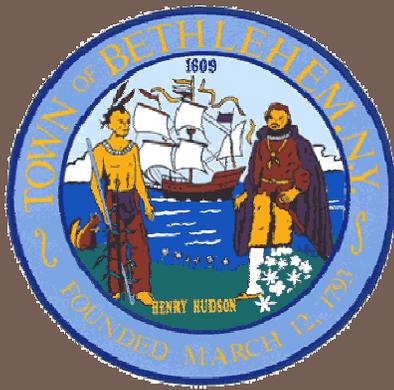


TOWN OF BETHLEHEM AGRICULTURAL AND FARMLAND PROTECTION PLAN



TOWN BOARD MEETING
NOVEMBER 24, 2009

PLANNING PROCESS

- Background
 - Recommendation of 2005 Comprehensive Plan
 - Farmland and Open Space Protection planning effort initiated February 2008
 - Two components:
 - Open Space
 - Agricultural and Farmland
 - Farmland component funded with grant from NYS Dept. of Agriculture and Markets (\$25,000)

PLANNING PROCESS



- Study Purpose
 - Work with individuals involved in the Towns agricultural industry
 - Establish strategies that result in the enhancement, management and continued viability of agriculture and farmland
- Participants
 - Department of Economic Development and Planning
 - Agricultural and Farmland Study Advisory Committee
 - American Farmland Trust
 - Town Residents



