

Town of Charlton

FARMLAND PROTECTION PLAN



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TOWN OF CHARLTON FARMLAND PROTECTION PLAN

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TOWN OF CHARLTON FARMLAND PROTECTION PLAN

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Agriculture is a vital part of the Town of Charlton – some would argue it is what makes Charlton Charlton. The rural landscapes of the town are appreciated by residents and visitors alike, and make Charlton a desirable place to live. Ironically, as people move to “the country” the rural character that drew them in is in danger of being lost. New development threatens the agricultural landscape as lots get subdivided into smaller pieces, unusable for agriculture. New homes may encroach on existing farm operations causing conflicts and eventual abandoning of the farm operations. As more farm land is lost it gets more difficult for the remaining farmers to maintain a critical mass of land and resources to support profitable operations. This is a situation that has been seen time and time again in other areas, and one that Charlton hopes to avoid through the implementation of this farmland protection plan.

The goals of this plan were to create a detailed inventory of the town’s agricultural resources, devise a set of tools and strategies for maintaining agriculture in the town, establish a way to evaluate farms for future protection, and provide agricultural-friendly zoning recommendations. The plan was developed by the Agricultural Task Force Committee, with input from many of the town’s residents, the majority of which are involved in the agricultural community.

Farmland Protection Mission Statement:

The best way to keep Charlton a successful agricultural community is to make agriculture as economically viable as possible and keep the town farm-friendly, while implementing minimal regulations.

Based on public input during the planning process

The Town of Charlton is located in the southwest corner of Saratoga County, in the Capital District Region of Upstate New York. With the exception of the southeast corner of the town, the Town of Charlton and the immediate surrounding areas are very rural in nature. The town is rich with agricultural resources, with over half of the land in agricultural related ownership and an abundance of high quality soils throughout the town.

There are multiple types of agriculture in the town, with the primary operations being in dairy, cattle, hay, horses and field crops. There are a number of specialty farms providing products such as alpacas, maple syrup, and Christmas trees. There are six active dairy farms in Charlton, three of which are relatively large operations. These six farms and their associated support land account for approximately half of the agricultural land in Charlton. Over 1/3 of the agricultural land in the Town of Charlton is rented farmland. This land is critical to the success of the Charlton farmers, but is also the most vulnerable to development. For an example of the importance of the rented land - one of the largest dairy farmers in Charlton rents three acres of land for every one acre they own.

As was heard during the town’s comprehensive planning process preserving agriculture and keeping the town rural and farm friendly is the primary theme heard throughout the planning process. Something else that was made clear is that there is a lack of knowledge and understanding with regards to all the tools available to help preserve farmland. Many people have heard of things like PDR, but don’t necessarily know all the details. Others may not be taking advantage of tax abatements or the protections offered by enrolling in the agricultural district. Getting this information out to landowners in as many ways possible could go a long way in helping preserve agriculture.

TOWN OF CHARLTON FARMLAND PROTECTION PLAN

There are numerous options and tools available to help promote and preserve agriculture in the Town of Charlton. The strategies in this plan are believed to be the most realistic and likely to succeed for the Town of Charlton. There are two primary ways to preserve farmland: making farming a viable option that people want to continue to pursue by using a combination of land use planning tools, promotion, and education; and by acquiring the development rights to ensure land stays open and available for farming. The first method requires a lot of work and cooperation, the latter requires a large financial commitment from the state, county, town or other group.

The following are some of the strategies that the town should consider focusing on in the short term, the details of which are explained in the plan. The majority of these strategies were highlighted at the public meeting as being the most important.

Get Information Out - Making sure landowners are aware of their options, both while farming, and when they are ready to retire, is key to farmland protection.

Develop the Marketing Strategy - Whether it is one aspect, or all of the aspects discussed in the plan, a marketing strategy is a relatively low cost way to help protect farmland in town.

Install Right-to-Farm Law Signs - Charlton has a model Right-to-Farm law, and installing Right-to-Farm law signs can help demonstrate the town's commitment to agriculture.

Update the Town's Zoning per the Comprehensive Plan - The recommendations in the 2007 Comprehensive Plan are a good first step in a larger zoning update.

Modify the Town's Conservation Subdivision Regulations - The town's conservation subdivision regulations potentially represent one of the strongest tools for agricultural land protection available to the town.

Explore Ways to Locally Fund Farmland Protection Projects - Acquiring the development rights to ensure land stays open and available for farming is a critical method of preserving farmland, however while there is state and county money available, it is limited and there it is a very competitive process. Therefore the town should investigate ways to create a local source of funding for farmland protection.

Modify the Town's Zoning Code - Changes in town laws will not guarantee farmers will not sell their land for development, but they can ease the burden on farmers by reducing residential encroachment, and ensure that land that is sold for development retains some of its original agricultural value.

The Town of Charlton is fortunate to have the forethought to plan for agriculture without the typical growth pressures that often drive this type of planning effort. Rather than having to hastily try to save a few last remaining farms, Charlton has been able to develop a road map to preserve as much productive farmland as possible through a combination of voluntary and regulatory tools. There is no "silver bullet" that will preserve Charlton's agricultural heritage, but combining several of the approaches set forth in the plan should ensure that Charlton remain an agricultural community for future generations.



FARMLAND PROTECTION PLAN

I. INTRODUCTION

Agriculture has always been the primary industry in the Town of Charlton. The first settlers began farming in Charlton in 1770. The town has steadily grown from an initial population of 1,500 residents in 1792 to nearly 4,000 residents as of the last census count. As this population continues to increase, more and more pressure is placed on the vast expanse of open farm fields and timber land spread throughout the town.

Regionally, Saratoga County saw a rapid decline in farmland acreage immediately following construction of the Adirondack Northway. While not as extreme as the loss of farmland seen from the 1940's through the 1960's, farmland has continued to steadily decline in the county. Of greater concern, however, is another growth inducing project may be coming to the county soon, as a major microchip fabrication plant is slated to be built in the center of the county within the next few years.

Charlton's farmland is less than half an hour away from this proposed plant, and as the towns between Charlton and the plant become saturated with growth, it will likely spill over into Charlton. There is also continued revitalization in the City of Schenectady, less than 20 minutes south of Charlton, putting even more development pressure on the town. There is also the appeal of strong school districts and no municipal tax that make Charlton an attractive locale.



There are large core areas of farmland in Charlton, often conveniently linked by roads and free of major fragmentation.

While many communities wait to take action until most of the farmland has been taken over by development, Charlton seeks to be proactive in planning for new development while preserving the agricultural heritage that has endured for over 200 years. To that end the Town of Charlton has undertaken this Farmland Protection Plan, with the hope of ensuring agricultural viability long into the future.

OVERVIEW OF THE PLAN

The goals of this plan were to create a detailed inventory of the town's agricultural resources, devise a set of tools and strategies for maintaining agriculture in the town, establish a way to evaluate farms for future protection, and provide agricultural-friendly zoning recommendations. The plan was developed by the Agricultural Task Force Committee, with input from many of the town's residents, the majority of which are involved in the agricultural community.



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LOCAL AND REGIONAL PLANNING CONTEXT

A major recommendation of the town's 2007 comprehensive plan is the goal of preserving agriculture and open space in the town. The comprehensive plan had several specific recommendations regarding farmland protection, and those recommendations have been incorporated into this plan.

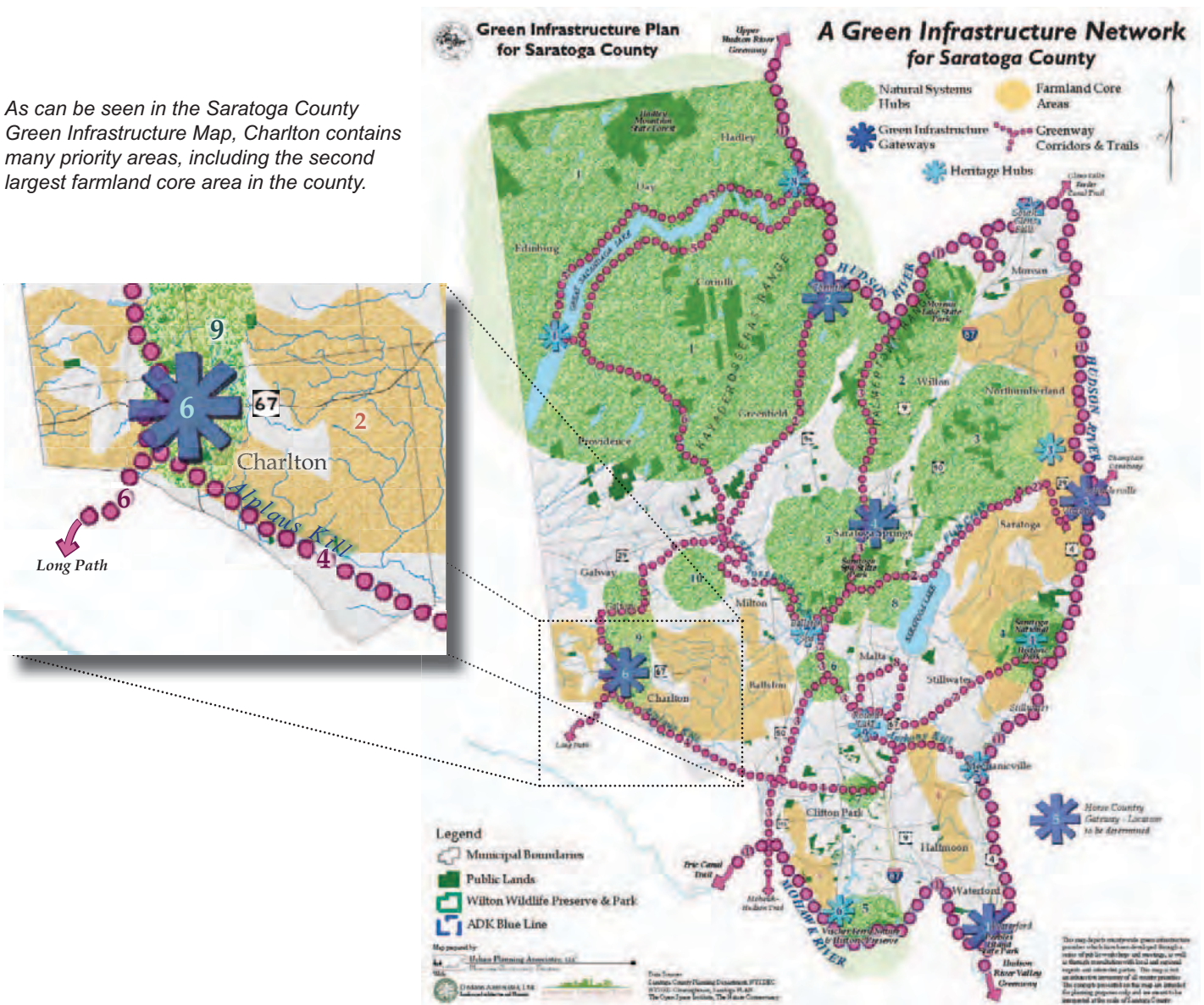
Agriculture and Farmland Goal:

"Farmlands are protected and active farms of varying types are economically viable and a major land use in Charlton"

2007 Comprehensive Plan

On a more regional level, the Saratoga County Green Infrastructure Plan, which was adopted in November 2006, identified working landscapes (agriculture and forestry) as a primary preservation goal for the county. More specifically the plan designated a large portion of the town of Charlton as being a key piece of a greater "farmland core area." The farmland core that Charlton falls within is the second largest core of farmland in Saratoga County. A summary brochure from the county's Green Infrastructure Plan is included in **Appendix A**.

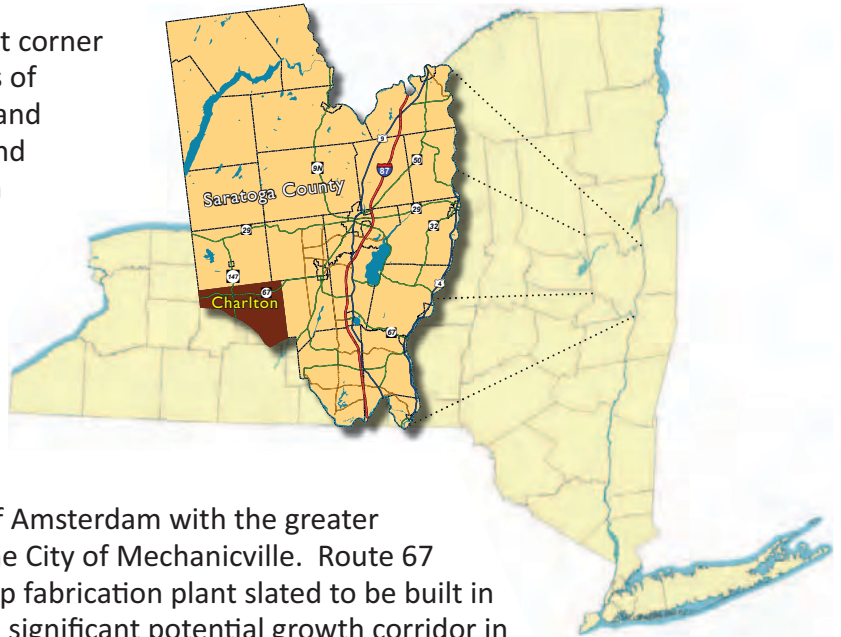
As can be seen in the Saratoga County Green Infrastructure Map, Charlton contains many priority areas, including the second largest farmland core area in the county.



