

First draft

Plans to shape development simmer

By Saranac Hale Spencer

NEW SCOTLAND — Long the center of debate over the future of development in town, the land at the intersection of routes 85 and 85A was discussed in some detail as a committee charged with recommending a new zoning code for that area met to go over the first draft of recommendations. In the same week, farmers met at the cooperative extension in a statewide Small Farm Summit to tackle the issues they face.

The hundreds of acres of land at the intersection of routes 85 and 85A, which is zoned for commercial development but has only ever been used for agriculture, became a focal point for the town when Cazenovia-based Sphere Development proposed building a Target-anchored shopping center there; the former Bender melon farm has been owned by a group of investors since 1971. Maura Mottolese, the lawyer representing the group and the daughter of one investor, sits on the committee, as does Katie O'Rourke, who with her husband owns a sizeable piece of land at the intersection that they hope to develop.

The draft that the committee was discussing came out of a public workshop held at the end of last year in which many of the 100 residents who attended expressed a desire to keep the land as it is or to build a quaint, village-like development on it.

The draft suggested that part

of the land would be put into an agricultural conservation area. Based on the amount of her clients' land that would be covered by that area, Mottolese said, "I can tell you right now, the owners will not be happy about that."

Michael Welti, a planner with Behan Planning Associates who was hired to work with the committee, largely developed the draft. He declined to release the

said that much of the land on the former Bender farm was not conducive to farming.

Mottolese disputed the viability of community supported agriculture, organic farming, or niche farming for the area.

"I don't think those are pie-in-the-sky ideas. They're possibilities," Welti responded, adding that more than just commercial development was possible for the area. A significant portion of the community expects to see agricultural or open space, Welti said.

"And when they buy the land, they can do that," Mottolese responded.

Her clients bought the property for about \$525,000 and, when Sphere was planning to buy it in 2008, they were asking \$4 million.

According to the most recent census of agriculture, performed by the United States Department of Agriculture in 2007, between 29 and 34 percent of farmers in Albany County were beginning farmers, meaning that they had begun within the last 10 years.

Nearly 50 people, including farmers and students of agriculture, gathered at the Cornell Cooperative Extension in Voorheesville to join a statewide discussion of the issues facing small farms.

"There could be a renaissance" of farming in New York, said Marybeth Vargha, who runs a community supported agriculture, or CSA, farm nearby.

"I don't think those are pie-in-the-sky ideas. They're possibilities."

draft to The Enterprise this week since it is still in rough form.

Mottolese also contested the classification of some of the soil on her clients' land as "soils of statewide importance" and "prime soils."

According to the United States Department of Agriculture, 34 percent of the 200-acre Bender farm is prime farmland and 12 percent is farmland of statewide significance.

Mottolese pointed out that, during the public forum, Timothy Stanton, a farmer who lost his bid for town board in the last two elections with a platform supportive of development, had

Local students debut at Lincoln Center

Two local students are among more than 200 students from The Crane School of Music at The State University of New York at Potsdam who will make their

Symphony Orchestra will travel to New York City for the Avery Fisher Hall concert.

The Crane Chorus roster includes:

Cecilia Snow, a sophomore

experience culminating in a packed performance at the Potsdam, N.Y., campus, before they depart for New York City.

Tickets to the May 1 event are \$35 for general admission.

Working



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Morin laughs as
Pack 51, who visit
turn metal rods i
from left, are: Luc
Kedik, Owen Van
Castillo, Daniel V



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