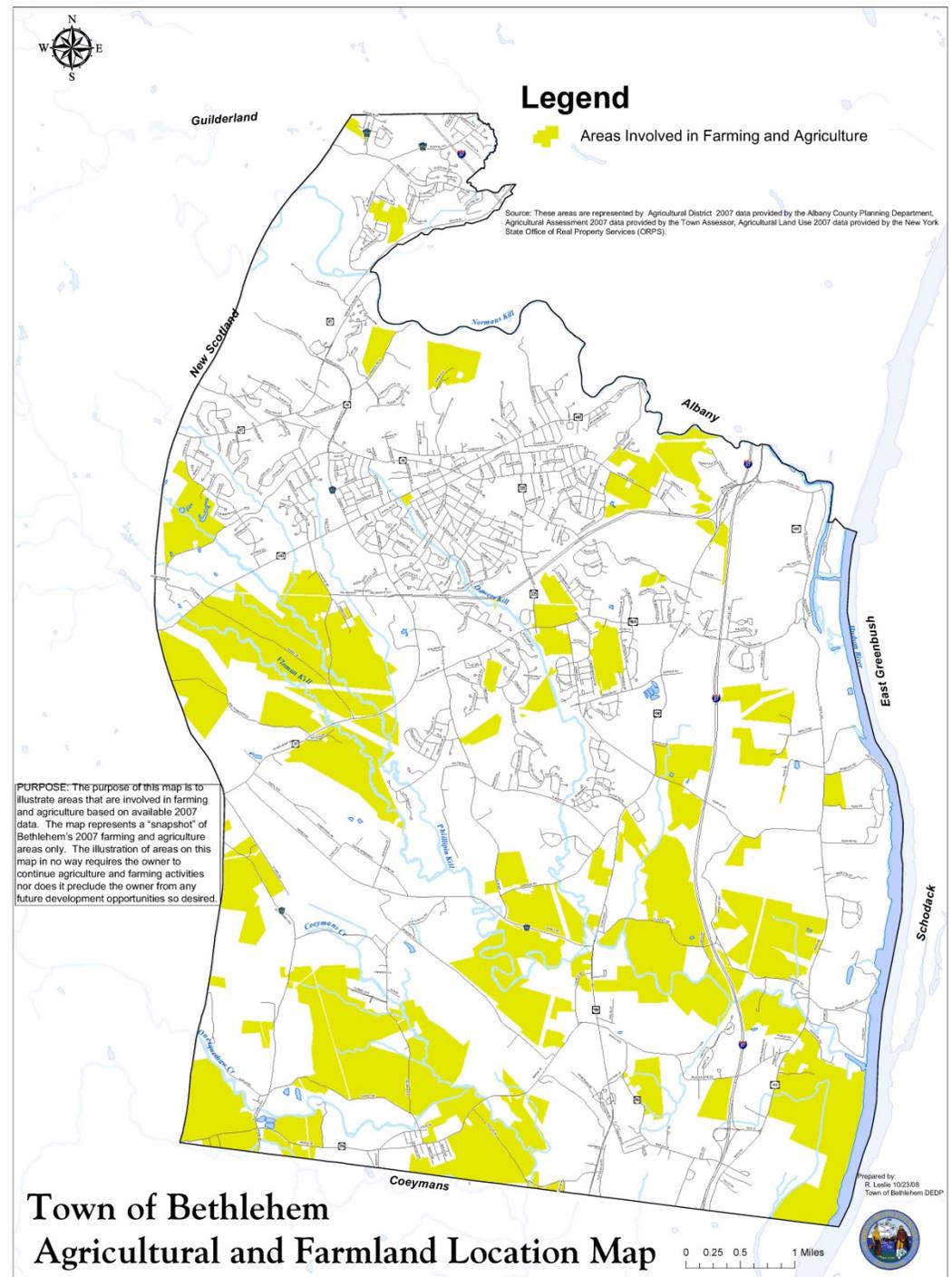
PLANNING PROCESS

- Key Points
 - GOAL: To encourage and support agricultural uses of land and protect property owner's rights
- Key Definition
 - **Protection** – the preservation, conservation, management and improvement of lands which are part of viable farming operations, for the purpose of encouraging such lands to remain in agricultural production. (*NYS Agriculture and Markets Law Article 25AAA*)
 - Not to be perceived as a means of restricting a property owner's rights
 - Opportunity to support agriculture as a business and on a voluntary basis protect farmland as a land use