FARMLAND PROTECTION PLAN

2. EXISTING CONDITIONS

The Town of Charlton is located in the southwest corner of Saratoga County, bordered by the rural towns of Amsterdam and Galway to the west and north, and the more suburban towns of Milton, Ballston, and Glenville to the northeast, east and south. With the exception of the southeast corner of the town, the Town of Charlton and the immediate surrounding areas are very rural in nature. There are two state roads that pass through Charlton, Route 67 which runs east-west through the northern part of town, and Route 147 which runs north-south through the western part of town. Route 67 is a significant road in upstate New York, connecting the City of Amsterdam with the greater Saratoga Springs region, and continuing on to the City of Mechanicville. Route 67 will also be a primary route to the new microchip fabrication plant slated to be built in Saratoga County. As such Route 67 represents a significant potential growth corridor in the region, and several of Charlton's farms are located along or near this corridor.



AGRICULTURAL PROPERTIES

A detailed inventory of existing agricultural uses was conducted as part of this project. A combination of Saratoga County Real Property data, aerial photo interpretation, and local landowner and committee knowledge was utilized to create an agricultural inventory map for the Town of Charlton as shown on the following page. There are a total of 196 parcels, totaling approximately 11,600 acres, involved in agriculture. Approximately 43 % are properties where the primary use (in terms of tax assessment) is something other than agriculture – most of these properties contain land rented by farmers. Of the 196 parcels, approximately 6,176 acres of land is estimated to be in active agricultural use based on interpretation of 2007 imagery. This represents approximately 30% of the total land area of Charlton.

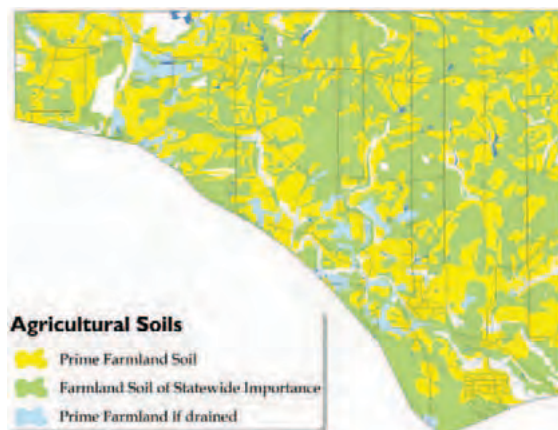
There are multiple types of agriculture in the town, with the primary operations being in dairy, cattle, hay, horses and field crops. There are a number of specialty farms providing products such as alpacas, maple syrup, and Christmas trees. There are six active dairy farms in Charlton, three of which are relatively large operations. These six farms and their associated support land account for at least 42 % of the agricultural land in Charlton. There is additional support land (approximately 24% of Charlton's active farmland) that is likely associated with dairy, cattle, or horses.

Horse farms and cattle operations each account for approximately 10% of Charlton's agricultural land. Farms that grow fruits and vegetables account for approximately 8% of Charlton's farmland, and land used for selling hay makes up another 5%.



Dairy farms and their associated support land comprise the largest faction of Charlton's agricultural land.

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Charlton has a wealth of agricultural soils based on data obtained from the USDA.

AGRICULTURAL SOILS

Many people complain about the soils in Charlton, but a review of the soil inventory prepared by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) reveals that Charlton had an abundance of high quality soils. High quality soils are either defined as prime farmland soil or farmland soil of statewide importance. According to the National Soils Survey Handbook, prime farmland soil is defined as “land that has the best combination of physical and chemical characteristics for producing food, feed, forage, fiber, and oilseed crops,” while statewide important soil is “nearly prime farmland and that economically produce high yields of crops when treated and managed according to acceptable farming methods.” In Charlton there are

approximately 8,430 acres of prime farmland soil, and an additional 10,232 acres of statewide important soil. There are also 865 acres of soil that would be considered prime farmland soil if they were drained. Overall this represents 93% of the town being comprised of high quality soils. It should be noted, however, that in many places in Charlton bedrock is relatively near the surface, and thus while the soils may be good for farming, they won’t always support higher density development dependant on on-site septic systems.

DEVELOPMENT TRENDS

Charlton was the only town in Saratoga County to lose population between the 1990 and 2000 census, but like every other town in the county, additional houses were still constructed – 124 according to the census data. Based on Saratoga County Real Property data an average of 16 additional homes per year were constructed between 2000 and 2008, a slightly greater average than the previous decade. By comparison, the neighboring Town of Ballston had an average of 52 homes built per year over the same time period.

The curse of Charlton’s relatively slow rate of development is that land is gradually consumed in a barely noticeable fashion, reducing the sense of urgency to adequately address the issue. If a developer proposed to build 50 homes in one subdivision people would certainly take notice and the town would make sure that the subdivision was well designed, protecting as many agricultural resources as possible and maintaining the rural integrity of the town as best as possible. However if those same 50 homes are built over the course of three or four years, one or two on Division Street, another couple on Jockey Street, and so on, people are not likely to notice, yet many of these lots will be developed in such a way to cumulatively diminish the rural character and agricultural viability that residents are so desperate to protect. This latter scenario, unfortunately is what Charlton continually experiences and what the Comprehensive Plan, and this plan hope to help resolve.



The development pattern shown in this image, where homes are spread along the road frontage, developed on former agricultural land, is typical for many parts of Charlton. Image © Pictometry 2008



Town of Charlton Agricultural Inventory

April 2009

Darker areas show land in production.
Colored outline depicts entire parcel.

- Dairy Farm Location
- Dairy and Support Land
- Cattle and Support Land
- Other Support Land (Hay and Crops)
- Horses
- Fruits and Vegetables
- Hay (Sales)
- Trees (Maple and Christmas)
- Other Livestock
- Greenhouse
- Wildlife Conservation

Note: the primary uses of the farmland are shown, in some cases there are multiple uses, including support for dairy (especially true for many horse farms). Inventory is based on a combination of Real Property data, committee review, and landowner surveys.

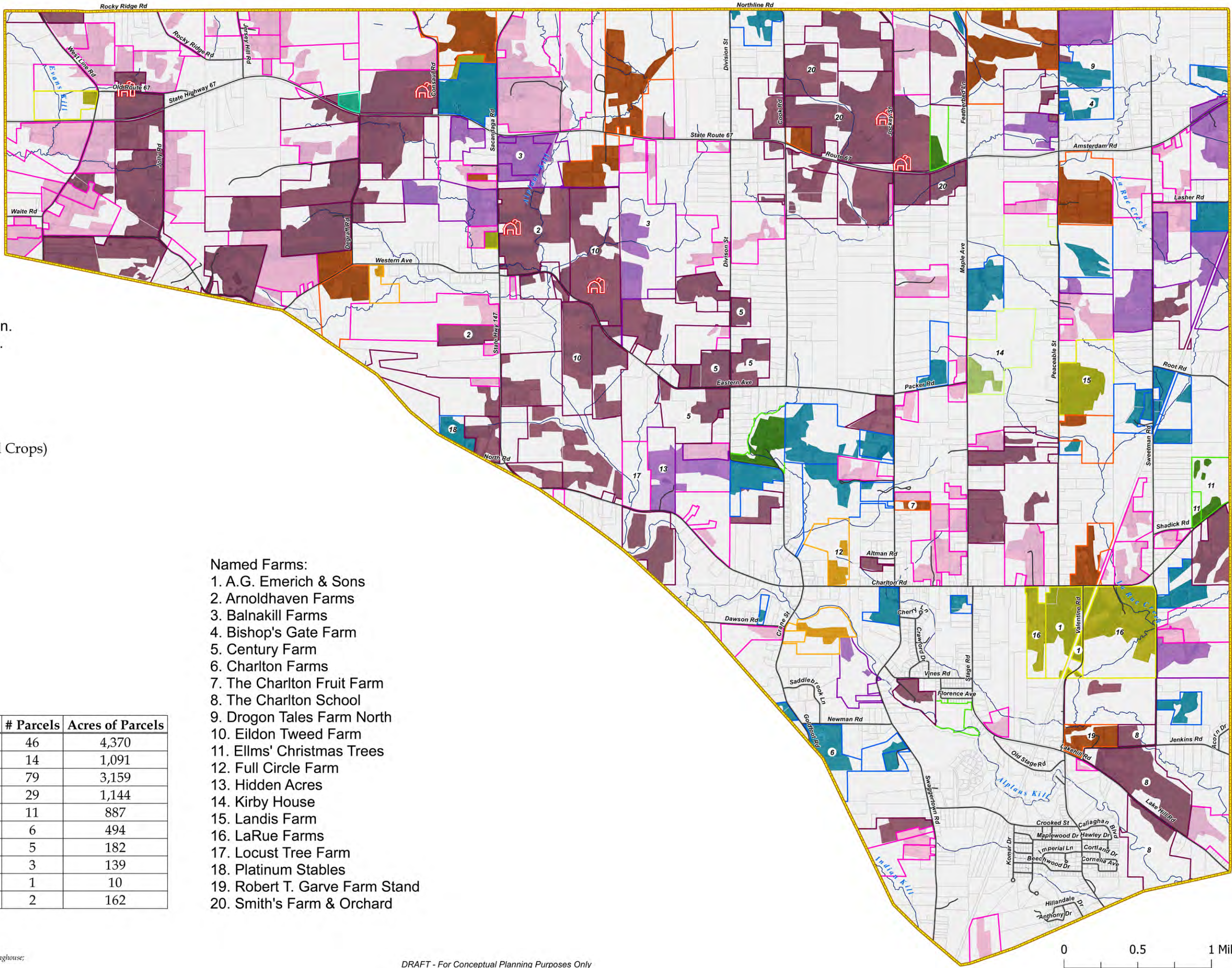
Land Use	# Parcels	Acres of Parcels
Dairy and Support Land	46	4,370
Cattle and Support Land	14	1,091
Other Support Land (Hay and crops)	79	3,159
Horses	29	1,144
Fruits and Vegetables	11	887
Hay (sales)	6	494
Trees (Maple and Christmas)	5	182
Other Livestock	3	139
Greenhouses	1	10
Wildlife Conservation	2	162

Map prepared by:



Data sources: Saratoga County Planning and Real Property Departments; NYS GIS Clearinghouse; 2007 image interpretation and local input.

- Named Farms:
1. A.G. Emerich & Sons
 2. Arnoldhaven Farms
 3. Balnakill Farms
 4. Bishop's Gate Farm
 5. Century Farm
 6. Charlton Farms
 7. The Charlton Fruit Farm
 8. The Charlton School
 9. Drogon Tales Farm North
 10. Eildon Tweed Farm
 11. Ellms' Christmas Trees
 12. Full Circle Farm
 13. Hidden Acres
 14. Kirby House
 15. Landis Farm
 16. LaRue Farms
 17. Locust Tree Farm
 18. Platinum Stables
 19. Robert T. Garve Farm Stand
 20. Smith's Farm & Orchard



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Agricultural Statistics for Charlton:

Size of Town: 21,000 acres (~33 square miles)

Total number of properties: 1,943

Total number of agricultural properties: 196 (**10% of all properties**)

Total acres of agricultural properties: 11,600 acres (**55% of town**)

Total active acres of agricultural land: 6,176 acres (**30% of town**)

Size of Agricultural District: 17,368 acres (**83% of town**)

Number of agricultural properties in Ag District: 170 (**87% of total**)

Prime Farmland Soil in Charlton: 8,430 acres (**40% of town**)

Acres of prime soil on agricultural properties: 4,950 (**59% of soil** on agricultural properties)

Acre of prime soil in production: 3,300 (**40% of soil** in production)

Farmland Soil of Statewide Importance: 10,232 acres (**49% of town**)

Acres of Farmland Soil of Statewide Importance on agricultural properties: 5,510 (**54% of soil** on agricultural properties)

Acre of Farmland Soil of Statewide Importance in production: 2,515 (**25% of soil** in production)

Approximately 90% of land area encompassed by farmland properties contain prime or statewide important soils

Based on combination of Real Property data, aerial photo interpretation, USDA soil data, and public input



What is Farmland?

