George R. Frantz & Associates . 604 Cliff Street . Ithaca, NY . 14850-2014
(607) 256-9310 e-mail: geoplan57@clarityconnect.com

Town of Dryden Comprehensive:
Recommendations Related to Agriculture.

May 21, 2004

Introduction

As part of an overall approach to accommodating anticipated future growth in population while preserving the character and quality of life residents enjoy the Town of Dryden should pursue a holistic strategy that includes:

- Encouraging higher density residential development in and around the existing village and hamlet centers of population;
- Encouraging the construction of a wider variety of housing types within existing and future neighborhoods to meet the needs of an aging population;
- Providing for attractive amenities such as neighborhood scale parks and off-street bicycle/ pedestrian paths in areas where higher density residential development is planned;
- Encouraging the use of cluster subdivision designs that create areas of permanent open space within future residential neighborhoods without reducing overall site density.
- Directing future commercial development into existing village and hamlet downtown cores where practical, or into existing nodes such as the North Street area between TC3 and the village, and the corner of NYS Rte. 13 and Dryden Road (NYS Rte. 366)

Although it has grown considerably in population over the past forty years, Dryden is still very much a rural township. Over 90 percent of its land area consists of active or inactive agricultural land or undeveloped meadow, brush, woodlands or wetlands. Woodland is by far the largest land use or land cover category, covering some 45 percent of the land area. Actively farmed land is a distant second, covering just over 22 percent of the town's land area.

Agricultural activities take place throughout the town. Altogether approximately 13,500 acres, of the land in the town are actively farmed. Another 3,500 acres of land are classed as inactive agricultural land. The largest area of contiguous farmland however extends along Fall Creek and Virgil Creek from Freeville eastward toward McLean and Dryden village. It extends southward past Dryden Lake to the Cortland County line, and encompasses about 8,300 acres of land, or about 60% of the town's farmland. Other major tracts of agricultural lands are located northwest and southwest of Varna and atop Mt. Pleasant, while smaller pockets exist in the northwestern corner of the town, in the upper reaches of Six Mile Creek along Irish Settlement and Midline Roads, Ellis Hollow and north of Etna.

The draft plan anticipates that agriculture can continue to be a major and valuable land use in the Town of Dryden. Even as this plan anticipates a need to accommodate up to 1,650 new dwelling units, it still envisions placing some 11,180 acres of the 13,470 acres of land currently being actively farmed in areas reserved primarily for agricultural use. Several hundred acres of

actively farmed land in small, non-contiguous tracts also fall into the Rural Residential and Conservation/Open Space categories, where limitations on development afford some protection also.

In some instances the plan recommends that some land that is currently being actively farmed be designated for higher intensity development in the future. The plan however recognizes the need to balance the importance of agriculture to the character and economy of the Town, and the desire to guide development into certain areas. It recommends that farmers who desire to continue farming should be provided with whatever supports the Town of Dryden can provide them in their efforts, regardless of how their lands are designated in the plan. Furthermore, as the Town proceeds with implementation of the land use components of this plan, through zoning and infrastructure improvements, it must ensure that these actions do not conflict with AML Sect.305 or undermine the viability of farm operations.

Plan Goals & Objectives for Agriculture

The overall goal of the new Comprehensive Plan is to *"Preserve important agricultural land resources and promote the long term economic viability of the agricultural community in the town."*

Six objectives have been established to further this goal:

Adopt land use regulations which grant agriculture primacy as a land use in areas zoned for agriculture, and which recognize the nature of contemporary agricultural enterprises in those areas of the town designated for agricultural use in this comprehensive plan.

Direct inappropriate levels of residential development away from productive agricultural areas of the town to minimize loss of higher quality agricultural lands, the unnecessary fragmentation of agricultural land resources and the potential for conflicts between farm and non-farm residents.

Encourage investments in public infrastructure, such as extensions of public water or sewer, service that promote a healthy agricultural sector.

Permit commercial retail and service enterprises that serve the needs of the agricultural community within those areas of the town designated for agricultural use in this comprehensive plan.

Promote the continued stewardship of the land through agricultural practices that minimize soil erosion, surface water runoff and water pollution.

Promote the use of existing programs to enhance the viability of agriculture and to protect farmland provided through the NYS Department of Agriculture and Markets and the Tompkins County Soil and Water Conservation District.

Specific Recommendations

The Plan calls for the Town to:

1. **Recognize agriculture** as a legitimate, long-term land use on par with residential, commercial, industrial and other traditional land use, and not as merely a temporary state pending development for a "higher" use.

2. Establish a new zoning district for the agricultural areas designated on the Future Land Use Map. Such district should grant agriculture the primacy as a land use that has traditionally been accorded residential development in a residential zoning district, commercial development in a commercial district, or industrial development in an industrial zoning district.