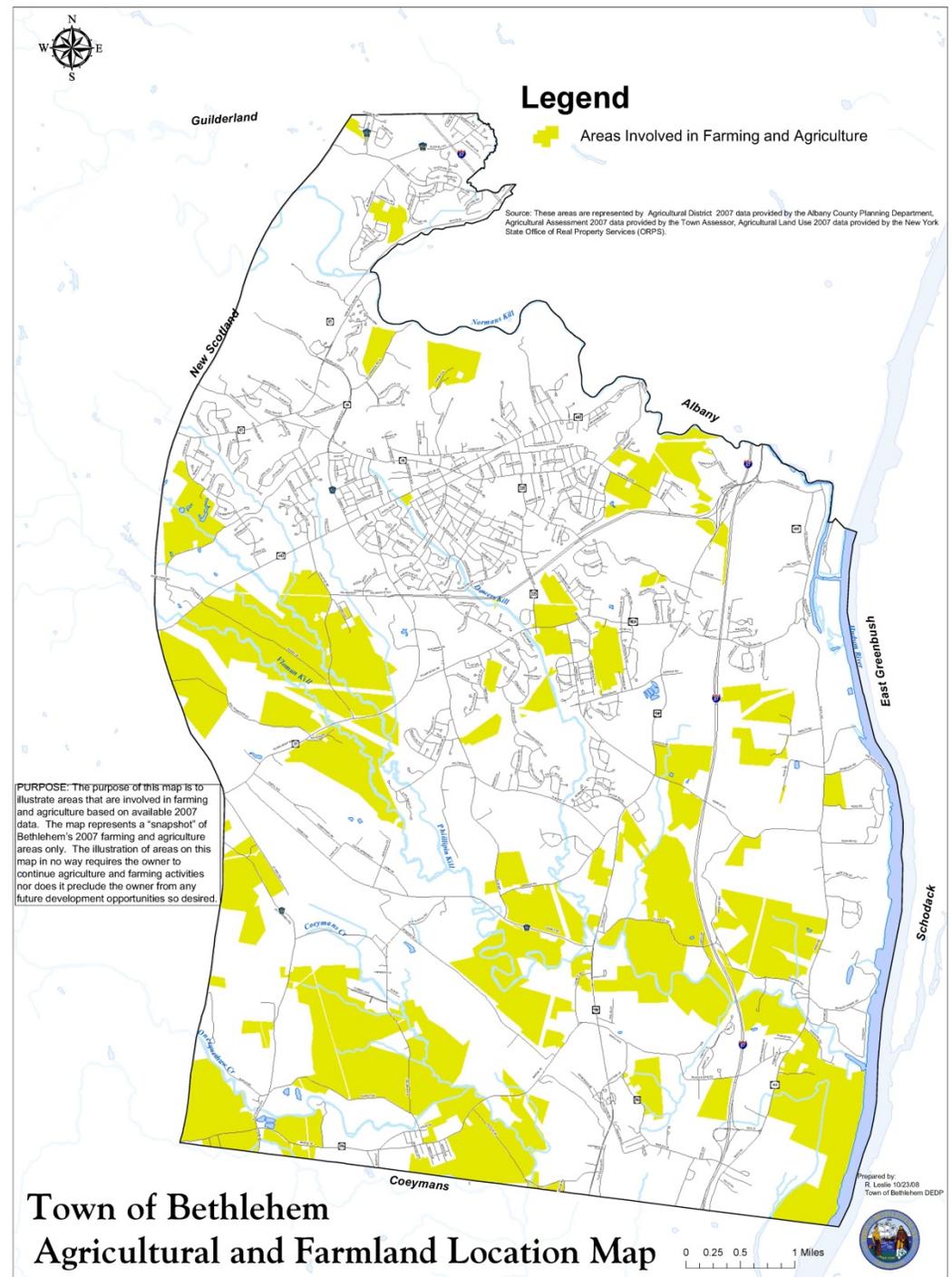
AGRICULTURE AND FARMLAND DATA

- 63 operating farms, working just over 5,900 acres of land
- Corn, hay, and pasture land represent the majority of agricultural and farming operations
- 33 farms are rented – nearly half the farms in Bethlehem, working just over 2,800 acres of land;



