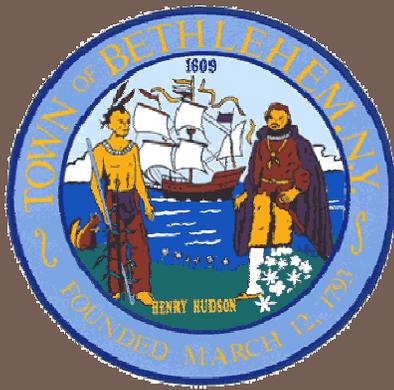


# TOWN OF BETHLEHEM AGRICULTURAL AND FARMLAND PROTECTION PLAN



**PUBLIC MEETING  
AUGUST 5, 2009**

# TONIGHT'S AGENDA

- Planning Process
- Public Input
  - Public Meetings
  - Agricultural Landowner Interviews
  - SWOT Analysis
- Agriculture and Farmland Data
- Goals
- Recommendations/Implementation
- Questions and Comments



# PLANNING PROCESS

- Introduction
  - Tier 2 recommendation of 2005 Comprehensive Plan
  - Farmland and Open Space Protection planning effort initiated February 2008
  - Two components:
    - Open Space Protection
    - Agricultural and Farmland Protection
  - Farmland component funded with grant from NYS Dept. of Agriculture and Markets

# 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
  - Town Residents
  - American Farmland Trust



# PLANNING PROCESS

- 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*)
- Key Points
  - Mission: To encourage agricultural uses of land and protect property owner's rights
  - Protection
    - 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



# PLANNING PROCESS

- Inputs to Process
  - Inventory existing conditions / agricultural and farmland resources
  - Three public meetings
  - Monthly Study Advisory Committee meetings
  - Public input at Study Advisory Committee meetings
- Outcomes
  - Identification of issues, needs and opportunities
  - Development of goals
  - Development of recommendations/implementation



# PUBLIC INPUT

- May 2008 Orientation Meeting
- October 6, 2008 Landowner Meeting
- October 23, 2008 Topics Meeting
- Study Advisory Committee Meetings
  - July 2008 – June 2009 (9 Meetings)
  - SWOT Analysis
- Interviews



# Agricultural Landowners Interviews

- Opportunities exist to educate farmers and landowners on existing programs to protect farmland and to provide new programs that make farmland more affordable;
- Farmers in Bethlehem are challenged by poor soils, disappearing farm support services, availability of labor and high land values;
- Increasingly suburban nature of the Town has resulted in conflicts and a perceived lack of respect and understanding between farmers, non-farm residents and town government;
- The challenges faced by farmers today will impact what the future looks like for agriculture in the Town of Bethlehem tomorrow.



# AGRICULTURE AND FARMLAND DATA

- Sources:

- Cornell Cooperative Extension of Albany County
- Albany County Farm Service Agency
- Town of Bethlehem Assessor's Office
- New York State Office of Real Property Services

(2007 – 2008 Data)