Charlton's Right-to-Farm Law defines "Farmland" as land used in agricultural production, as further defined below (from New York State Agricultural and Markets Law Circular 1150, Article 25AA, Section 301)

"Land used in agricultural production" means not less than seven acres of land used as a single operation in the preceding two years for the production for sale of crops, livestock or livestock products of an average gross sales value of ten thousand dollars or more; or, not less than seven acres of land used in the preceding two years to support a commercial horse boarding operation with annual gross receipts of ten thousand dollars or more. Land used in agricultural production shall not include land or portions thereof used for processing or retail merchandising of such crops, livestock or livestock products. Land used in agricultural production shall also include:

- a. Rented land which otherwise satisfies the requirements for eligibility for an agricultural assessment.
- b. Land of not less than seven acres used as a single operation for the production for sale of crops, livestock or livestock products, exclusive of woodland products, which does not independently satisfy the gross sales value requirement, where such land was used in such production for the preceding two years and currently is being so used under a written rental arrangement of five or more years in conjunction with land which is eligible for an agricultural assessment.
- c. Land used in support of a farm operation or land used in agricultural production, constituting a portion of a parcel, as identified on the assessment roll, which also contains land qualified for an agricultural assessment.
- d. Farm woodland which is part of land which is qualified for an agricultural assessment, provided, however, that such farm woodland attributable to any separately described and assessed parcel shall not exceed fifty acres.
- e. Land set aside through participation in a federal conservation program pursuant to title one of the federal food security act of nineteen hundred eighty-five or any subsequent federal programs established for the purposes of replenishing highly erodible land which has been depleted by continuous tilling or reducing national surpluses of agricultural commodities and such land shall qualify for agricultural assessment upon application made pursuant to paragraph a of subdivision one of section three hundred five of this article, except that no minimum gross sales value shall be required.
- f. Land of not less than seven acres used as a single operation in the preceding two years for the production for sale of crops, livestock or livestock products of an average gross sales value of ten thousand dollars or more, or land of less than seven acres used as a single operation in the preceding two years for the production for sale of crops, livestock or livestock products of an average gross sales value of fifty thousand dollars or more.
- g. Land under a structure within which crops, livestock or livestock products are produced, provided that the sales of such crops, livestock or livestock products meet the gross sales requirements of paragraph f of this subdivision.
- h. Land that is owned or rented by a farm operation in its first or second year of agricultural production that consists of (1) not less than seven acres used as a single operation for the production for sale of crops, livestock or livestock products of an annual gross sales value of ten thousand dollars or more; or (2) less than seven acres used as a single operation for the production for sale of crops, livestock or livestock products of an annual gross sales value of fifty thousand dollars or more; or (3) land situated under a structure within which crops, livestock or livestock products are produced, provided that such crops, livestock or livestock products have an annual gross sales value of (i) ten thousand dollars or more, if the farm operation uses seven or more acres in agricultural production, or (ii) fifty thousand dollars or more, if the farm operation uses less than seven acres in agricultural production.
- i. Land of not less than seven acres used as a single operation for the production for sale of orchard or vineyard crops when such land is used solely for the purpose of planting a new orchard or vineyard and when such land is also owned or rented by a newly established farm operation in its first, second, third or fourth year of agricultural production.

3. PUBLIC INPUT

INTRODUCTION

Protecting agriculture in Charlton is not a top-down approach, it requires support at all levels of the town, from both the residents and their elected officials. As is heard across the state, the best way to keep farmland protected is to keep it in farming. There were two focus group meetings held as part of this project, with the primary goal of hearing first-hand from the farmers what can be done to maintain farm viability. Another goal was to get the discussion started about options available to assist in preserving their land. Since the public had already provided a great deal of input on their desire for farmland preservation as part of the recent comprehensive planning process, the town-wide public meeting was used as way of soliciting feedback on the strategies set forth in this plan. The majority of the plan strategies are a direct result of the meetings with farmers and other landowners. Notes from all the meetings, including committee meetings, are included in *Appendix B*.

FOCUS GROUP MEETING #1

A meeting was held in August of 2008 to solicit input from people involved in the agricultural community. Approximately 14 landowners from within the agricultural community participated. The group discussed the current state of agriculture in the Town of Charlton, listing dozens of positive aspects that the town has to offer, with very few areas of concern. Several ideas were discussed on how to better promote agriculture within the town and what tools could be available to assist farmers in successfully maintaining their operations into the future.

The focus group participants felt that the overall strengths of the Town of Charlton seem to be rooted in a large, well established, diverse community of agriculture. Agriculture in the town provides for, and enhances a rural lifestyle enjoyed by all residents of the town. Residents overall seem to be supportive of agriculture, and there is a good support system in place between farmers and other agencies, such as Cornell Cooperative Extension. Conditions in Charlton are favorable for agriculture as there are plenty of good soils, a good supply of water, and currently not a lot of growth pressure.

The biggest potentially controllable threat to agriculture, as viewed by the participants, is development. When the road frontage is taken up by new homes, and new house lots cut up existing farm fields it makes the continuation of agriculture difficult, if not impossible. Also as more homes encroach on farm operations there is more likelihood of disputes, even though the town has a Right-to-Farm law. It was suggested that reviewing and updating the town's zoning, as recommended in the comprehensive plan, could start to address some of these concerns.

Some of the biggest threats to agriculture in Charlton that were brought up are difficult to mitigate, including lack of farm succession, high school taxes, and high cost to do business – most noticeable fuel and fertilizer costs. It is also difficult for business to expand as there is a lack of available help, and overhead costs make it difficult to pay additional employees. There also is a perceived lack of understanding among many farmers as to their options to help with costs while they maintain their farms, and how to keep the land in production when they no longer are able or willing to farm the land.

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Opportunities available to help farmers were also discussed, such as the Cornell FarmNet which matches agricultural students with farms that lack family successors. Local grocery stores and restaurants are reportedly focusing more on local produce. A rising number of horse farms is also perceived as good for Charlton as they often have a high assessed value to help balance the tax base, and they provide an outlet for the farmers in town selling hay.

There are several strategies which participants thought could help maintain and improve agriculture in Charlton. Establishing a brochure and/or web site that “advertise” the many farms in town that can be visited by the public, and where farm products are sold is an option. Also promoting the rural nature of the town for bikers and others looking to take a scenic drive, could ultimately lead to more demand for local goods and services. Farms in town have found success in diversifying their operations, such as adding a corn maze in the fall, or selling pies made from apples grown at the orchard, other farms could be inspired by these successes.



Elms tree farm is an example of a farm in Charlton that has benefited from online marketing.

Some recommendations that the focus group came with are:

- review the town’s zoning regarding lot sizes and frontage requirements, as well as allowed uses, such as bed and breakfasts and windmills;
- restrict municipal water to its current location so as to encourage growth to locate in the south end of town, away from the majority of agriculture;
- develop a marketing strategy for the town; and
- provide educational outreach to landowners regarding farmland options.

For a more detailed summary of the focus group meeting see the meeting notes in **Appendix B**.

FOCUS GROUP MEETING #2

The second focus group meeting, held in February of 2009, focused on providing information about landowner options with presentations by American Farmland Trust (farmland.org), Saratoga P.L.A.N. (saratogaplan.org), and Saratoga County Planning Department (saratogacountyny.gov). The meeting also was a chance to get feedback on the preliminary recommendation of the Farmland Protection Plan. Approximately 20 landowners attended the meeting, many of which also were at the first focus group meeting. The farmers present represented a wide cross-section of agricultural operations in the town including dairy, beef, vegetables, maple syrup, Christmas trees, greenhouse, hay, pigs and chickens, and horse farms. Landowners that rent land to farmers in town were also present.

There was a great deal of discussion about both the purchase and the donation of easements. There was an overview of the state and county purchase of development rights (PDR) programs, which is discussed in detail in the strategies section on page 21. It was explained that often a farmer will use the equity received from a PDR transaction to reinvest in their operation, such as buying additional farmland or equipment.

Following a review of the preliminary plan recommendations, the participants were asked to provide feedback on what they liked, didn’t like, and additions they thought would be useful to the plan. The plan recommendations were generally well received. Some suggested additions included adding horse boarded to

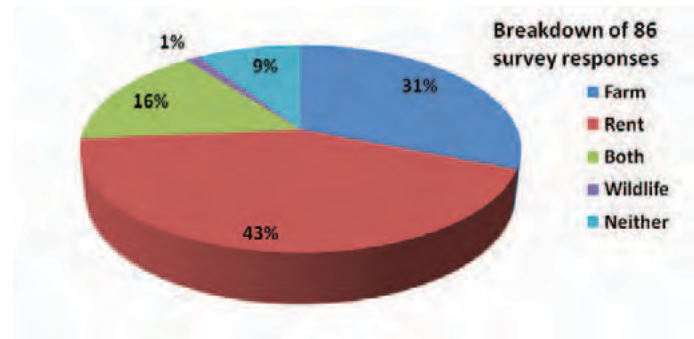
FARMLAND PROTECTION PLAN

the recommendation to allow bed and breakfast establishments, having the town look into high-speed internet access for the rural parts of town, finding a way to freeze tax assessments on properties with easements, and possibly adding a new residential zoning district with incentives to focus more growth in an appropriate area away from agriculture.

For a more detailed summary of the focus group meeting see the meeting notes in **Appendix B**.

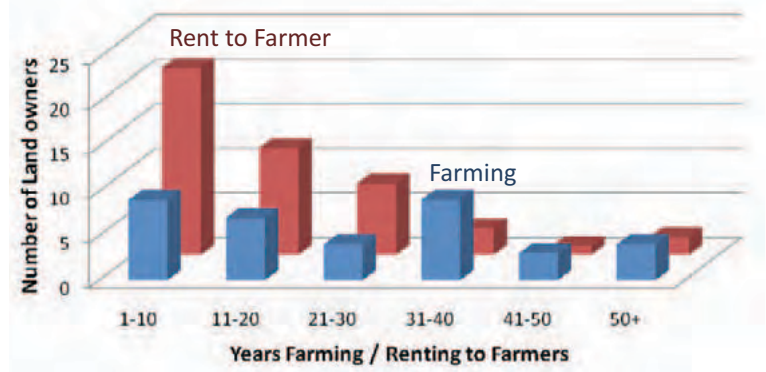
AGRICULTURAL LANDOWNER SURVEY

Questionnaires were mailed out to everyone identified in the agricultural inventory phase of the project as potentially being involved in agriculture. The survey asked about details of farming operations such as number of years farming and type of farming, as well as questions about public opportunities on the property. The survey also asked what the landowners saw as the greatest opportunities and threats to maintaining their land, as well as suggestions for what the town could do to preserve agriculture.



There were 195 questionnaires mailed out, and 86 responses were received, approximately a 44% response rate. Approximately half of the responses were from farmers, and nearly half from those that are not farmers, but rent land to farmers.

Of the 36 people that responded to the question regarding number of years farming, the average number of years given was 27.7 with a range of 2 to 63 years



Of the 48 people that responded to the question regarding number of years renting their land to farmers, the average number of years given was 17.6 with a range of 1 to 68 years. The people that are renting out their land are renting an average of 29 acres each, ranging from 1 acre to 127 acres, and total of approximately 1,460 acres. The vast majority of owners indicated that they only rent to one farmer at a time.

20 people said they opened up their land to the public with opportunities that include:

- snowmobile trails;
- selling products on the premises;
- tours of the farm;
- riding lessons and shows;
- cut-your-own trees;
- weddings;
- farm camp;
- hunting; and
- the Sundae on the Farm program.

TOWN OF CHARLTON

The majority of farmers seem to sell their products locally, many through word of mouth and/or an existing customer base. Some sell their products at businesses in the region, others, like some of the horse breeders sell at auctions and through web and print publications. Over a third of the responders indicated that they are interested in promotion, or may be interested in the future.

Regarding the greatest opportunities to keeping farming successful there were numerous responses, some of the recurring themes included:

- keeping the farm in the family;
- tax breaks;
- support from the town and community;
- lack of development;
- local resources for buying and selling products;
- desire of people to buy local and/or organic;
- strong demand for race horses;
- ability to board other peoples horses; and
- having adjacent farming operations.

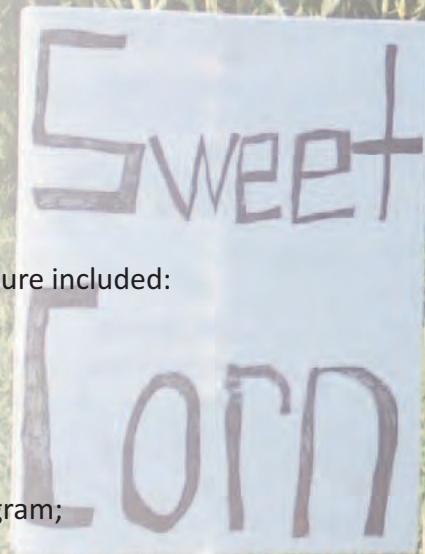
Some of the issues regarded as the greatest threats to agriculture included:

- taxes;
- fuel, labor and crop prices;
- economic downturn;
- encroachment from development;
- stray dogs and coyotes;
- loss of neighbors farm land;
- disease; and
- over regulation.

