

Issues to Consider about “Up zoning”

Agricultural lands provide not only beautiful scenery, but clean air and water, fresh food and rural culture that makes a distinct contribution to our quality of life. Most community master plans state as goals: the preservation of rural character and historic resources, and the provision of a mix of housing and commercial development. Their zoning laws, which are supposed to implement these goals, actually betray them, by providing a blueprint for standardized sprawl development. Large lot zoning, which is ostensibly designed to preserve rural areas, is actually a prescription for their decline.

Therefore, we find this recommendation of 10 acre minimum lot size for residential home construction contrary to the long term goals of our residents. There are ways to save what has to be saved, and build what needs to be built without hurting the economic position of farmers and landowners, or the special qualities of the land. Preservation of our resources should benefit the public without harming the economic position of the agriculture industry.

Landowners cannot be deprived of their rights by government taking without just compensation as provided by the Fifth Amendment of the U.S. Constitution. For land that should be saved we firmly believe there are other alternatives to recommend to local governments such as Purchase of Development Rights (PDR), Transfer of Development Rights (TDR), Leasing of Development Rights (LDR), and others. All techniques should be studied rather than take the easiest approach and the least morally right which is to regulate the land at the expense of the landowner.

Many people don't comprehend the effect this will have on farmers. Farmers utilize the equity on their land to buy supplies and equipment to keep their business running efficiently and profitably. If the Town approves these changes, the farmers lose equity making it difficult for them to borrow against their land.

It is Tompkins County Farm Bureau's position that we will not accept any proposal to up zone farmland. With our statements from above, we have made it patently clear that:

1. The indispensable ingredient to the ability of farmers to remain in agricultural production is their ability to borrow funds annually to finance the cost of their farming operation.

2. The sole source of collateral for those borrowings is the farmland itself and its equity value
3. The equity value is wholly determined by the fair market value for its highest and best use for residential development.
4. The development value is directly related to the density of the zoning category affecting the property.
5. Reduction in that density or “yield” by any substantial percent would have a commensurate and devastating reduction in the farmland’s value as collateral for borrowing.

Our open space resources are an important element in making Tompkins County and the Town of Dryden attractive to quality economic enterprises as well as the high quality of life that is enjoyed by our residents. If you do not act now in a responsible, equitable, and fair manner to protect our resources, you will not fulfill the goals of our residents in keeping agriculture alive and viable in Tompkins County.