Cornell University  
Cooperative Extension  
Albany County



United States Department of Agriculture  
Farm Service Agency



American Farmland Trust

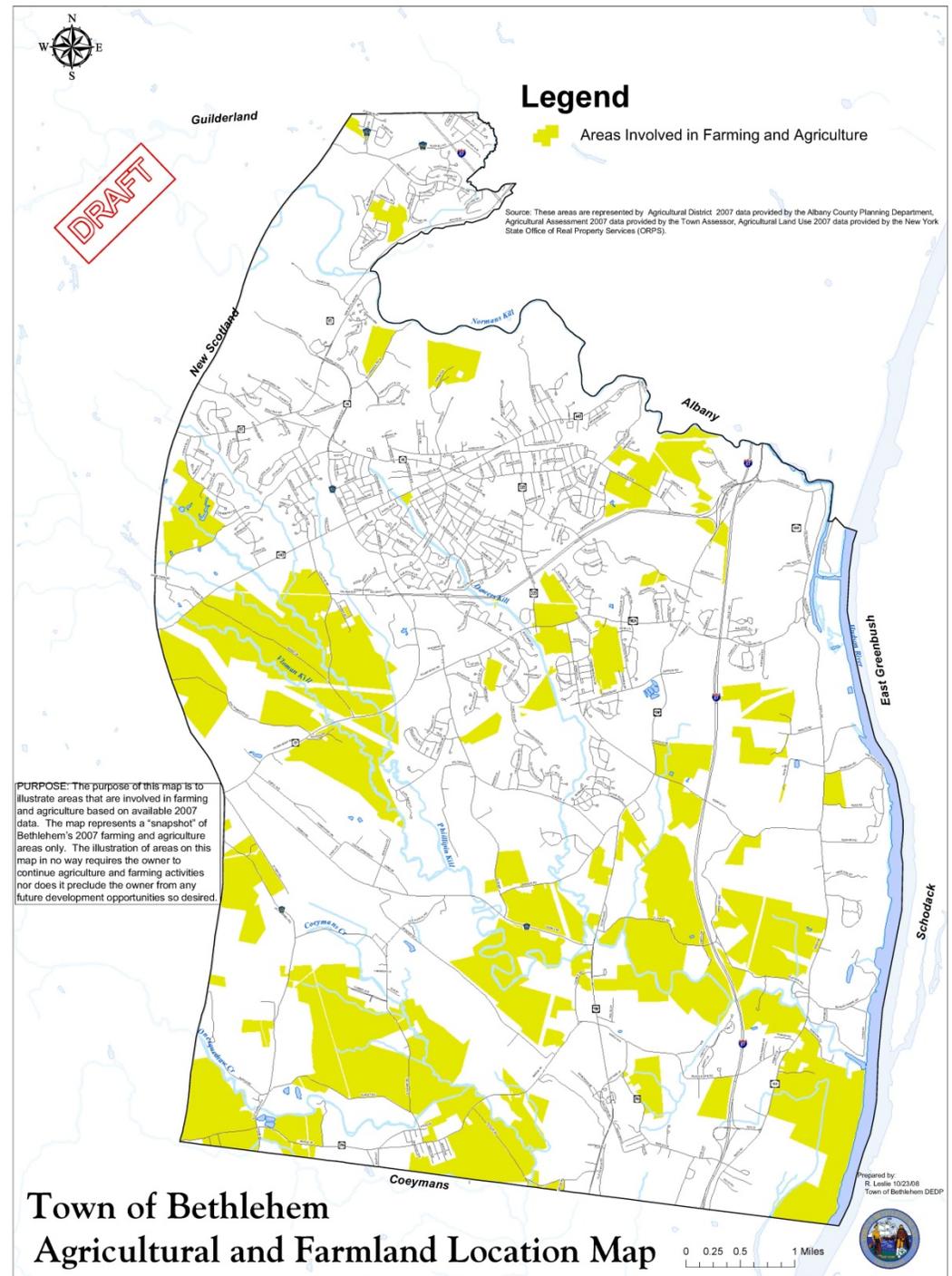


Office of Real Property Services



# AGRICULTURE AND FARMLAND DATA

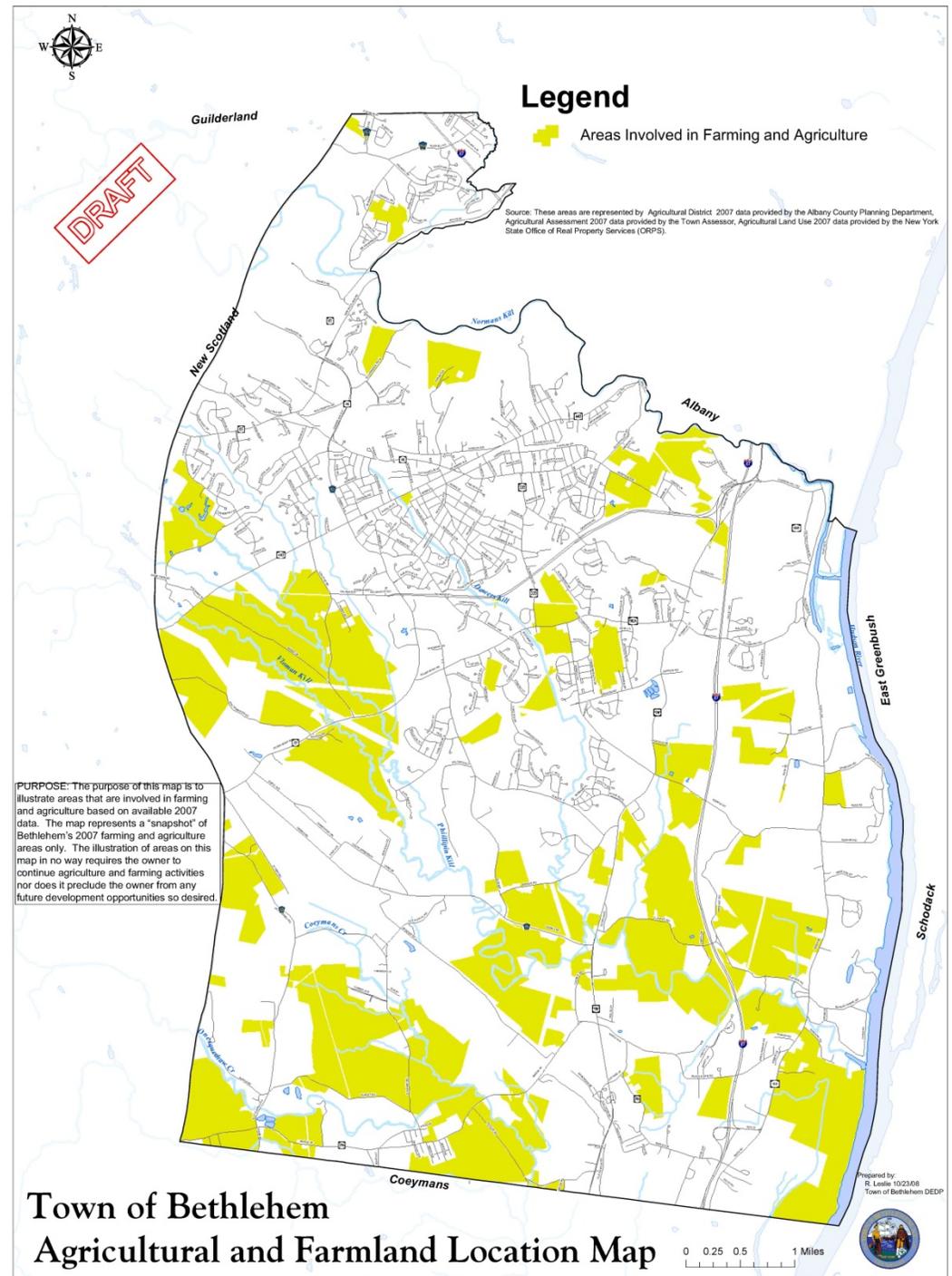
- 4,680 acres in Albany County Agricultural District
- 4,000 acres receive agricultural assessment
- 63 operating farms, working just over 5,900 acres of land
- Corn, hay, and pasture land represent the majority of agricultural and farming operations