Ideas people had for the town to preserve and/or promote agriculture included:

- lower taxes;
- limit development;
- shift tax burden from agriculture to residential;
- web site development;
- publish information in the town newsletter;
- support county Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) program;
- make zoning horse friendly;
- make high-speed internet available town-wide;
- promote agriculture education and awareness;
- follow recommendations of the comprehensive plan;
- promote higher density clusters to protect road frontage; and
- keep taxes down on vacant properties so people are less inclined to sell

Overall the survey responses were positive and encouraging.



FARMLAND PROTECTION PLAN

PUBLIC MEETING

A public information workshop was held at the end of April, 2009. The draft Farmland Protection Plan was presented to the public, and afterward the meeting participants were asked to provide feedback on the plan. The 30 - 40 members of the public broke into three facilitated groups to discuss what they liked about the plan, concerns they had, additional recommendations they felt were needed, and priority actions for the town to focus on. Generally all the comments received were positive and constructive. Many people expressed their approval and support of the town's efforts toward farmland protection.

Some people were concerned that once the plan was complete it would sit on a shelf, and there was a lot of discussion regarding implementing the plan and keeping it current. Several people suggested the committee, or a new committee again made up of several farmers, be tasked with ensuring the plan continues to be referred to and that recommendations of the plan are reviewed and eventually put into action.



Community members listening to Supervisor Grattidge at the start of the public workshop.

Some recommendations that came out of the public meeting included: developing a liaison or some other relationship with another town that has done a similar plan and is in the implementation phase; installing "farm-friendly" signs in addition to Right-to-Farm law signs; find ways to encourage "youth" to get involved in agriculture; and look into term easements as a possible way to help protect farmland. All of the comments received at the meeting are included in **Appendix B**.

CONCLUSION

As was heard during the town's comprehensive planning process preserving agriculture and keeping the town rural and farm friendly is the primary theme heard throughout the planning process. Something else that was made clear is that there is a lack of knowledge and understanding with regards to all the tools available to help preserve farmland. Many people have heard of things like PDR, but don't necessarily know all the details. Others may not be taking advantage of tax abatements or the protections offered by enrolling in the agricultural district. Getting this information out to landowners in as many ways possible could go a long way in helping preserve agriculture.

Promoting agriculture also was a common theme heard through the public process. There was a lot of interest in a Charlton farm brochure and/or web site.

There are also several successful agricultural business operations that have adapted to changes in the economy and population that could be a model for other farms in town. Finally, promoting Charlton as an agricultural community is beneficial for everyone, since it brings awareness and possible new business to the existing agricultural operations, and it lets farmers in the surrounding area know that Charlton is a place they can come to if development pressure gets too great where they are now. These ideas are woven into the strategies that begin on page 16.

Farmland Protection Mission Statement:

The best way to keep Charlton a successful agricultural community is to make agriculture as economically viable as possible and keep the town farm-friendly, while implementing minimal regulations.

Based on public input during the planning process

4. ANALYSIS

INTRODUCTION

Much of the analysis of Charlton's agricultural viability was done during the town's comprehensive planning process. The simple solution for Charlton is to maintain everything the way it is. The problem is figuring out how to do that, and recognizing that as much as people want everything to stay the same, change is inevitable. The key is to plan for the change, and be prepared for it, rather than react to it. With the 2007 comprehensive plan, as well as this project, Charlton is doing just that.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR AGRICULTURE

The greatest opportunity that Charlton has for continued agricultural success is the overwhelming support of the residents. The comprehensive plan made it clear that residents recognize agriculture as the primary asset of the town, and that supporting agriculture will help maintain the rural quality of life everyone in Charlton values.

A significant opportunity for many Charlton farmers is the increasing desire of people to buy local products. People want to be more socially responsible and not buy something that came from thousands of miles away, and they also want to support their neighbors and feel safe about where their food is coming from. Many farmers in Charlton take advantage of this opportunity through farm stands. Others sell their products to local restaurants. Skidmore College, in Saratoga Springs, is committed to buying local produce, some of which comes from Charlton. Large grocery stores such as Hannaford and Price Chopper also buy local produce to resell to consumers in the area. It is likely that this "buy local" trend will not be a passing fad, and therefore it is a significant opportunity for farmers in Charlton.



There is a increased desire to "buy local" which presents opportunities for successful farm stands in Charlton.

Charlton is also lucky to have several types of agriculture, with strong dairy, cattle, horse, and crop producing operations. The high concentration of each of these types of farming allows for a good support system between farmers. Having a large diversity of farming also helps ensure that if in the unfortunate event one industry becomes economically non-viable, there will still be other operations in town that should be successful and not only maintain their lands, but perhaps be in a position to acquire the land from the farmers that can not longer sustain their operations. The diversity also allows for farmers to more easily transition their operation should another agricultural industry becomes more viable.

One of the agricultural industries that seems to be increasing in viability is equine, both for breeders and boarders. Saratoga County has a very high concentration of horses, with a mix of race horses, show horses and horses for recreation. Breeders are having success with increased interest in New York bred thoroughbreds, and farms that board and provide riding opportunities are also doing well given the large equine focus in the area. With a potential Saratoga County horse park in the works the demand for horse facilities should

FARMLAND PROTECTION PLAN

remain high for the foreseeable future. There are several horse farms in Charlton, and much of the remaining agricultural land could easily be used for equine operations in the future giving farmers a viable sales alternative to development. Horse farms tend to be good for the tax base in Charlton as well, as they often have higher assessed values than comparably sized farms. The number of horses in Charlton is also beneficial for those that sell hay, though the thousands of cows in town help with hay sales as well.

These are just some of the many opportunities that Charlton has to offer when it comes to agricultural success. Other strengths and opportunities in Charlton include a generally good retail location, especially in relative proximity to the Adirondack Northway, high quality soils, significant natural water supply and a rural and unspoiled landscape that residents wish to protect.



Horse farms are becoming more prevalent in Saratoga County, and Charlton is no exception as there are several successful equine operations throughout the town.

THREATS TO AGRICULTURE

Charlton is a successful agricultural community, but there are pressures that could drastically alter the town if left unchecked. Things like school taxes and the cost of fuel and fertilizer are mostly beyond the control of the town or its residents. However there are some significant threats to agriculture that can be addressed.

Development is a major concern for agriculture. More homes mean an increase in demand for services, which can lead to increases in local taxes (and in Charlton's case a beginning of a town tax), which puts a burden on everyone, especially farmers. Development also often comes at the expense of some of the best agricultural land. The pattern of development is also of concern, as it only takes a few lots to be laid out in such a way as to render a once productive field unusable. Another concern with development, is even though the town has a right-to-farm law, residential development in close proximity to farm operations often leads to conflicts and complaints. This is not to say that development should not be allowed in Charlton, rather new development needs to be accomplished in a way that has the least impact on agricultural.

Another significant threat to agriculture in Charlton is a lack of farm succession. A lot of farm operators in town are inching closer to retirement without a younger generation available to take over the farm. Without an obvious successor these farmers are more likely to sell their land for development - a problem compounded by the fact that farm land sells at a much higher price per acre for development than it does for the agricultural value. There are programs available for farmers that want to transition their operation to another farmer, but often the landowners are unaware of these programs.

Lack of awareness is another major concern in Charlton, as farmers often do not know what all of their options are with respect to maintaining their farm properties when they are ready to retire. There is also a perceived lack of information about landowner options for while they are still farming, such as agricultural tax abatements and school tax rebates. A lack of understanding by some non-farmers is also seen as a threat to

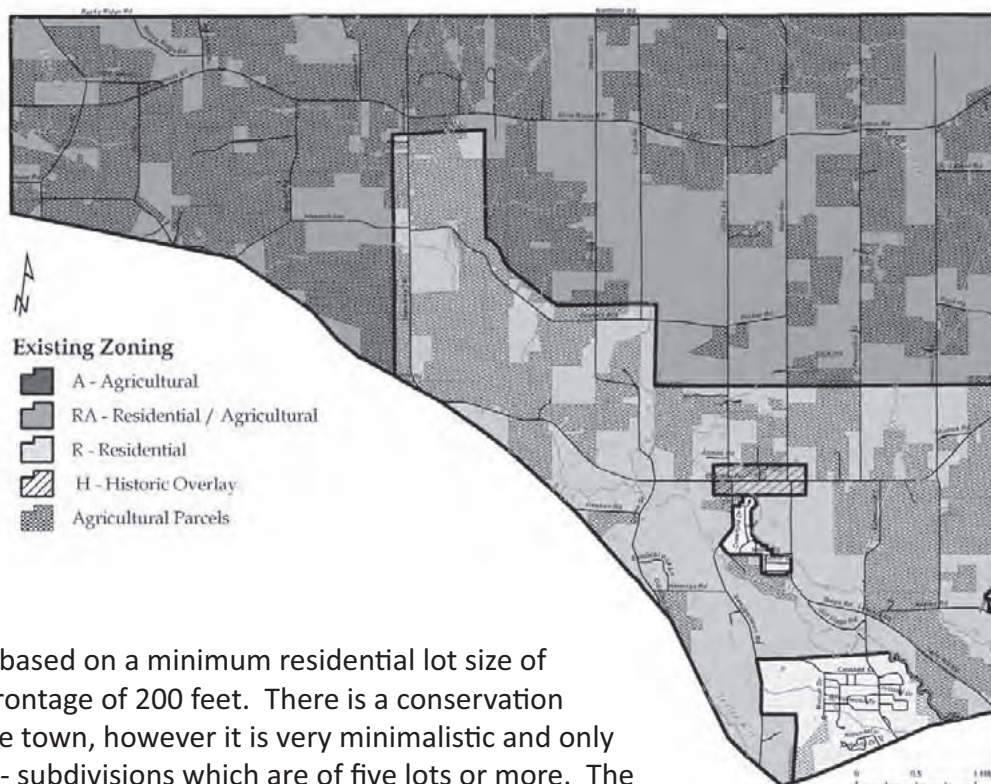
TOWN OF CHARLTON

agricultural operations, many people for instance seem to be unaware that Charlton has a Right-to-Farm law. Finding a way to increase awareness is a simple, yet effective way to help preserve and promote agriculture in Charlton.

ZONING ANALYSIS

The Town of Charlton has three zoning districts, plus an historic overlay district around the historic hamlet of Charlton. The three districts are the Agricultural Zoning District (A), the Residential/Agricultural Zoning District (R/A) and the Residential Zoning District (R). The majority of the town is split between the A and R/A districts, and as one would expect, the majority of agricultural properties are within these two districts, 66% and 34% respectively. Less than one percent of the agricultural properties fall within the R district (approximately 57 acres). Several of the properties are split between the A and R/A districts, as the boundary line between the districts does not always follow parcel lines. The shape of the two districts seems somewhat arbitrary, and the possibility of redrawing the boundary was brought up several times throughout the planning process.

Agriculture is a permitted use within both the A and R/A districts, but is not permitted by right in the R district. At the time of this project there is not a significant difference between the A and R/A districts - the allowed uses, lot dimension requirements, and lot size requirement are identical between the two districts. The only apparent difference between the districts relates to the keeping of commercial vehicles on the premises.



Zoning throughout the town, is based on a minimum residential lot size of two acres with a minimum lot frontage of 200 feet. There is a conservation subdivision regulation within the town, however it is very minimalistic and only applies to “major” subdivisions - subdivisions which are of five lots or more. The town’s code does include any lots subdivided from the same parcel within the previous 15 years in determining whether a subdivision is considered a major subdivision.

The zoning has minimum lot sizes for agriculture including 50 acres for a dairy farm, 25 acres for other livestock, and five acres for crops. As was noted in the town’s comprehensive plan these acreage requirements may be too restrictive. There is a growing trend of “hobby” and specialty farms which would not likely be able to exist under these acreage requirements. A goat-based dairy farm is an example of a use that could be too restricted by the current zoning. The farm would appear to need at least 25 acres based on the other livestock criteria, but it could be argued that the operation would need 50 acres since it is a dairy. In either case goat farms are successful on far smaller parcels elsewhere in the state.

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FISCAL IMPACTS OF AGRICULTURE

In 2007 farms in Saratoga County provided full and part-time jobs to 1,534 people (approximately 10% more than in 2003) – including 641 owners/operators and 843 employees. Farms sold over \$47 million in farm products in 2007 – a 30% increase from the previous year and a 43% increase from 2002.