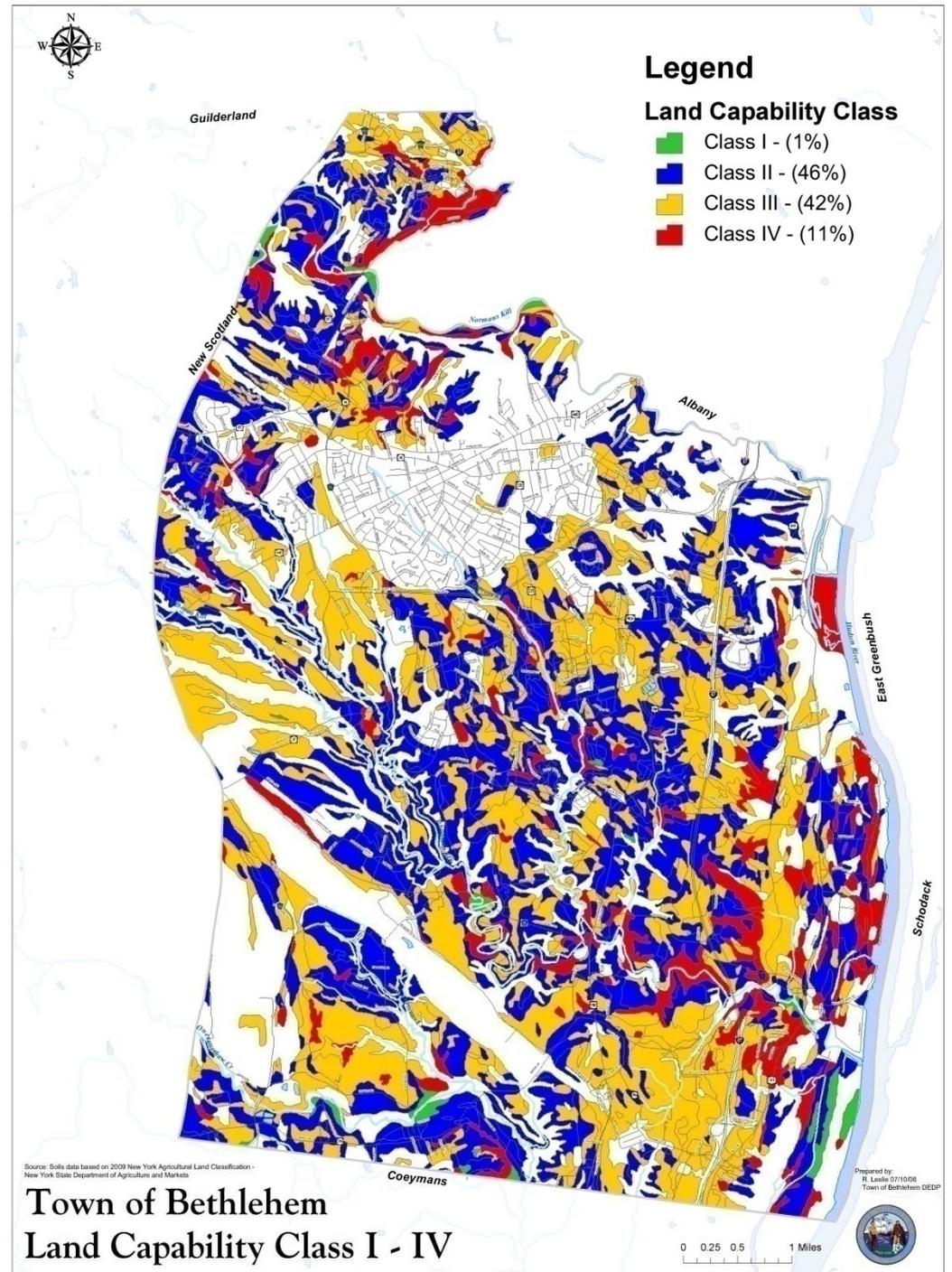
AGRICULTURE AND FARMLAND DATA

- 4,760 acres in Albany County Agricultural District
- 4,000 acres receive agricultural assessment
- 77% of all agriculture and farmland are located in three Zoning Districts – Residential A , Rural, and Rural Light Industrial;
- 68% of all agriculture and farmland are located in the RCS School District



AGRICULTURE AND FARMLAND DATA

- Prime Farmland Soil (10,000 acres)
- Soils of Statewide Importance (2,760 acres)
- Capability Class I – IV
 - Class I: 1% 
 - Class II: 46% 
 - Class III: 42% 
 - Class IV: 11% 



RECOMMENDATIONS – SHORT TERM

- Draft and adopt a resolution in support of the Albany County Right to Farm Law.
- Establish an Agricultural Advisory Committee to provide advisory information to the Town Board, Planning Board or Zoning Board of Appeals with regard to agricultural related issues.
- Encourage open communication between farmers/owners of agricultural land and Town Police Department.
- Include Agricultural Advisory Committee in the Town's Development Planning Committee review of potential projects to determine impact on agriculture.



RECOMMENDATIONS – SHORT TERM

- Adopt NYS Department of Agriculture and Markets definition of agri-tourism and include the term as an “Agricultural Use” as defined in the Zoning Law.
- Further review the Zoning Law Schedule of Use Regulations to determine complimentary uses that support agriculture and farmland.
- Increase the temporary off-site signage allowed for farms.



RECOMMENDATIONS – MEDIUM TERM

- Provide educational materials about agriculture and related benefits to the community.
- Work with existing educational programs in schools to educate youth on farming.
- Work with Albany County to update the “Albany County Bounty” farm guide to help promote Bethlehem agricultural and farming businesses.



RECOMMENDATIONS – MEDIUM TERM

- Explore opportunities for the Bethlehem IDA to invest in agricultural businesses.
- Research and consider the development of a term conservation easement program.
- Develop amenity/incentive zoning to assist in preserving farm and agricultural lands.

RECOMMENDATIONS - ONGOING

- Encourage Town Board to include representation from agricultural enterprises on Town committees and boards.
- Educate and provide support to agricultural businesses and farms during the planning review processes.
- Require all Planning Board members to receive training on agricultural land use planning.
- Educate landowners about the land division review process available in the Town Law.



RECOMMENDATIONS - ONGOING

- Explore ways to provide assistance with property encroachment matters.
- Explore opportunities for remedial actions where drainage from existing development and infrastructure negatively impacts farmland.
- Provide education regarding existing Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) programs (Federal and State) and support applications as they arise.



QUESTIONS/COMMENTS