# AGRICULTURE AND FARMLAND DATA

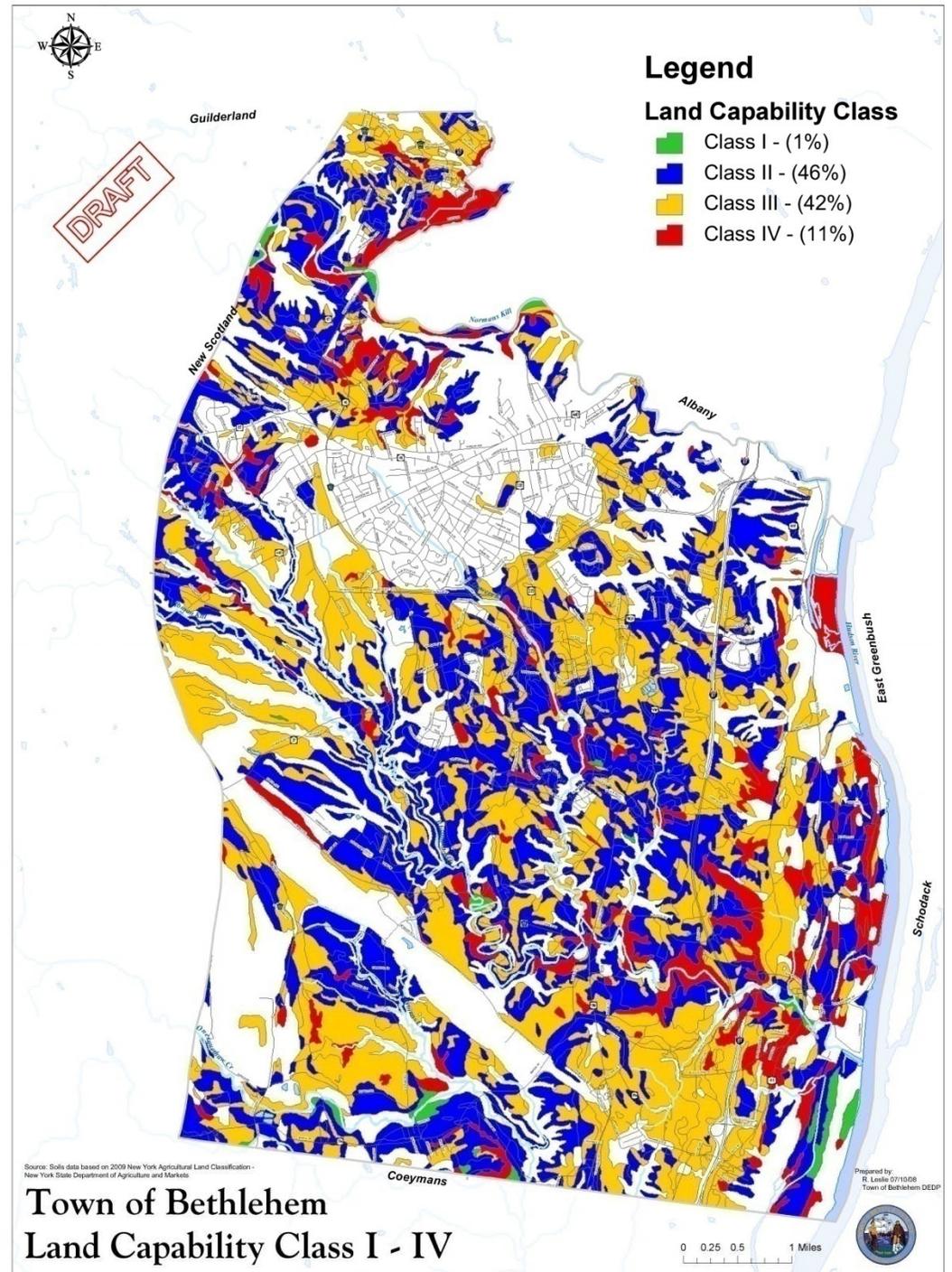
- 33 farms are rented – nearly half the farms in Bethlehem, working just over 2,800 acres of land;
- 77% of all agriculture and farmland are located in three Zoning Districts – Residential A , Rural, and Rural Light Industrial;
- 68% of all agriculture and farmland are located in the Ravena-Coeymans School District

American Farmland Trust



# 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% 



# Value to Agricultural Economy

- 2002 Census of Agriculture
- Town of Bethlehem Data
  - 92% of farms sold less than \$50,000 in ag products
  - 46% report farming as primary occupation