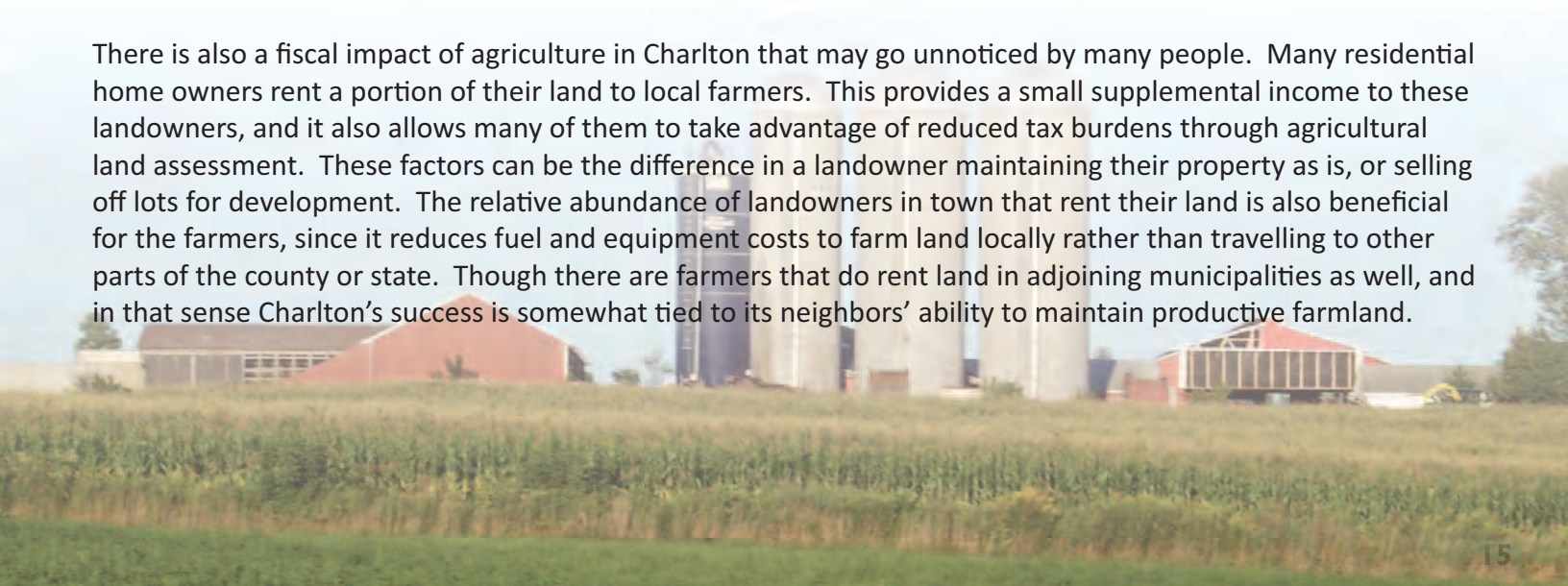
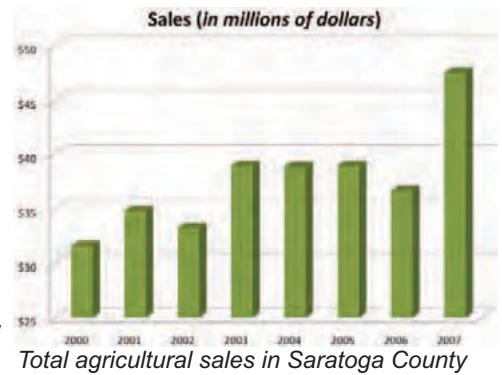
The economic activity and jobs on Saratoga County farms are also closely connected to other local businesses that provide goods and services to farms as well as food processors. In 2002, local farms spent over \$32 million on expenses at hardware stores, feed and seed dealers, machinery repair facilities, banks and many other businesses – many of which are located in Saratoga County and the Capital District.

Farms are capital-intensive businesses requiring significant on-going investments to remain profitable and competitive in the global marketplace. In 2007, Saratoga County farms owned \$330 million in land and building assets and an additional \$52 million in machinery and equipment. This combined \$382 million is an indication of the commitment of the county's farmers to their businesses and the local economy.

In Charlton, agriculture is the primary industry. There are no industrial uses in Charlton, and only a handful of commercial uses exist, most of which are related to agriculture. The presence of agriculture in Charlton is beneficial for residents for a variety of reasons. For instance, having so much of the land in agriculture limits the number of homes in town, which in turn limits the number of school aged children, which in turn is less of a demand on the school system, and therefore school taxes are not as high as they could be - though it is clear that most residents feel they are too high already. Less development also means less need for services from the town, such as road maintenance, and police and fire protection. Charlton does not have a municipal tax mostly due to the lack of demand for services. If enough farmland is converted to development that situation would likely change.

The rural, agricultural landscape also brings visitors to Charlton, and those visitors spend money in town. This is good for the direct recipients of this money, but it is also good for the rest of the town, as Charlton receives a percentage of the Saratoga County sales tax revenue. The more goods and services purchased, the larger the sales tax revenue to be distributed.

There is also a fiscal impact of agriculture in Charlton that may go unnoticed by many people. Many residential home owners rent a portion of their land to local farmers. This provides a small supplemental income to these landowners, and it also allows many of them to take advantage of reduced tax burdens through agricultural land assessment. These factors can be the difference in a landowner maintaining their property as is, or selling off lots for development. The relative abundance of landowners in town that rent their land is also beneficial for the farmers, since it reduces fuel and equipment costs to farm land locally rather than travelling to other parts of the county or state. Though there are farmers that do rent land in adjoining municipalities as well, and in that sense Charlton's success is somewhat tied to its neighbors' ability to maintain productive farmland.



5. STRATEGIES

Agriculture is a vital part of the Town of Charlton – some would argue it is what makes Charlton Charlton. The rural landscapes of the town are appreciated by residents and visitors alike, and make Charlton a desirable place to live. Ironically, as people move to “the country” the rural character that drew them in is in danger of being lost. New development threatens the agricultural landscape as lots get subdivided into smaller pieces, unusable for agriculture. New homes may encroach on existing farm operations causing conflicts and eventual abandoning of the farm operations. As more farm land is lost it gets more difficult for the remaining farmers to maintain a critical mass of land and resources to support profitable operations. This is a situation that has been seen time and time again in other areas, and one that Charlton hopes to avoid using some combination of the following possible actions.

INTRODUCTION

There are numerous options and tools available to help promote and preserve agriculture in the Town of Charlton. The strategies that follow are believed to be the most realistic and likely to succeed for the Town of Charlton. Additional tools are included in **Appendix A** for reference. There are two primary ways to preserve farmland: making farming a viable option that people want to continue to pursue by using a combination of land use planning tools, promotion, and education; and by acquiring the development rights to ensure land stays open and available for farming. The first method requires a lot of work and cooperation, the latter requires a large financial commitment from the state, county, town or other group.

STRATEGIES TO PRESERVE AND PROMOTE FARMLAND

Develop a Marketing Strategy

While several farms in Charlton have a well established client base, many depend on new customers “discovering” their farm products. A well defined marketing strategy would benefit these many farmers, and may lead to interest in new farming operations. Marketing can take many forms, both electronic and print. Below are a few of the suggested options for marketing the Town of Charlton and its many agricultural amenities.

Build on the “Explore Charlton” Theme

As part of the Hudson River Quadcentennial celebration, Charlton is hosting an Explore Charlton event. This two-day event in September 2009 will include tours of some of the farms in the town. The literature and events do not need to be limited to this 400-year event, however. The town could have an Explore Charlton event annually to promote the town, and specifically the agricultural resources.

Create a Farm Tour Map

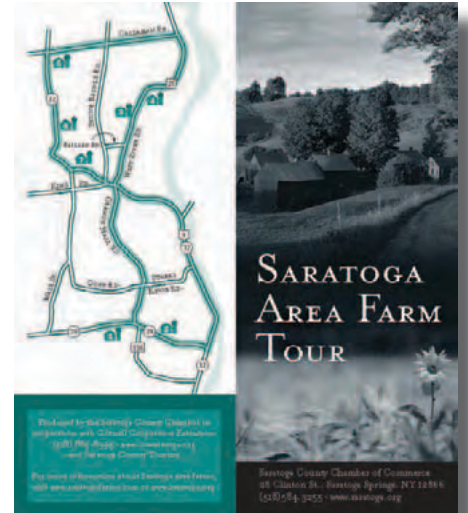
There are several farms in town that are open to the public, at least on a seasonal basis. A map could be developed (or modified from the Explore Charlton map) that depicts these farms and has a brief write-up about each one. A logical route can be traced linking the farms for visitors to fully enjoy the rural landscape of the town as they travel between the farm destinations. The map could be created by the town, the county, or it could be a cooperative effort among the participating farms.

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The farm tour map could double as a bicycle tour map. Many people reportedly enjoy riding through the rural countryside of Charlton as it has a “Vermont feel” to it. Promoting the farm tour to cyclists would be a large potential consumer market.

Develop a Charlton Agriculture Web site

In the “digital age” many people find their information on the internet. While the town government has a well established web site, a site specifically designed to promote the agriculture in the town should be explored. The web site could include both farms that are open to the public, as well as other farms that visitors may see along their travels and be interested in the history and operations that occur there. Having an awareness of the diversity of farm operations in town is beneficial for both visitors and residents alike. The web site could be developed by the town or cooperatively by the town residents, and funding may be available from New York State Tourism.



An example farm tour map from elsewhere in Saratoga County.

Promote Charlton as an “Ag-friendly” Town

The best way to keep land open is to keep it productive. Promoting the town to farmers or people interested in becoming farmers is great way to preserve the land in town. Agricultural land in Saratoga County is continually being lost to development. This in turn puts a strain on existing agricultural operations. Having a place to relocate that is dominated by farmland, rather than subdivisions, could be an appealing alternative to farmers in nearby towns. One way to promote the “ag-friendly” nature of the town is to install applicable signs at the gateways or other key locations - for example a sign could simply read “An agricultural-friendly community” or “Support your local farmer”. Well designed signs that promote the agricultural importance of the town, besides Right-to-Farm law signs discussed in the next section, could be a relatively simple and effective way to increase agricultural awareness in Charlton.

Another aspect of the marketing strategy, which could be woven into the materials created or as a separate piece, is highlighting the importance of agriculture. Ensuring that the public understands how agriculture is important for the local economy, taxes, and preserving the rural landscape of Charlton, can go a long way in gaining support for future preservation efforts. The marketing should address the “what’s in it for me?” issues often associated with farmland preservation. One possible source of funding for marketing is through the New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets (agmkt.state.ny.us) agricultural viability grants. In the past, Saratoga County has utilized the grant funding for county conferences and farm tours. The state should renew and expand this valuable program.

Ensure Information is Reaching the Public

A common theme heard during this project is the need to inform landowners of opportunities and resources related to agriculture. Whether it be someone renting their land that may be unaware they are eligible for an agricultural assessment, or a new resident unaware of the town’s Right-to-Farm law, getting the information out to the town in as many forms as possible is a simple, but effective way help to preserve and promote farmland in Charlton.

Inform the Public on Charlton's Right-to-Farm Law

A Right-to-Farm Law is a form of community support and endorsement for agriculture and agribusiness that are enabled under NY State Agriculture and Markets Law Article 25 AA. Specifically, Right-to-Farm Laws are legislative statements stating that sound farming practices cannot constitute a private nuisance. The Town of Charlton has one of the earliest Right-to-Farm laws in New York State. The ordinance recognizes that "farming is an essential enterprise and an important industry which enhances the economic base, natural environment and quality of life in Charlton" ...and "urges understanding of and cooperation with the necessary day to day operations involved in farming." A copy of the law is included in **Appendix A**. The Town's Right-to-Farm law has three major provisions:

1. A provision that protects farmers' use of sound agricultural practices against unreasonable nuisance claims
2. A requirement that a disclosure form must be part of any real estate transaction in the town. The disclosure describes agriculture and the types of practices associated with it, including activities such as noise, smoke and dust.
3. A process for the resolution of disputes.



An example sign alerting residents and visitors that a Right-to-Farm Law is in effect

While Charlton's Right-to-Farm law is a model for other towns, many residents don't know the law exists. The town should publish a summary of the law in the newsletter, and be sure that new residents get a copy of the law when they move to town. Many municipalities post signs alerting people that a Right-to-Farm law is in effect. These signs are usually standard green metal DOT-style, however the town could install signs that are more in-line with the existing wooden signs located at key gateways.

Inform Landowners of Agricultural District Benefits

New York State's agricultural districts program is a multi-faceted initiative designed to promote the continued use of farmland for agricultural production. The program's benefits include "preferential real property tax treatment (agricultural assessment and special benefit assessment), and protections against overly restrictive local laws, government funded acquisition or construction projects, and private nuisance suits involving agricultural practices."

