

Town endorses farmland program

Written by MARK JAEGER

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County has identified 12,355 acres of farmland eligible for tax credits

A long build up led to a rather anti-climatic vote last week, when the Fredonia Town Board agreed to take part in the state's Working Lands Initiative.

Without the town's participation in the program, local farmers would not be eligible to receive tax credits offered through the state's revamped farmland preservation program.

Fredonia was the last township to take a stand on the issue, which has met considerable resistance on other areas of the county.

The towns of Port Washington, Saukville Grafton and Cedarburg voted against participating in the program. The Town of Belgium previously voted to take part in the program, and the Town of Cedarburg and City of Mequon included small sections of their communities in the program.

The initiative identifies prime agricultural land which has been identified as desirable to keep in farming. Tax credits are granted to landowners who use that land as a source for income, provided the communities have signed on to the program.

Town officials repeatedly put off a vote on the program because of uncertainty about which specific parcels would be eligible for the grants.

Even as the board was poised to take action last Wednesday, Andrew Struck, the county's director of planning and parks, said some minor tweaks were still being made.

Struck said the latest maps include land at the west end of Pioneer Road that had been excluded from earlier maps.

He also agreed to look into whether areas near Waubeka would be eligible for the program, even though a preliminary map showed it as within a proposed sewer service district that would be excluded from the program. The service boundaries were established by the Southeastern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission in 1976.

"I'll look into it, but if it is within the sewer service district boundaries there isn't much we can do about it," Struck said.

As it stands, the county has identified 12,355 acres in the town that qualify for the program. Participation by landowners is completely voluntary.

The only opposition to the program was voiced by Supr. John Blasczyk, who said he talked with several farmers who felt the preservation program limits their ability to sell their land in the future.

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“We do have zoning that does preserve farmland. We’ve been doing this for a while,” Blasczyk said.

Struck said landowners always have the option not to participate in the program, but its difficult to get into the program if the land is not originally included in the plan.

He also rejected the suggestion that the state will eventually use the program to order what crops a farmer can plant.

“A farmland plan may dictate that crops need to be rotated according to a schedule, but I can’t envision the state ever dictating crops,” Struck said.

Blasczyk cast the only board vote against participating in the farmland program.