change that they've proposed to look at grazing. T. Wood said his concern is that, going back to the argument of that map and why it was drawn up, the number one public concern was to protect green space and agricultural operations. And it seems like we are getting away from that. N. Munkenbeck said this is supposed to not have a long-term effect on the potential agricultural use of the land. The comment was presented, how you are going to keep it in agricultural production while it's being used as solar or not. R. Burger said it won't be, the contract states it will just be planted with rye grass and others underneath and not have it in agriculture for probably thirty years. T. Wood said another concern is we are taking one of the largest family owned farms in the area, and subdividing it out into non-ag uses, energy production specifically, that doesn't seem to go along with the initial intent of the plan of keeping things in agricultural production. D. Weinstein said that probably the owner's response to that would be the income from this project will help him be more profitable so he can keep farming the rest of the farm and be more productive. P. Davies said he thinks that the idea that this enables a farmer to keep the rest of the farm going is a good one. T. Wood spoke about the image being projected to the public, is it still agricul-

tural land or not. He spoke about the big energy production farm that was built in Lowellville, the same arguments were used there that the farmers, school districts, and the village would reap the benefits of the farm, but those that wanted to keep the windmills out because of view shed and agricultural use were fighting against it. We've seen the results, after fifteen years, of what that "farm" has done for Lowellville. N. Munkenbeck asked him to summarize what it has done. He said it brings in like eight million dollars a year for the local community, school district and farmers. N. Munkenbeck said that the tax base has changed and he said "yes, dramatically". N. Munkenbeck said that one idea of protecting the agricultural land was that you need a certain base of land and a base of farming for the industry to continue because you need to have resources for farms; you need to have enough farmers to do that. If allowing farmers to get input from the solar, that actually is a positive thing toward keeping the farming community, which was the basis, to her knowledge, of why they wanted to protect the Ag lands in the first place. It was suggested that perhaps it would be better to have projects like this placed on land with poorer soil quality, drainage issues, etc., and keep the best land used for agricultural purposes. K. Servoss said that recommendations could be made, but you can't tell homeowners what they can do on their property. This has to do with property owners' rights to do what they want with their property (as long as it is legal). T. Woods brought up the comprehensive plan (that was approved in 2005) and his concern is about the siting of some of these solar arrays is that they're putting them in the agricultural reserve area which were areas that were specifically set aside to maintain the best agricultural practices over a long period of time. He's confused as to why this is being allowed in the agricultural reserve areas, and doesn't know how to respond to the public when asked about this. It was stated that there's a trade off of being able to farm and being able to afford to farm, and being able to use your property in a way that makes it affordable to do that. B. Beck said that the solar farms are far better for the future of agriculture as well as perhaps our community than some other kinds of large scale development that would be incompatible with agriculture; this type of development is reversible. P. Davies said that since this is agricultural land it doesn't affect any endangered species and isn't going on wetland. P. Davies said that other than the general concern of using the better Ag land (of which they have no control) he hasn't heard any objections that would stand. C. Schutt stated that the presentation given to the Town Board by the Delaware River personnel was very good. N. Munkenbeck said that it could be suggested that pollinator friendly plants be included with whatever they're planting in the buffer screening area and it was agreed that they'd make that suggestion. P. Davies said that he concludes from this committee that there are no substantial objections.

T. Woods spoke about wildlife corridors in large developments. He mentioned a project in south Texas and the effort and planning that went into the placement of these corridors. Everything revolved around the wildlife corridors instead of being the other way around (placement of roads, lots, commercial lots).

