

ONONDAGA COUNTY

AGRICULTURE & FARMLAND PROTECTION PLAN

PLANNING PROCESS AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

STATUTORY AUTHORITY AND PLAN ADOPTION

By the provisions of Article 25AA of the NYS Agriculture and Markets Law, the Onondaga County Agriculture and Farmland Protection Board (AFPB) was established by the County Legislature in 1971. The AFPB is charged by statute with a variety of duties intended to protect farmland and agricultural activity in the County. Among these duties is the development, review, and monitoring of an Agriculture and Farmland Protection Plan for Onondaga County.

Per Section 390.3 of NYS Agriculture and Markets Law regarding County Agriculture & Farmland Protection Plans, plans are to include:

- A statement of the county's goal(s) with respect to agriculture and farmland protection;
- An identification and analysis of the general location of any lands or areas that are proposed to be protected;
- Strategies to be used by the county to promote the maintenance of land in active agricultural use; and
- Identification of other county and municipal programs which may be shown to complement or conflict with the plan.

Upon completion, the Board reviews, approves and formally submits the plan to the Onondaga County Legislature for public hearing and adoption. The approved plan is then forwarded to the New York State Department of Agriculture & Markets for final approval.

PLANNING TEAM AND OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE

This Agriculture and Farmland Protection Plan has been created at the request of and with oversight by the Onondaga County Agriculture & Farmland Protection Board. The planning project was managed by the Syracuse-Onondaga County Planning Agency (SOCPA) on behalf of the Board, who often provides staff services and support to the AFPB.

Grant funding for the development of this plan was provided by the NYS Department of Agriculture and Markets (Farmland Protection Planning Grants Program), and through a local grant from the Onondaga County Agricultural Council. In kind services were also provided as match to grant funds, by members of the planning team, comprised of staff of SOCPA, Cornell Cooperative Extension of Onondaga County, and the Onondaga County Soil & Water Conservation District. A local planning consulting firm, EDR, along with subconsultants George Frantz, AICP, and Karen Karp & Associates, were hired by Onondaga County to prepare the plan documents and facilitate the planning process.

The Onondaga County Agriculture and Farmland Protection Board (AFPB) served as the formal oversight committee for the plan, providing invaluable insight into the agricultural conditions, needs and challenges. The Board met several times throughout the development of the plan to provide guidance and feedback on the planning process. The Board is composed of farmers, agri-business representatives, and local representatives from the Onondaga County Legislature, Onondaga County Soil and Water Conservation District, Cornell Cooperative Extension, Syracuse-Onondaga County Planning Agency, Onondaga County Real Property Services, and natural resource protection.

ONONDAGA COUNTY

AGRICULTURE & FARMLAND PROTECTION PLAN

PLANNING PROCESS

The planning process began in earnest in the Spring of 2021, and concluded in the Summer of 2022, comprising a one-year planning process.

MUNICIPAL ENGAGEMENT

Initial steps of community engagement were with municipalities, due to the project commencing during the agricultural growing season. A municipal survey was distributed, and a number of towns participated in the **Farm-Friendly Toolbox** creation process, and a webinar was held for municipal planning and zoning officials for the release of the Toolbox.

POP-UP EVENTS

As farmers became more available and as Covid-19 concerns subsided, the project team held in-person pop-up events at various Fall events including the Empire Farm Days, On Farm Fest, the Regional Farmers Market and the LaFayette Apple Festival, to spread awareness about the project and solicit input from the public and members of the farming community.

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

Specific stakeholder groups were invited to participate in a targeted series of focus groups and individual interviews over the Fall and Winter months. Meetings were targeted to various topic areas including economic development, agritourism, food systems, natural resources, and farmland protection. These stakeholder gatherings provided an opportunity for dialogue among attendees regarding the challenges and opportunities facing Onondaga County agriculture and farmland, and to establish important context and perspective around future alternatives. Several individual meetings and discussions were also held with select stakeholders throughout the planning process.

PUBLIC MEETINGS

Due to concerns related to public gatherings related to the Covid-19 pandemic, an early public meeting was forgone in favor of smaller scale in-person engagement opportunities, and use of surveys, webinars, and social media described above. The team was fortunate to be able to conduct a full-scale in-person public meeting to present preliminary plan recommendations and strategies. As part of the County Legislature's review of the final plan, and a formal public hearing will be held.

PLAN ONONDAGA

Also of note, Onondaga County is currently in the process of updating its countywide comprehensive plan. **Plan Onondaga** is focused on five central themes, one of which is Agriculture. As a critical component of this plan, engagement activities for Plan On project throughout the course of the past year may also be considered relevant outreach. Of note, the Agriculture & Farmland Protection Plan was presented at a seminar for the Onondaga County Planning Federation Conference held in March 2022. Local Planning and Zoning Board representatives that participated in the seminar engaged in lively discussion about agricultural issues and initiatives that they saw occurring in their communities.

ONONDAGA COUNTY

AGRICULTURE & FARMLAND PROTECTION PLAN

WEBSITE AND SOCIAL MEDIA

In addition to in-person engagement, the planning team created a project website - www.agriculture.ongov.net - at the onset of the project where updates, plan sections, background, and materials were posted throughout the planning project. The website also offered an online sign-up for an email list to stay informed about Onondaga County agriculture programs and events. Social media was also used to spread the word of events and to direct traffic to the website. Municipalities and partners organizations shared social media postings and posted flyers about the plan and related events.

PROJECT TIMELINE

The timeline below is a graphic representation of the Community Engagement Plan (CEP) prepared for the project, to ensure an inclusive, and robust community engagement process. More details about the community engagement can be found in the full plan document and appendices.

Figure 1. Planning Process and Project Timeline