3. Recognize the enterprise nature of contemporary agriculture. Any new zoning regulations for the agricultural areas must be flexible enough to allow farmers to make a reasonable economic return on their substantial investments. Today many farmers supplement their incomes with income generated by an agriculture-related business such as grain, feed, seed, farm implement of farm building dealerships, as well as wholesale and retail distribution of agricultural products. By providing such options for generating revenue in its zoning regulations, the Town can allow the farmer or farmland owner alternatives to the sale of land for development purposes.

4. Ensure to the extent possible the continued viability and presence of agriculture in the town of Dryden by preserving large tracts of contiguous, actively farmed land. This can be achieved by channeling large-scale residential development away from agricultural areas. The draft plan recommends that the Town adopt fixed-ratio zoning that would preclude major residential development but allow farmers adequate opportunity to subdivide and convey the occasional house lot. In addition to preventing fragmentation of agricultural land, such a policy would also limit the potential for the conflicts that can arise between the farm and non-farm community over agricultural practices.

1:10 ac.

5. Provide for and encourage adaptive re-use of old barns to ensure the continued survival of these traditional rural landmarks.

6. Encourage higher density development within and around the existing hamlets of Varna and Etna, and around the villages of Freeville and Dryden to help channel inappropriate levels of development away from agricultural areas.

7. Extend municipal water and sewer service to limited areas within the town in order to provide the foundation for the denser residential development in and around existing centers of population that this plan envisions. Such extensions should be targeted to correcting identified needs or to encourage in-fill development within existing built-up areas.

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The Fixed-Ratio Zoning Approach for Protecting Agricultural Lands

April 28, 2004

To better protect agricultural lands from over-development, some communities have turned away from the traditional zoning approach of setting very large minimum required lot sizes. Experience has shown that setting high lot size minimums of 5 acres, 10, acres, 20 acres or more as a means of protecting agricultural land from development has generally not worked. Farms have simply been carved up into lots that "are too big to mow and too small to farm."

An approach pioneered by rural agricultural townships in southeastern Pennsylvania is to limit residential development by limiting the number of land subdivisions allowed, and placing a maximum lot size cap on land sold for non-agricultural residential use in addition to the traditional minimum lot size. The minimum lot size is usually set by the capacity of local soils to safely accommodate on-lot septic disposal systems. The maximum allowable lot size for non-agricultural residential lots is usually two or three acres.

How does the system work? First the number of permissible subdivisions for non-agricultural development is established in the zoning district regulations: one lot per 7 acres of land, 10 acres, 20 acres of land, etc. If, for example, a farm tract contained 125 acres of land, and the permissible number of non-agricultural lots was set at 1 per 7 acres, then the landowner would be allowed to subdivide off up to 17 non-agricultural lots. (125 / 7 = 17.86 lots, rounded down to 17 lots.) If the permissible number of non-agricultural lots were set at 1 per 10 acres, then the landowner would be allowed to subdivide off up to 12 non-agricultural lots. (125 / 10 = 12.5 lots, rounded down to 12 lots.) If the permissible number of non-agricultural lots were set at 1 per 20 acres, then the landowner would be allowed to subdivide off up to 6 non-agricultural lots. (125 / 20 = 6.25 lots, rounded down to 6 lots.)

If the zoning district regulations allow a maximum lot size of three acres for non-agricultural lots, then there could be up to sixteen 1.5- to 3-acre residential lots created under the first scenario (1:7) with between 74 and 101 acres of land remaining for agricultural use; twelve 1.5- to 3-acre residential lots under the second scenario (1:10) with 89 to 107 acres of farmland remaining; and 5 residential lots under the third scenario (1:20) with 110 to 117 acres of farmland remaining.

It is likely however that the farmland owner would first subdivide off land that is less valuable for farming, such as woodland or brush land, and also minimize the size of the new lots wherever possible. Thus the amount of higher quality, actively farmed land lost through this approach would likely be less than the maximum amounts shown above.

This approach requires a re-thinking of how zoning density is expressed. The "...minimum lot size shall be 10 acres..." language is replaced by "...number of lots per 10 acres...;" and an upper limit on the size of residential lots is generally set at 2 acres or 3 acres.

The fixed ratio approach has proven both successful in preserving agricultural lands and easy for rural townships with limited staffs and lay boards to implement. Generally at the adoption of a zoning ordinance all parcels subject to the new regulations are identified on a map, and for each parcel the total acreage at the time of adoption of the new regulations and the number of permitted subdivisions are recorded. As subdivisions are approved the map is updated. This allows for easy tracking of land subdivisions and the number of potential lots available to current and prospective landowners.

The attached map illustrates how a 1:10 fixed-ratio approach could work about a sample area encompassing about 1.5 square miles of agricultural lands