Some of the benefits provided to landowners in the Agricultural District include:

- a) Any property identified as being in active production within an agricultural district is eligible for an agricultural assessment;
- b) State policies that encourage the maintenance of viable farmlands in a municipality;
- c) Limitations on the exercise of eminent domain or other public acquisitions and on the advance of public funds for eminent domain projects on farmlands;
- d) Limitations on the power to impose benefit assessments, special levies based on the value of property, or other rates or fees in certain improvement districts or benefit areas;
- e) Use of assessment for certain purposes;
- f) Any lands that are used for replanting or crop expansion as part of an existing vineyard or orchard are exempt from taxation for six years after a documented replanting or crop expansion takes place; and

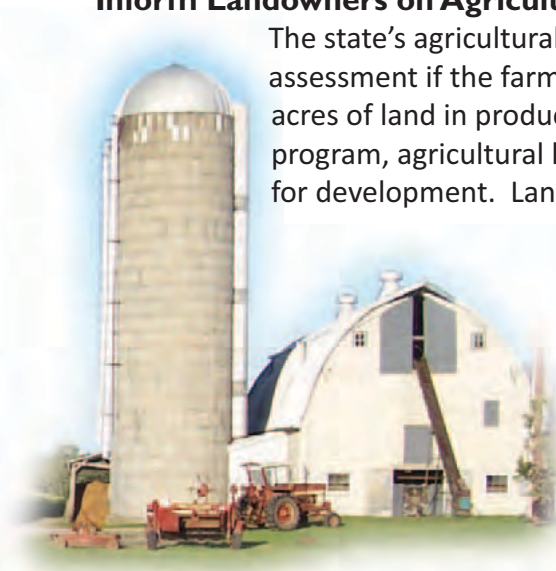
FARMLAND PROTECTION PLAN

- g) Requiring that any project that requires municipal review on or within 500 feet of a farm include an agricultural data statement that documents the impact of the proposed use to nearby farms.

Source: New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets

The benefits of the Agricultural district can extend to both farmers and the landowners they rent land from. Many of the active farms in Charlton are within the Saratoga County Agricultural District #2, however not all of the farms are within the district. Some farmers may be unaware that the agricultural district exists, while others may be unsure of how being part of the district could benefit them. It is important to make sure everyone in town is aware of the presence and benefits of the district. This awareness could be accomplished through a public workshop, a summary in the town's newsletter, posting on the town's web site, and/or direct outreach.

Inform Landowners on Agricultural Assessment and Farmers School Tax Credit



The state's agricultural assessment allows owners of farmland to receive a lower land assessment if the farming operation meets certain criteria, including a minimum of seven acres of land in production and gross agricultural sales of \$10,000 or more. Through this program, agricultural land is assessed for its value for agricultural production rather than for development. Land rented to farms is eligible for the agricultural assessment, and some farmers in Charlton are known to assist landowners they rent land from in filling out the necessary paper work to apply for the exemption. It is important that all landowners involved in agriculture be aware of this opportunity.

Recognizing that "cows don't go to school" New York State provides farmers a significant state personal income and business tax credit for school property taxes paid on farmland and buildings. The tax credit exempts the first 250 acres of farmland from school property taxes by providing a tax credit to New York's

farm families up to 100 percent of the annual cost of their school property tax. More information about the Farmers School Tax Credit can be found in New York State Department of Taxation and Finance's Publication 51.1, at: http://www.tax.state.ny.us/pdf/publications/multi/pub51_1197.pdf

An additional tax benefit that farmers may not be aware of is the exemption from fire and ambulance taxes on vacant farmland. Charlton does not have an ambulance tax, but does have three fire districts.

Promote the Cornell FarmNet and FarmLink Programs

There are many sources of information available to farmers, however the FarmNet (nyfarmnet.org) and FarmLink (newyorkfarmlink.org) programs are unique in that among other things they help farmers deal with farm succession, a key to maintaining farmland viability. The FarmLink program can help match people looking to get into farming or expand their existing operations with a landowner who is getting close to retirement, but does not have any family willing or able to take over the farm. The FarmNet program can also assist farmers plan for retirement or improve their business operations. Both programs are supported by the New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets. On a more local level Cornell Cooperative Extension's Saratoga and Washington Counties Agricultural Economic Development Program (AEDP) works to "increase agricultural viability and profitability" and as such is a resource for Charlton farmers and those that may be interested in getting involved in farming (counties.cce.cornell.edu/washington/aedp/aedp.html).

Promote Information Workshops

As indicated in many of the strategies, awareness is a major component of preserving farmland. The town should host public information workshops aimed at both farmers and the greater Charlton community to raise awareness about topics such as tax credits, the Right-to-Farm law, and conservation options. Presenters could be from American Farmland Trust, Saratoga PLAN, Cornell Cooperative Extension, New York State Department of Agriculture in Markets, Saratoga County, or the town itself. The town could consider having a regular “seminar series” with a different speaker each time, perhaps twice a year. Funding for the workshops could come from the county or state.

A separate workshop series could focus on youth education. This could be organized by the state or Cornell Cooperative extension with input and assistance from the Town of Charlton and/or Saratoga County. The focus of the workshops would be to get kids interested and excited about agriculture.

Promote Conservation Easements

Ownership of land includes a suite of legally recognized rights including the right to subdivide and develop, farm, and harvest timber, to name a few. Landowners can voluntarily choose to forego a portion of these rights to protect agriculture for future generations. These rights can be donated or sold to a municipality or land trust through the creation of a conservation easement and the landowner can continue to use the land for purposes that are not prohibited by the terms of the easement. The landowner continues to hold the deed to the property, including the right to sell, donate, or transfer the property.

A conservation easement is a voluntary agreement that restricts development of a property only to the extent necessary to protect the land’s conservation value. For agricultural lands, the conservation value is often achieved by restricting new subdivision and development to protect farming operations. This does not mean that new farm buildings are prohibited. Conservation easements can also be developed creatively to ensure that the landowner’s future needs are planned for; for example by excluding some parcels from the easement so children can build a home in the future.

A conservation easement protects agriculture while keeping land in private ownership and on the tax rolls. The landowner retains all of the rights to the property, including the right to sell, lease or transfer the mortgage and can continue to use the land in any way that is consistent with the easement. Public access is not required for a conservation easement.

The town should actively promote farmland protection through voluntary conservation easements. Information about easements should be readily available to interested landowners on the town’s web site, at town hall, and periodically through the town’s newsletter.

Easement Donation

Currently, if a landowner is interested in donating a conservation easement, he or she can discuss this with Saratoga PLAN, the nonprofit land trust in Saratoga County. Typically, land trusts such as Saratoga PLAN would hold the easement and ensure that it is enforced and monitored over time. There are transaction costs associated with each conservation easement just as there are for any real estate transaction and the funding for these transaction costs must be identified for each project to move forward. Saratoga PLAN already has one easement in Charlton which has ensured that support land for one of the town’s dairy farms remain open and available.

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There are tax credits available at both the state and federal level associated with conservation easement donations. There are also other tax and estate benefits available that should be explored further by landowners interested in donations. The town could post an annual summary of the current tax laws with respect to easements as a starting point for interested landowners.

Purchase of an Easement

Conservation easements can also be sold by a land owner through what is referred to as the Purchase of Development Rights (PDR). PDR requires a funding source in order to pay the landowner for the development rights. The State Farmland Protection Program administered by the New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets offer one potential funding source for PDR. The program awards grants to local governments (town or county with approved agricultural protection plan) that cover up to 75% of the cost to acquire development rights on qualifying farms. It requires a 25% local match, which can come from Saratoga County's Farmland/Open Space Preservation Program, the Town of Charlton, private donations, or the landowner (who can offer a bargain sale of the 25% or sell at 25% below appraised value and use this as a tax deduction).

The New York State Farmland Protection Program is a competitive grant program, with currently about \$17 million to spread across all of New York State. Therefore, the Town of Charlton must pre-screen any potential grant applications against its criteria to ensure that the most viable projects are submitted to the program. The screening criteria is discussed more on Page 29.

Saratoga County Agricultural Lands

"NYS should focus commensurate attention and resources in NYS Region 5 to the protection of agricultural lands for working farms ...Any reasonably viable farmland under consideration should be protected, whenever possible, by the purchase of an easement rather than fee simple acquisition, in order to enhance future use of the land for agriculture."

2009 NYS Open Space Conservation Plan

The county's program can be used to augment the state program, or in some cases as a stand-alone source of funding. The county has \$750,000 available in its farmland and open space preservation program, however the funds are not restricted to farmland, and may be used for ecological and recreation projects as well.

Because funds in the state and county program are limited, many communities also establish their own local PDR program. This requires a dedicated source of funding which is discussed in more detail on page 27.

Maintain the Agricultural Inventory and Plan

The Town should regularly update the agricultural inventory that was created during this project. Updating the inventory every five years would be a good way to track how much farmland has been converted to other uses. The updated inventory can also serve to monitor if the types of agricultural operations change, and based on any obvious trends the town may wish to address these changes with different forms of outreach or promotion. In addition the town should make sure that this plan stays current and evaluate how the recommended strategies are progressing. The existing committee, or a similar one, should transition to an implementation committee, and continue to meet at least once a year to evaluate the town's progress and make action recommendations where appropriate.

Support High Speed Internet Access

The town should actively pursue agreements with Time Warner Cable and/or Verizon to provide high speed internet access throughout the town. As was heard in both the focus group meetings, and the landowner survey, access to the internet is becoming more critical everyday. Farmers that don't have this access may be missing out on opportunities, including marketing. The town can be the voice for the farmers with the internet service providers. Additionally the town can investigate the possibility of funding from the state or federal government to assist in supplying the necessary infrastructure.

MODIFY LOCAL LAWS TO PROTECT FARMLAND

The preceding strategies are all voluntary in nature. The town has the ability to modify land use regulations in an effort to further protect agriculture. Changes in town laws will not guarantee farmers will not sell their land for development, but they can ease the burden on farmers by reducing residential encroachment, and ensure that land that is sold for development retains some of its original agricultural value.

Zoning Code Strategies

There were several zoning code amendments recommended in the 2007 Comprehensive Plan which are applicable to agriculture. For ease of reference they are repeated below.

Recommendations from 2007 Comprehensive Plan:

Amend zoning to comply with provisions in the NYS Agriculture and Markets Agricultural District Law regarding the distinction between horse boarding operations and riding academies.

Specify acreage requirements for horse boarding operations and for pasture horses.

Current zoning minimum lot sizes of 50 acres for dairy, 25 acres for livestock and 5 acres of crops for farms should be reviewed to determine if they are unduly restrictive.

The 5% maximum percentage of lot occupancy for farms, the provisions in current zoning of Page 29L (5) and Page 31 (4), and all dimensions required for farms in Table IV-2 of the Zoning Ordinance should be reviewed to determine if they are too restrictive.

Review Table IV-2 of the Zoning Ordinance to be sure that customary accessory uses for farms include roadside stands.

Consider whether there should be definitions for "major" and "small" farm stands and whether major farm stands should contain a special use permit including site plan review.



A simple farm stand such as this should not require a special permit from the town.

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Smaller farm stand operations should be exempt from getting a special use permit.

Reconsider the existing restriction (pages 29 and 31 (6) and (5)) that states that roadside stands are limited to selling agricultural produce which has been grown on the same premises where the stand is located.

The town should continue to review and modify the existing zoning to reflect these 2007 recommendations. In addition the following zoning amendments are suggested.

Revise the Boundary between the Agriculture and Residential/Agricultural Districts

While there is currently virtually no difference in the regulations between the Agricultural and Residential/Agricultural (R/A) zoning district, several of the recommended changes to the zoning would create a distinction between the districts, and thus their respective locations are important. It is recommended the limits of the Agricultural zoning district increase to encompass more of the existing agricultural operations within the town. This would likely involve shifting the boundary with the R/A district further south from its current location.

Clarify Farm Stand Language

Building on the recommendations from the Comprehensive Plan, there should be a distinction in the zoning between a farm stand and a farm market. While a farm market should be allowed, it should have to go through permitting and site plan review, while a farm stand, as recommended in the Comprehensive Plan, should be exempt from permitting. Eliminating the requirement that items sold must be grown on the premises would allow for the selling of goods that complement the local produce, as well as allow multiple farmers to sell from one farm stand, rather than each having their own to contend with. There should also be a provision that allows for processed items, such as cheese or baked goods, to be sold at a farm stand.

Evaluate Lot Frontage and Density Requirements

A common problem in Charlton is the creation of “bowling alley” lots. A new lot will be created that meets the minimum frontage requirement of 200 feet, and then will extend in a long rectangle back from the road.

There are two main problems with this style of development. The first problem is the road frontage gets taken up by houses, isolating potentially productive “backland.” The second problem is that it breaks up the land that is behind the houses in such a way that may eliminate potential farming. For example if there is a property with a large hay field that is subdivided into three long and narrow lots, and if two owners want to rent their land to a farmer, but a landowner in between them does not, it is not profitable for the farmer to use the two disconnected lots, and therefore farming on the land is abandoned. By increasing frontage requirements, and incentivising clustering off of the main road, development can be done in a way that better maintains agricultural viability.



Charlton's current zoning requires a minimum lot size of 2 acres with 200 feet of frontage. As can be seen in this example subdivided lots often are more than twice the minimum size allowance (number represent acreage), however they often just meet the frontage requirement. Adjusting the frontage requirements will likely have a more beneficial impact than just increasing minimum lot size requirements.