# INDICATORS OF PRESSURE

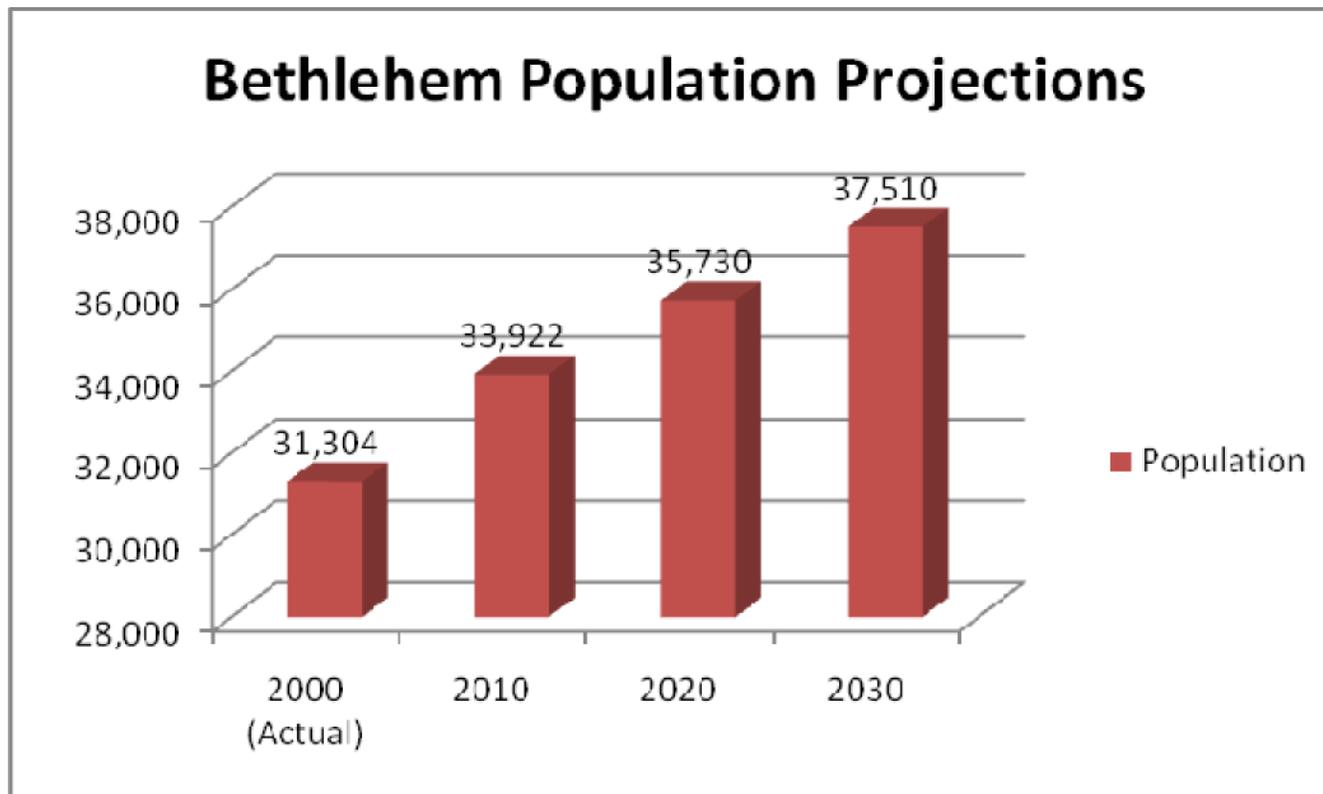
- POPULATION TRENDS

**Bethlehem Population and Population Change 1980 – 2000**

<b>1980</b>	<b>1990</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>Change 1980 – 2000</b>	<b>Change 1990 – 2000</b>
24,296	27,552	31,304	28.8%	13.6%

