

AGRICULTURE, PLANNING, TOURISM & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES – AUGUST 31, 2022

AGRICULTURE, PLANNING, TOURISM & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE MEMBERS

PRESENT: Griffith, Campbell, Hicks, O'Brien, Skellie

AGRICULTURE, PLANNING, TOURISM & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE MEMBERS

ABSENT: Shaw, Ferguson

SUPERVISORS: Hall, Henke, Hogan

Debra Prehoda, Clerk of the Board

Melissa Fitch, County Administrator

Al Nolette, County Treasurer

AGENDA AS PRESENTED IN COMMITTEE NOTICE:

- 1) Call to Order
- 2) Accept Minutes – July 19, 2022
- 3) Septic System Replacement Program Discussion Tourism Updates
- 4) Tourism
 - a) Updates
 - b) Discuss Local Law to Continue to Enact Occupancy Tax
- 5) Other Business
- 6) Adjournment

Chairman Griffith called the meeting to order at 1:00 P.M. in the second floor classroom, Room B214, and via zoom.

A motion to accept the minutes of the July 19, 2022 meeting was moved by Mr. Campbell, seconded by Mr. O'Brien, and adopted.

SEPTIC SYSTEM REPLACEMENT PROGRAM DISCUSSION: Corrina Aldrich, Executive Director, Washington County Soil and Water Conservation District and Laura Oswald, Economic Development Director

The Economic Development Director stated that last year the County agreed to participate in a DEC program that would replace septic systems in very specific areas along the shores of Lake George and around Cossayuna. Soil and Water offered to handle the administration of this and the Treasurer mailed information to about 310 parcels that were eligible for the funding which would provide up to ten thousand dollars for septic replacement as a 50/50 match. They received forty responses and only a handful of eligible applicants that have actually proceeded to be eligible to get reimbursed. DEC has offered the County another \$450,000. Internally those involved, Soil and Water, Economic Development, Treasurer, County Administration and Code Enforcement, discussed why it had been so difficult to move the first \$250,000 forward and concluded that they needed to find a way to make it easier for Soil and Water to manage because it was just too burdensome suggesting to find a way to automate the process and create a set of guidelines that were able to automatically establish eligibility without a lot of back and forth dialogue. The group proposed a couple of changes like establishing eligibility guidelines for parcels within a 200-foot boundary of Lake George or Cossayuna shoreline but it also allows us to include septic systems that have the reasonable potential to adversely impact those water bodies adding wording for tributaries, consider age of septic from when installed and has a seasonal camp become a year round home. Soil and Water also provided alternatives, attached. They would like IT to create an online form for people to help determine if they pre-qualify and then go through and review. The Treasurer stated once a project has been completed, submitted, and approved within 48 hours of receipt of the state funds he can disburse the reimbursement. Discussed reviewing applications twice a year and the Treasurer suggest reviewing

on a monthly basis. The Soil and Water Executive Director would like dates on the application to give applicants a guideline and all necessary paperwork that they need if accepted in the program. We currently have more money than we do eligible prepared applicants. Setting the age of the septic system criteria for replacement at 30 years was recommended. A motion to automatically qualify septic systems for replacement at 30 years was moved by Mr. Campbell, seconded by Mr. Hicks and adopted. Need a second reach out to the 310 parcels originally contacted on the lakes to ensure they understand the grant opportunity. A motion to accept the second round of funding was moved by Mr. Skellie and seconded by Mr. Campbell. Discussion on including tributaries; six or seven tributaries on Cossayuna and twice as many on Lake George. It is all County cost reaching out to the landowners. The Economic Development Director stated the language in the contract states, parcels within a 200-foot boundary of Lake George or Cossayuna or parcels with a reasonable potential to adversely impact those water bodies. A motion to amend to include tributaries was moved by Mr. Hicks, seconded by Mr. Campbell and adopted. The motion to accept the second round of funding was adopted as amended. The language includes tributaries and that applies to the first round of funding. The Treasurer should reach out to everyone for a positive environmental impact. The Soil and Water Executive Director would like a map on the website of the two areas/parcels included in this funding and the committee concurred.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT DIRECTOR, Laura Oswald, addressed the following items:

- Washington County Fair – This year changed locations from the former Grange building to the County Bounty building which was a positive change with more exposure. Distributed trail cards, visitor guides, information on farmers markets, and ran out of the Haunted History guide. She took nine unopened trail card boxes to the fair of the various trail offerings and the craft beverage trail was the most popular followed by the ice cream and cheese trails. Heard many comments from fairgoers that they did not realize there was so much to do in Washington County. The videos are very popular and the latest is the ice cream trail video. The cheese tour is coming up September 11th and 12th and that video was shown of channel 13.
- Next event being worked on is a short term rental event getting together with people managing short-term rentals probably in November. The town of Fort Ann has a higher number of short-term rentals than any of the other towns by far. A significant number of those rentals in Fort Ann are listed on Vrbo and we are not collecting taxes on those. Missing revenue not having an agreement with Vrbo which the Economic Development Director has been working really hard to try to get. The State would need to enact a law.
- Occupancy Tax Law - The County enacted an occupancy tax law in 2009 and requires passing a local law to continue to enact an occupancy every three years and last adopted in October 2019. A motion to continue the occupancy tax law was moved by Mr. Hicks and seconded by Mr. Skellie. Discussion. There is wording in our law that allows the Treasurer's Office to retain up to 15% of the tax collected to pay for administration of it. The revenue had generated about \$2,000 to \$5,000 in revenue that the Treasurer retained and put back into the General Fund but with the addition of the Airbnb revenue the Treasurer is retaining about \$18,000. At budget time, the Economic Development Director, requests money to fund the tourism budget. The Budget Officer recommends the Treasurer keep the 15% for the occupancy tax administration but not retain funds regarding Airbnb collections. They both would like tourism to pay for itself. This is an internal policy and this change would be effective for 2022. The motion to continue to enact an occupancy tax law was adopted.

- Airbnb revenue is up 2% over 2021 for gross revenue and tax collection. Collected \$13,000 in July compared to \$9,000 last year.

OTHER BUSINESS: None.

The meeting adjourned at 2:02 P.M.

Debra Prehoda, Clerk
Washington County Board of Supervisors

Septic Funding Timeline Proposal A

- Applications will be accepted all year long up until April 1st-Applications will be reviewed after this date
- Applications reviewed by designated committee by end of April 30th
- Award letters sent out immediately after April 30th
- Refusal letters with reason for refusal sent out by May 30th
- Awarded projects will need to be completed and have proper paperwork submitted by Dec 31st
- Reimbursements will be made by Feb 28th for previous years projects

Septic Funding Timeline Proposal B

- Take Applications for a limited time period during the year-Jan 1st to April 1st suggestion
- Applications reviewed by designated committee by end of April 30th
- Award letters sent out immediately after April 30th
- Refusal letters with reason for refusal sent out by May 30th
- Awarded projects will need to be completed and have proper paperwork submitted by Dec 31st
- Reimbursements will be made by Feb 28th for previous years projects

Septic Funding Timeline Proposal C

- Have bi-annual application deadlines with a bi-annual review process and two reimbursement dates run in the same manner as mentioned in proposals A and B
- **Such as Application Reviews in April and October with reimbursements made in Feb and August**

Items that need to be made clear to participants-

- reimbursement based-
- first priority is a failing system
- new constructions are not eligible
- they can reapply if first application is considered incomplete in some way.
- Applications must meet program requirements set by DEC, EFC and Washington County in order to receive reimbursement funding
- Projects must meet code enforcement guidelines
- Applications for systems that have already been completed maybe accepted as long as they fall within the contract period designated in the contract between EFC and Washington County BOS
- Funds are available until contract ends in 2024 or until they are depleted.
- Not all projects will meet the program requirements
- No one will receive more than \$10,000 even if the system may cost them \$70,000 to install

Notes/Questions