Everything was based on wildlife movements and where the wetlands were. He also spoke about Canada, British Columbia and Alberta where they are putting in passes for caribou, moose and elk. A lot of research went into where they were being hit on the highway and migration patterns. It ended up being very beneficial for moving rather large herds across the highways by using overpass, tunnels or a combination of both. He also spoke about a project that started back in the 1980's to start linking the wild lands out west, (Glacier and Yellowstone together, for example). Ranchers were very protective of their water and grazing land, and didn't want a lot of competition from wild herds, so that was the big issue out west when they wanted to start linking National Parks with wildlife corridors. The effort that is in the current bill (at the government level) is to try figure out what kind of algorithm should be used to recommend wildlife corridors to accomplish something similar to what they were trying to do out west, but on a much smaller scale. If species are moving and millions of dollars are being spent due to automobile accidents with wildlife, is this a way to mitigate that. B. Beck said that locally, the best example of that would be the Land Trust's "Emerald Necklace Project". They are trying to protect lands between state forests and parks and other wild areas and connect those bigger wild areas up with corridors. N. Munkenbeck said she doesn't feel we need to worry about a deer, coyote, or bobcat corridors. Most of those creatures are pretty good at fending for themselves in the habitats we have. D. Weinstein stated that the corridors are not just to protect the species, but humans also. This is a safety issue. P. Davies stated that this whole topic came about because of the solar installation and we were talking about how wide a corridor you need across a solar installation. However, going through this bill it's much more expansive between two ecological areas. He looked to see if there were any recommendations for the width of wildlife corridors going through solar installations and there isn't. The concept is if there is a huge development of any sort, we are in a rural area and need to make sure wildlife can cross it. T. Woods said one of his concerns regarding the solar array that's going north of the cemetery was if you make that big enough, and you've got a fairly large amount of green space now and turn it into a solar array, put the fences around it and make it more difficult for deer to move through there, where are the deer now going to move and does it change their day to day movement patterns and does it force them to go back and forth Johnson Rd more or George Rd more. G. Dodici said that Tompkins County Planning is working on a draft wildlife corridor management plan (mostly in the southern areas of the county). R. Burger said that some of the action items that pertain to Dryden specifically are general statements about trying to keep large subdivisions from happening and taking the open space resource. Other action items were connecting the wetlands around the airport and doing something to connect that down to Fall Creek. P. Davies said he'd propose a resolution be made from this committee that any large solar developments or similar developments include appropriate wildlife corridors. N. Munkenbeck said they should at least address concerns about not channeling the larger wildlife towards roadways. That's the major concern.

T. Woods made a motion to pass the following resolution proposed by P. Davies:

RESOLUTION #2 for 2018 FROM THE CONSERVATION BOARD

Whereas, large fenced in developments may impact the normal travels of wild-life, the Conservation Board of the Town of Dryden recommends that any major fenced developments give serious consideration to appropriate wildlife corridors,

And further, that the developments address concerns about not channeling the larger wildlife towards roadways ensuring that wildlife will not be directed toward public roadways in order to protect the public.

Be it resolved that the Conservation Board requests that the Town Board consider appropriate wildlife corridors for any large fenced in developments.

The motion was seconded by B. Beck and passed unanimously.

P. Davies brought up the subject of maintaining good relations with the Game Farm and hunters so that hunters will be permitted (or do not put up any roadblocks) going to the Rail Trail going across their property. Last month this was discussed and there were a couple of recommendations. He wrote up the following to submit, but decided to get approval of the wording.

To the Dryden Town Board:

- 1) The Conservation Board suggests to the Town Board that the Town Board send a note to the Department of Environmental Conservation's Bureau of Wildlife in general support of the Richard E. Reynolds Game Farm on Game Farm Road to create a favorable atmosphere for the Rail Trail crossing of their land.
- 2) The Conservation Board suggests to the Town Board that the Town Board look into opening The Parke Dabes Natural Area (on route 366) to hunting during the deer hunting season (with appropriate notice to nearby residents) as a gesture to local hunters in return for the favorable actions of DEC in allowing for the Rail Trail crossing of the Richard E. Reynolds Game Farm on Game Farm Road.
- These are expressions of the general sentiment on the Conservation Board and not voted resolutions.

He said that C. Schutt told him that this has already been done by the Town Board, so the above wording to the Town Board is no longer necessary. The resolution that was submitted to the DEC by the Town Board was read to the Conservation Board. They haven't heard back from the DEC as of yet. The State Parks grant, the Game Farm Trail is essential to implementing that grant.

J. Grace spoke about the Town of Danby, a volunteer group that inspects conservation easements on behalf of the Town. This might be a model for us regarding conservation sub developments. She said that one of the Danby planners has a handbook on how they are managing their easements. She wasn't able to get a copy of the handbook before tonight's meeting but will get the document and look it over. If it looks like it's useful for this group to quote some of their handbook that might be something we'll want to do down the road. It might be a good starting point. A discussion about the \$10,000 in support for the Finger Lakes Land Trust to help facilitate the establishment and stewardship of an agricultural easement on the Prince farm that was proposed by this board to the Town Board last month was gone over as to what could be done to get the funds necessary or trade in-kind. K. Servoss said that they would look at this during the budget process and see if funding can be provided, but she can't guarantee what the outcome might be. She suggested that in addition to the resolution that was submitted to the Town Board previously that they should provide more detailed information. B. Beck said that someone should go to the Town Board meeting with the resolution and detailed information. It was stated that the group looking for funding should be requesting to be put on the agenda and attending the meeting. D. Weinstein said he thought that that person was going to go to the Town Board about it. P. Davies said he'll give the person a call so they can coordinate and get on the agenda.

Appointing a representative from this Board to the Planning Board. P. Davies asked for any volunteers. P. Davies said that he'd volunteer.

A motion to adjourn the meeting was made by C. Schutt and seconded by N. Munkenbeck. It was unanimously approved.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 8:35 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Diane Michaud
Deputy Town Clerk