Another strategy that has worked in other communities is requiring lower density development in agriculturally zoned areas. Having newly created lots larger than the current 2-acre minimum won't necessarily protect the larger existing farm operations, however it could allow productive farmland that is subdivided to still be able to support hay fields and smaller individual farms for specialty crops such as berries or small animals.

Allow Agricultural Supportive Commercial Uses

Some commercial uses are not currently permitted in the town of Charlton that could be supportive of agriculture. For example if people want to visit Charlton to experience the rural character of the town they have no way to stay overnight in the town. Allowing for bed and breakfasts would be a logical remedy to this problem. In other parts of the state, where there is a strong agri-tourism industry, such as the Finger Lakes region, bed and breakfasts are very popular. Also allowing for a bed, *board*, and breakfast to accommodate visitors travelling to the area for equine events would be a logical use, and another way to promote the agricultural image of Charlton.

The ability to have an on-farm business should also be a simple and straightforward permitting process within the zoning code. Allowing on-premises apartments may also be an indirect method of helping to keep farmers on their land. A lot of farmers have large homes, that are mostly empty after their kids have moved out. Allowing them to rent part of the home as an apartment would provide an additional source of income, thus reducing their financial burden and making it more likely for them to maintain the agricultural nature of their property rather than selling the land for development.

Increase Setbacks for Residential Development in the Agricultural Zoning District

One way to reduce conflicts between residential landowners and adjacent farmers is to buffer farm operations from the residences. Rather than impose restriction on the farmers, the town could increase the side- and rear-yard setbacks for residential development within the Agricultural zoning district. This would effectively move the development away from the farm operation and should reduce complaints regarding noise and odors. These setbacks could be reduced in the case of a conservation design where homes are to be clustered.

Modify and Strengthen Conservation Subdivision Regulations

The town does have a conservation subdivision regulation, however it is very limited in scope and detail. The town should enhance these regulations to be more rigorous and place an emphasis on protecting agricultural resources, such as discouraging new development on productive farm land and prime farmland soils, and locating development away from existing farm operations on neighboring parcels. The regulations should include site analysis and review procedures for the town and applicant to be able to work together to find an acceptable balance between development and farmland preservation.

Require Conservation Design for New Development within the Agricultural Zoning District

Following the enhancement of the conservation subdivision regulations, the town should require conservation design to be undertaken for any new subdivision within the Agricultural zoning district, regardless of lot count. Typically land is lost one lot at a time, since very few "major" subdivisions occur in the town. By requiring a site analysis for any subdivision, existing and future lots can be evaluated to minimize impact to productive farmland.

Allow for and Promote Cooperative Farm Subdivisions

A development concept that has had success in other locations is a cooperative farm subdivision, which is set up similarly to a home-owners association. There are different ways the program can work, one way is

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that a farmer subdivides several relatively small lots, and each of the owners of the new lots also own a percentage of the large farm parcel. The advantage of this type of development is that the residential owners have a vested interest in the agricultural land and are thereby preserving it as a group of private individuals, each of which may wish to own a farm but have neither the financial nor practical resources to do so. This type of development is often implemented with landowners that own horses. By collectively owning a large piece of land they have sufficient open space for their horses, as well as a common barn to stable the horses. This group investment benefits the individual land owners, as well as the greater public since this land remains open and in active agriculture.

Ensure Zoning is Flexible with Regard to Agricultural Operations

Farmers should not have to expend a vast amount of time and resources to make minor improvements on their land. As such the approval process in current and future zoning should streamline as much as possible for agricultural related permits. Care should be taken that improvements that could have a detrimental impact on the environment or character of the town still receive an appropriate level of scrutiny however.

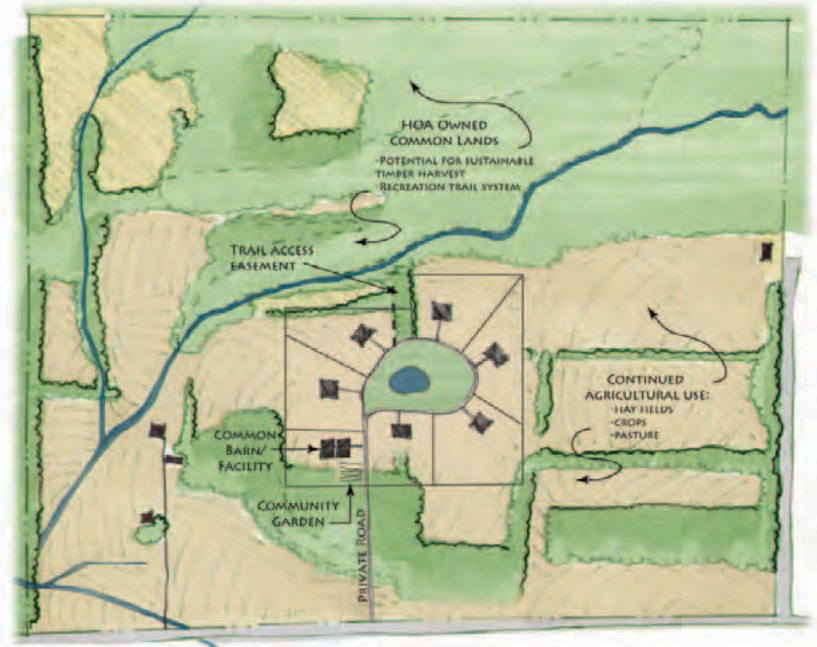
Incentive Zoning

Incentive zoning (or amenity zoning) allows a landowner or developer to work with a municipality to obtain incentives in exchange for providing desired community amenities such as preservation of agricultural resources. Incentives may include modifications to density, allowed uses, setbacks, or other zoning controls. The landowner or developer may provide, in exchange, permanently protected farmland or open space, trail access, park land, or potentially cash (in lieu of land) to contribute to a PDR program.

Incentive zoning is voluntary and optional, and therefore does not infringe on the rights of a landowner. However, since following the incentive zoning is not mandatory for a landowner/developer, the desired land use patterns and amenities are not guaranteed.

When developing incentive zoning, it is important to take into account the availability of infrastructure in areas desired for increased density, as well as the community support for increased density, especially with the residents of surrounding neighborhoods. It is also important to understand the types of projects the real estate/development market will support and design the zoning to reflect these realities.

In the Town of Charlton, incentive zoning could be used to encourage clustered growth, such as the development of a traditional hamlet pattern, in areas with existing infrastructure (or areas with planned growth), such as the southeast end of Charlton near the Town of Glenville. The community benefit or amenity



An example of an agricultural subdivision where each landowner has a partial interest in the larger farm parcel, allowing for a sharing of costs and benefits. In this example each landowner has access to a common barn and fields. This type of development is gaining in popularity, especially with an equine focus.

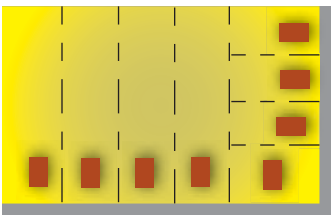
TOWN OF CHARLTON

could include preservation of farmland through contributions to a PDR program/fund; the development of an equestrian/agri-tourism and equestrian trail; and/or the development and updating of a marketing program.

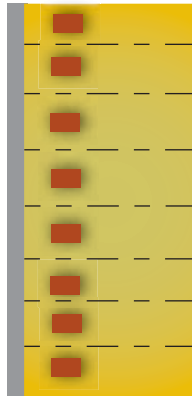
Incentive zoning should be created through a community planning process to identify the geographic areas for increased density of development, such as a country-style hamlet; as well as the types of community amenities desired. The inclusion of some appropriately-scaled commercial uses within such a hamlet could also help add diversity to the town's fiscal base. Other needs, such as senior housing or other types of housing diversity could also be established within the hamlet area.

Some municipalities in New York have implemented a more structured form of incentive zoning known as a Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) program which is used as a way to help preserve land. In a TDR program, sections of a community that have been identified for increased preservation are designated as sending areas (or areas to conserve). Other areas of a town where growth is more appropriate and desirable, and where public infrastructure exists or can reasonably be in place within the timeframe of the plan's implementation would be designated as receiving areas (or areas for growth). A developer in a receiving area that chooses to build a project that would exceed the existing zoning in the area would have the option to purchase additional development rights from a landowner in the sending area. This way, the community would get a growth pattern that better reflects the community's needs and utilizes available infrastructure to its greatest extent, while owners of land in the sending area would be paid a fair market value for the development rights that might exist on the property. TDR requires extensive up-front planning and ongoing monitoring to ensure that growth areas are clearly defined and supported by the community, and that the necessary infrastructure is in place. TDR may not be a solution for Charlton at the moment, however it may be useful in the future should housing demand increase. Additionally Saratoga County could look into a county TDR program, where Charlton's agricultural areas could be a sending area, and areas near established growth centers elsewhere in the county could be the receiving area.

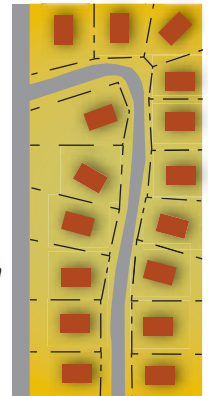
Incentive Zoning Example: The Town of Clifton Park's open space incentive zoning provides a density bonus incentive for landowners in exchange for open space amenities. For single-family residential increases under the incentive zoning, each bonus dwelling unit requires the preservation of three acres of open space or payment of \$30,000. Alternatively a developer may buy the development rights from another land owner located in the rural portion of the town, or if the developer owns more than one property they can transfer the development rights from one parcel to another.



A. In this scenario two lots on opposite sides of town are developed to the maximum extent allowed under the base zoning. Each lot is subdivided into eight smaller parcels, carving up the road frontage and rendering both parcels unusable for agriculture.



B. In this scenario using the same two lots, the development potential is transferred from the first parcel to the second parcel. The second parcel's density is doubled, but the first parcel is kept free of development, thus there is no net change to number of houses.



The above hypothetical examples demonstrate the basic concept of TDR - with Scenario A being a typical development and Scenario B involving a transferring of development rights.

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Other Town Code Strategies

The town has the ability to restrict the construction of new infrastructure in Charlton so as to limit growth pressure in areas not currently serviced by water, sewer, or public roads. Charlton should plan for where new growth is most desired, and allow for creation or expansion of services within those areas, to encourage new development. Conversely in areas where the town wishes to limit development extension of water or sewer systems should be prohibited. Additionally, the town may wish to maintain the current size of the municipal road network, while allowing for development of private roads that are maintained by home-owners associations or other private means.



When public water is available higher density development, like that in the southeast section of Charlton, is likely to occur. Image © Pictometry 2008

FARMLAND PROTECTION PROGRAM FINANCING OPTIONS

Local Appropriations

Local government can appropriate funds (approved by public referendum) collected through property taxes to purchase lands, development rights, etc. This type of budget allocation can be a one-time annual appropriation or a multi-year appropriation. Local appropriations are limited to available funds and are weighed against other public costs, often producing limited results for open space conservation. It is important to recall that as part of the 2007 Comprehensive Plan over 90% of survey respondents believed it was appropriate for the town to spend money on the preservation of farmland, with 43% believing the town could use existing monies, 29% believing the town should use grant funding, and 20% would be in favor of using new taxes if necessary.

Municipal Bonds

A local government can issue a bond to finance special projects, such as open space preservation. A municipal bond allows for a municipality to raise capital applicable for investment in capital projects (not operating costs) and repay the debt (bond principal and interest) over time. Bonds can be retired in 20 years or 30 years, for example. A municipal bond can be placed on a ballot during a local election for voter approval, or it can be subject to permissive referendum. Under permissive referendum, the municipal board may take an action without a vote, however, voters have an opportunity to petition the decision and require a ballot measure. Successful municipal bonding requires extensive public outreach and education, but provides the opportunity to obtain necessary dedicated farm land conservation funds for the local PDR program.

Strategies for Bonding:

Bond Amount Proposal

Some communities have successfully pursued voter approval or permissive referendum of a designated amount of funding authorization. Funding expended under this authorization must meet its purposes, but the work remains to identify the specific projects and to bring projects to closure. The advantage of this approach is that the community has a commitment of funding to work on real estate transactions for conservation. However, the specific projects are not necessarily identified up front. This approach also postpones the costs of preparing the projects. The Town of Red Hook, in Dutchess County, NY

followed this approach, obtained successful voter authorization and is proceeding with closing on projects that permanently conserve key farms in the community.

Project-Driven Bond Proposal

Some communities choose to identify specific projects first, and propose a body of projects for authorization. The benefit of this approach is that the Town board and voters know exactly what projects are proposed for funding. This approach requires up-front costs to identify and refine the proposed projects ahead of an authorization.

Model Communities with Voter-Approved Public Investments in Conservation

In 2003, voters in the Town of Red Hook, Dutchess County, NY approved a \$3.5 million open space bond by an approximately 80 percent margin to purchase the development rights from interested farmers. The Town's investment is being leveraged with dollars from a Dutchess County matching grant program, technical assistance from Dutchess Land Conservancy, a land trust, and follows significant investment by Scenic Hudson, a regional conservation organization. The Town adopted an open space plan in 2000.

