

Farmers Have Say In Conestoga Valley Region Plans

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LEOLA (Lancaster Co.) — Various development projects throughout the state occur without much input from the communities that they affect.

Farmers in Cumberland County are frustrated by a plan to add a proposed Exit 7 to Route 81, which would condemn farmland without consent from the Ag Security Board. Other farmers are combating development and road expansions that limit their ability to farm.

However, farmers in the Conestoga Valley region of Lancaster County have the opportunity to be involved in development plans from the ground up.

The Conestoga Valley strategic comprehensive plan is a new approach to community planning for Lancaster County and

the southcentral Pennsylvania region. The process takes about 18 months and involves the entire community.

"Traditionally the planning commission would have drawn up the plan and then let the community respond," said Cheryn Fogarty, the project manager for Community Planning Consultants, Inc., a group contracted by the Lancaster County Board of Commissioners to facilitate the process. "In this approach, the community is more in the driver's seat. Public involvement is integrated throughout the entire process."

On Tuesday evening at the Upper Leacock Municipal Building, the Community Planning Consultants hosted the third of four focus groups, in which community members, including farmers, could discuss what they want to see in the future of their community.

About 30 people attended the focus group, which was phase I in the community-based planning process. The goal of the focus groups is for the planning commission to gain a better understanding of what community members want.

Those who attended the focus groups were asked three questions — what do you like most about your community, what do you like least about your community, and what would you like this plan to do.

"The focus groups really established the issues that the community members have," said Fogarty. "The discussions have been about the character of the community. The people attending the meetings value their farmland and small villages. They also have issues with Route 23 traffic that threatens those values."

While the phase I focus groups are occurring, Fogarty and her colleagues are also developing background profiles on the area's land use, transportation, environment, and community services.

"We want to determine where the area is heading and what the probable future is," said Fogarty. "Then, in September, we will host a regional forum where we can present our findings from the focus groups and find out from the community what is acceptable and not acceptable in the plans."

The regional forum will also be an interactive event for people living in the Conestoga Valley region, which includes Upper Leacock, West Earl, and East Lampeter townships.

Based on the feedback from the regional forum, Fogarty and her colleagues will then move into phase III of the process, which involves developing strategies at the regional level regarding land use, roads, water, sewer, and other development issues.

Phase IV is when they prepare the policy plan, which shows community members what will get them to where they

want to be. Phase V will be when the action plan is formulated, and phase VI is when the community will adopt the plan.

"This plan will set the direction for the next 20 years in this community," said Fogarty. "We're modeling the Conestoga Valley region process after the plan we just finished in the Warwick/Lititz area."

According to Fogarty, the community approach to planning was very successful for the Warwick/Lititz area.

"We got a fantastic response from the community on the plan," said Fogarty. "17 out of the 34 strategies outlined in the plan have already been adopted by the community."

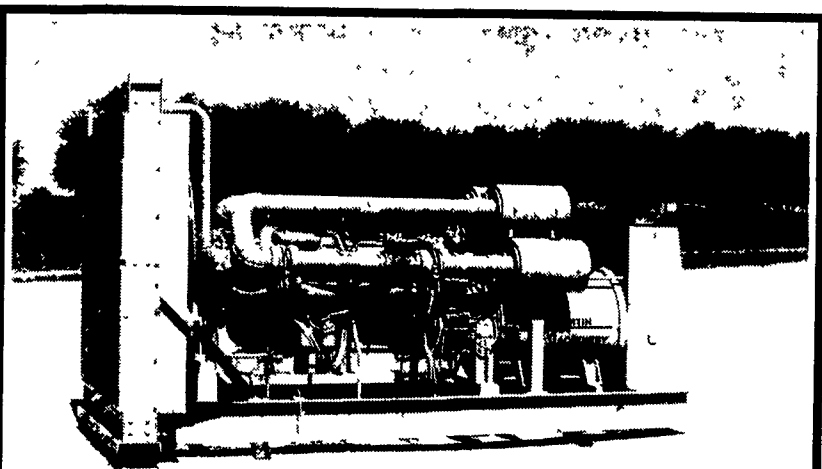
"It's a new approach for Lancaster County," she said. "But it really brings into partnership the community, the consultants, and the planning commission. Community members will play a key role in the future of their region."

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Community-Based Farm Brings Farmers And Consumers Together

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harvest twice a week. We stagger our planting so we are harvesting throughout the summer."

David and Peggy hope to expand their business to offer other organically grown foods to their shareholders and customers. On their farm, they are currently offering naturally raised chicken and eggs from Philip Landis in Ephrata and organic milk and juice products from Natural By Nature of West Grove.

"We want to provide a place for other farmers to direct

market their products to customers," said Peggy. "We are hosting an organic cooperative so that members can have access to most of the products they need."

In addition to the produce and crops on their farm, Peggy and David currently offer home-raised honey and are hoping to soon offer bread.

"We are looking for other organic farmers who are interested in direct marketing," said Peggy. "They could do that here."

David is the 10th generation to farm in Lancaster County. Having a background in community building, Peggy helped

with community gardening projects in Costa Rica. Both Peggy and David completed internships on other organic farms.

"We had the idea to develop a community-based farm before we moved to this area," said Peggy. "We completed an internship on Spiral Path Farm in Perry County, which stimulated the idea of starting something similar to Spiral Path in the Ephrata area."

"It's very difficult to find organic foods in this area," said Peggy. "We're hoping to give our customers what they want while building a strong sense of community among the shareholders and the farmers."

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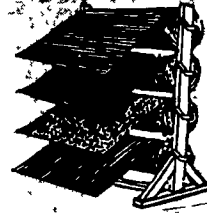


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