# INDICATORS OF PRESSURE

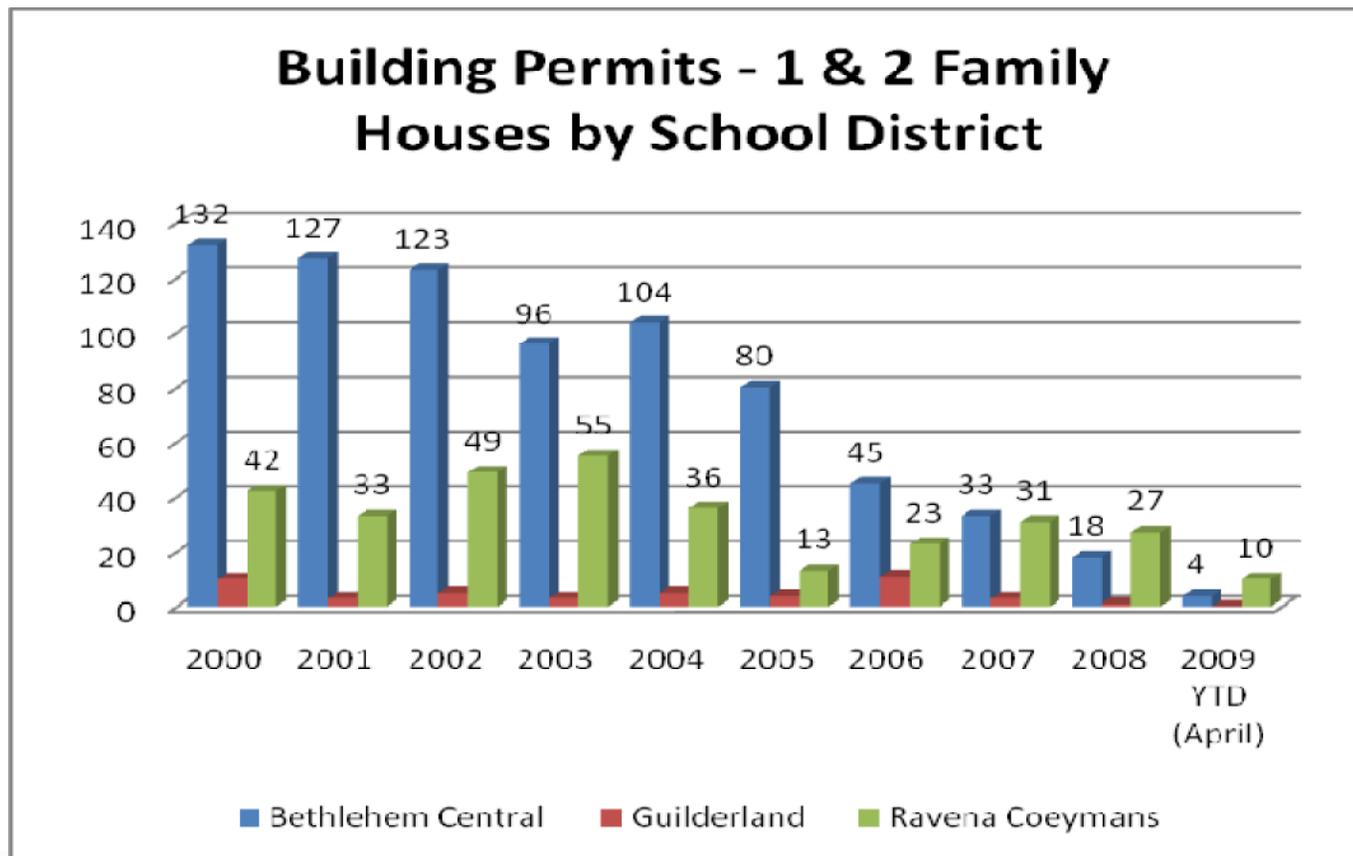
- POPULATION TRENDS



Source: Capital District Regional Planning Commission

# INDICATORS OF PRESSURE

- HOUSING TRENDS – Location of Residential Development



Source: Bethlehem Building Department



# GOALS

**Goal 1:** Foster communication between farmers and non-farming community to encourage and support the existence of the agricultural industry within the Town.

**Goal 2:** Encourage flexible town policies and regulations that are supportive of agriculture.

**Goal 3:** Assist and support in resolving issues causing adverse impacts on agriculture and farmland.

**Goal 4:** Support economic opportunities for farms and businesses that complement agriculture.

**Goal 5:** Provide voluntary incentives for agricultural landowners to continue agricultural activities.



# RECOMMENDATIONS – SHORT TERM

- Develop and Adopt a Town of Bethlehem 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.
- Create a town farm guide to help promote agriculture as a land use and business.
- 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.
- 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



# NEXT STEPS

- Written Comments by Tuesday, August 9 to:  
Email: [rleslie@townofbethlehem.org](mailto:rleslie@townofbethlehem.org)  
Mail: 445 Delaware Avenue, Delmar NY 12054
- August 17 Agriculture and Farmland Committee Meeting
  - Town Hall Room 107 (7:00 PM)
  - Discuss Comments from Public Meeting
  - Update Plan (as necessary)
- Submit/Present Plan to Albany County Agricultural and Farmland Protection Board (September 9, 2009 Meeting)
- Submit/Present Plan to Town Board (early Fall)
- Visit [www.townofbethlehem.org](http://www.townofbethlehem.org) for status of the Plan