In 2000, voters in the Town of Warwick, Orange County, NY approved a \$9 million bond for open space and farmland protection. The local goal is to protect approximately 3,000 acres of the Town's farmland and open space. A study for the Town of Warwick estimated that the continued development otherwise would cost taxpayers an estimated \$4 to \$5 million per year in additional school taxes.

In 2004, voters in the Town of Webster, Monroe County, NY approved a \$5.9 million bond program, and subsequently have secured matching grants from federal, New York State, and Monroe County to leverage their local dollars to meet their program budget of close to \$7.9 million. The 2002 fiscal model prepared for the Town and school district showed that for every dollar invested in open space conservation, town residents would save an equal dollar in avoided costs associated with growth. Hence, in that community, there was no net cost of investing in open space land acquisitions.

In 1998, the Town of Pittsford, Monroe County, NY approved a \$9.9 million bond for open space and farmland protection. When the Town reviewed the fiscal impact of the \$9.9 million dollar open space bond, it was determined that the approximate \$64 per year cost to the average household to pay for the bond would be far less than doing nothing about open space bonding, as the cost of community services to serve that additional development would impact the average householder about \$250 per year in new taxes for schools, road maintenance, and other community services.



The Town of LaGrange Open Space Committee, with assistance from Robert Mckee in Red Hook NY, developed a creative slogan and graphic to support a \$2 million open space bond which voters approved by nearly a 3 to 1 margin. As the sign implies LaGrange determined that the \$2 million spent on open space would be less than the costs of additional services if the same land were to be converted to development.

Real Estate Transfer Fee

An emerging and very promising opportunity for local conservation financing is currently being considered by the New York State legislature called the "Community Preservation Act." This legislation would allow local governments (upon voter approval) to impose up to a 2% fee on real estate transactions to fund agricultural and open space conservation, recreational opportunities, and other important environmental benefits. This

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option is interesting to local governments because it is a way to generate agricultural protection funds without charging the taxpayer. First-time home buyers and purchases below the median home value in the County would be exempt from the fee.

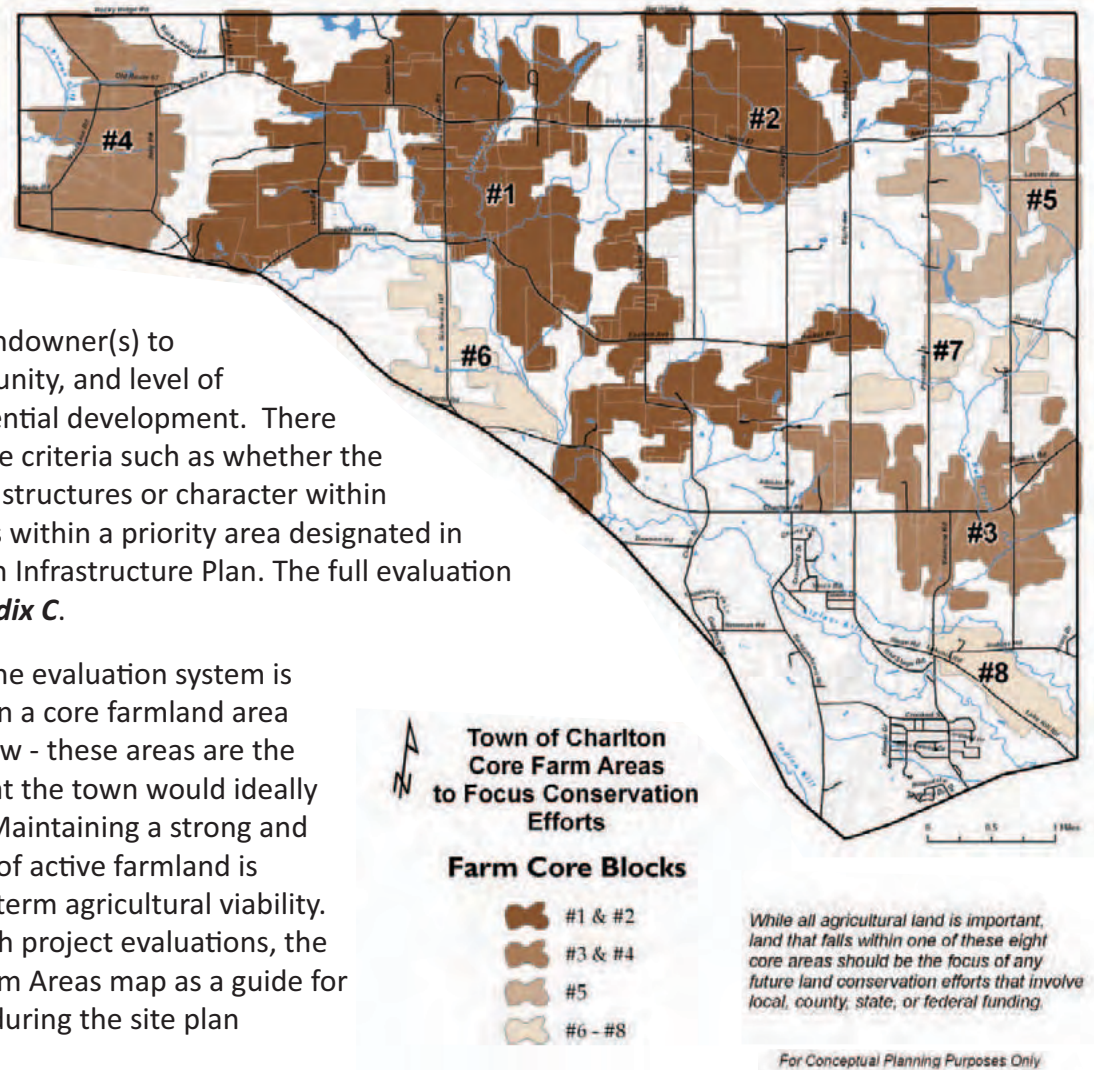
An example of how the fee works is if the median sales price for the county in a given year was \$250,000, and a house sold for \$275,000, the buyer would pay the transfer fee on \$25,000, the amount over the median. If the transfer fee were 2% the fee paid would be \$500. Looking at sales figures from 2004 and 2005, if the town had a transfer fee of 0.75% in place, approximately \$5,400 and \$8,300 could have raised, respectively. With a transfer fee of 2% those numbers could have been \$14,500 and \$22,100.

FARMLAND PROTECTION EVALUATION PROTOCOL

As previously stated both the state and county farmland protection PDR programs are very competitive. Even if the town were to create a local funding source it is unlikely that all interested landowners would be able to receive PDR funding. As such the town needs a way to evaluate projects as interested land owners voluntarily come forward. A ranking system was developed as part of this project to assist the town in determining which farmland protection projects are likely to have the greatest chance of being awarded funds. The criteria focus strongly on farmland viability, since it is most important to preserve those lands that have the highest chance of being agriculturally

productive long into the future. Factors that influence farmland viability include the size of the farm operation, the proximity to other farms, the quality of the soils, the commitment of the landowner(s) to farming, ties to the community, and level of encroachment from residential development. There are other factors within the criteria such as whether the farm will preserve historic structures or character within the town and if the farm is within a priority area designated in the Saratoga County Green Infrastructure Plan. The full evaluation form is included as **Appendix C**.

A primary criteria within the evaluation system is if the farm is located within a core farmland area as shown on the map below - these areas are the areas of active farming that the town would ideally focus protection efforts. Maintaining a strong and contiguous concentration of active farmland is critical to the town's long-term agricultural viability. In addition to assisting with project evaluations, the town can use the Core Farm Areas map as a guide for steering new development during the site plan review process.



CONCLUSION AND PRIORITIZATION

There are many strategies set forth in this plan, and there are still more that the town could consider. It is important that the town prioritize these strategies, and make a concerted effort to accomplish them in a methodical, but timely manner. Some of the strategies are simple and require little to no capital investment, while others will take a large commitment from both the town government and the residents of Charlton. Keeping the public involved in the decision making process will be a key factor in the success of the Farmland Protection Plan strategies. The following are some of the strategies that the town should consider focusing on in the short term, broken down by anticipated cost. The majority of these strategies were highlighted at the public meeting as being the most important.

Low Cost Priority Strategies

Get Information Out - As stated many times, making sure landowners are aware of their options, both while farming, and when they are ready to retire, is key to farmland protection. Making this plan available, printing summary articles in the town's newsletter, and posting information on the town's web site are all minimal cost actions that can go a long way to helping support and maintain Charlton's agricultural community.

Develop the Marketing Strategy - Whether it is one aspect, or all of the aspects discussed in the plan, a marketing strategy is a relatively low cost way to help protect farmland in town. There are likely volunteers in town that have design and web talent and there are possible funding sources for marketing available now or in the future at the state. The biggest hurdle will be in organizing everyone that may interested in marketing. Forming a sub-committee to the agricultural task force may improve the success of the marketing campaign.

Install Right-to-Farm Law Signs - Right-to-Farm law signs demonstrate the town's commitment to agriculture. While potentially more expensive than the marketing strategy, it is not anticipated that signs would be a large capital investment for the town to undertake. Creating and installing "Farm Friendly" signs at the same time is recommended.

Update the Town's Zoning per the Comprehensive Plan - Since the town is already working on the comprehensive plan zoning recommendations there is little additional cost to the town, with the exception of potential legal and/or consulting fees, to update the zoning based on the 2007 recommendations. The recommendations in the Comprehensive Plan are a good first step in a larger zoning update.



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Moderate Cost Priority Strategies

Modify the Town's Conservation Subdivision Regulations - While updating zoning piece by piece is not ideal, budgetarily it is often necessary. The town's conservation subdivision regulations potentially represent one of the strongest tools for agricultural land protection available to the town. The regulations can be modified to focus more on agricultural preservation, and the town code could be modified to make the regulations apply to all subdivision, not just "major" subdivisions. Also ensuring that the regulations allow for the "cooperative" agricultural subdivision concept is important, as that was viewed favorably by many people in town.

Explore Ways to Locally Fund Farmland Protection Projects - As was discussed at the public meeting, the town previously was able to fund construction of a new town hall without having to implement a local property tax. Hiring a financial consultant to determine creative ways to fund a local farmland protection fund could be a moderate cost solution that would yield a large financial reward. Alternatively the town could perform an analysis to evaluate the cost of buying the development rights from willing farmers versus the fiscal impacts of those same properties being converted to development.

Larger Cost Priority Strategies

Modify the Town's Zoning Code - As previously noted there are some smaller pieces of the town's zoning that can be updated and modified to help protect agriculture in Charlton. However to truly accomplish the goal, a thorough revision of the town's zoning should be conducted. This will likely require hiring a qualified consultant to guide the process. Ideally the zoning review and modification would be all inclusive (recommendations from the comprehensive plan, update to the subdivision regulations, etc.) as this will provide for the lowest overall cost to the town, and also ensure that there is consistency across the code.



6. CONCLUSION

The Town of Charlton is fortunate to have the forethought to plan for agriculture without the typical growth pressures that often drive this type of planning effort. Rather than having to hastily try to save a few last remaining farms, Charlton has been able to develop a road map to preserve as much productive farmland as possible through a combination of voluntary and regulatory tools. There is no “silver bullet” that will preserve Charlton’s agricultural heritage, but combining several of the approaches set forth in the plan should ensure that Charlton remain an agricultural community for future generations.

Some of the strategies in this plan are simple and straightforward, like installing Right-to-Farm signs to raise awareness. Other strategies are more complicated and will take time and patience, such as revising the town’s zoning ordinance, or developing a local farmland protection fund. No matter what the town decides to do, it is important that there is always something happening to maintain momentum. Too often a plan will sit on a shelf collecting dust. This plan must be reviewed often, and revised as necessary to ensure the strategies are continually being advanced.

The greatest strength for agriculture in Charlton is the overwhelming support from the community. It is important to maintain that support as the town considers making changes to zoning or creating new funding streams. Demonstrating how new zoning will protect both farmland and individual property rights will go a long way in maintaining public trust. Likewise, as shown in many communities throughout the state, a good marketing campaign is essential if the town pursues a local financing initiative. Town’s that have demonstrated the importance of farmland protection, and have shown that the costs to protect the land are far less than the eventual tax burden from development, usually garner overwhelming support from voters.

Overall the people that live in Charlton want to keep the town the way it is - a rural community. Thankfully most people realize that agriculture is the key link in maintaining Charlton as Charlton. Ensuring that Charlton remain an agriculturally friendly community is the most important action that can be taken - whether it be the planning board steering new development away from active farmland, or a home owner tolerating the spraying of manure in the spring. Farming in Charlton has been successful for over 200 years; with a little work and cooperation farming can be successful for at least another 200 years into the future.