

A. INTRODUCTION

This chapter examines the potential for significant adverse impacts on agricultural resources from the proposed project. The proposed Four Season at Hamptonburgh project will be located in an area that is largely characterized by low-density residential and agricultural land uses as well as several commercial and industrial uses. The project site is located within the Town of Hamptonburgh in Orange County Agricultural District No. 1. The immediate study area, including the project site, includes currently operating farms which contribute to the Town and the County's economy, provide livelihoods for local residents, and add to the area's rural character and attractiveness. The Applicant recognizes the value of these factors to the local and regional economies, as well as to the success of the proposed project.

B. EXISTING CONDITIONS

According to the 1997 Census of Agriculture, Orange County had 624 farmers encompassing approximately 94,771 acres, or approximately 18% of the County's 522,000 acre land base. In the preceding decade, from 1989 to 1999, Orange County had lost 165 farms comprising approximately 20,000 acres. The County's 2003 Comprehensive Plan predicts that the conversion of farmland to residential and commercial uses will continue in the future.

According to the *Orange County Agricultural Economic Development Strategy* of 2004, dairy farms have historically dominated Orange County's agricultural base. Since the 1980s, the dairy sector has declined rapidly, with farm conversion to vegetable and nursery-related products. Vegetable farming now represents approximately 40 percent of the County's agricultural output. This transformation to high-value crops has actually increased the value of the County's agricultural production despite a loss of nearly 20 percent of the County's farmland during the same period. Echoing the loss of dairy farms, the number of horse farms has also declined from 196 farms in 1987 to 137 in 1997, a 31 percent decline. The value of horse farming in Orange County, however, has decreased by 76 percent during this period, as compared to a 39 percent reduction in cattle sales.

Farming and farmland have been in transition throughout the northeast region. The number of farms in Orange County fell by 17% from 1987 to 2001, with most of the decline occurring from 1987 to 1997. At the same time, farm acreage declined by 20 percent. Farm size, as measured by average acreage per farm, declined modestly from 135 acres per farm to 129 acres per farm from 1987 to 2001.

PROJECT SITE

The majority of the project site was used for agricultural purposes from as early as 1940. Currently, portions of the project site are tenant-occupied and are used as horse farms and

Four Seasons at Hamptonburgh

pasture. Approximately 70 percent of the project site consists of pasture land, with the remainder being undeveloped woodland.

STUDY AREA

The adjoining properties within the one-half mile study area radius primary functions are for parkland, agriculture and residential use.

Several farm operations exist in the study area that include crop farm and horse farm operations. Information was obtained from tax parcel data from the Town of Montgomery and the Town of Hamptonburgh. Parcels identified for agricultural use in the study area are listed in Table 3.16-1, including portions of four tax parcels located in the Town of Montgomery to the north and west of the project site. See Figure 3.16-1 for locations of agricultural operations in the vicinity project site. These parcels include several horse farms located to the west and north of the project site. To the east of the project site, there are several small family farms, as well as several farms engaged in small-scale crop production, including corn and vegetables, as well as flowers.

There are several parcels of vacant land in the study area that may also be utilized for agricultural use, including horse farming pasture land. Morning Star Acres, a farm operating adjacent and south of the project site, is utilized for this purpose.

**Table 3.16-1
Agricultural Resources in the Study Area**

Tax Parcel	Town	Acreage	Location
1-1-5	Hamptonburgh	138.21	east of the project site
1-1-6	Hamptonburgh	76.97	east of the project site
1-1-17.2	Hamptonburgh	120.07	west of the project site
1-1-20.2	Hamptonburgh	80.34	adjacent and west of the project site
35-1-24	Montgomery	25.6	West of project site
35-1-20	Montgomery	2.1	West of project site
36-1-22.3	Montgomery	50.13	Northeast of project site
36-1-4.1	Montgomery	17.77	Northeast of project site
Sources: Town of Hamptonburgh and Town of Montgomery Tax Assessors' Offices, 2005			

C. THE FUTURE WITHOUT THE PROPOSED PROJECT

PROJECT SITE

The future without the proposed project represents the projected future conditions of agriculture on the site and in the immediate area in 2008 (build year). It is anticipated that the project site would remain undeveloped and in its current uses in the near future. As discussed in Chapter 3.1, “Land Use, Zoning and Public Policy,” the zoning classification of the site is R4-A, which allows a number of different uses, including residential. This classification is anticipated to remain in place in the foreseeable future, enabling residential development to occur.

While it is anticipated that the site’s current uses would continue in the near future, as reported in the 2004 *Orange County Agricultural Economic Strategy*, the livestock industry, including horse-related sectors, throughout Orange County has experienced significant declines over the past several decades, and the horse industry is noted to be stagnant or declining. Further, a market for residential development has created a demand for new homes in Orange County and within the I-84 corridor. It is therefore likely that portions of the site would be subject to residential development at some point in the future.

STUDY AREA

Agricultural lands throughout the study area and across Orange County are generally considered vulnerable to conversion to residential and commercial uses. Although public policies expressed in the Town’s Comprehensive Plan, the Town’s Zoning Code, and various County documents, including the Agricultural Economic Strategy cited above and County Agricultural Plan, encourage the protection and continued farm use of agricultural lands, the trend in agricultural land conversion is expected to continue. The agricultural land within the study area is predominately zoned for residential use.

D. POTENTIAL IMPACTS OF THE PROPOSED PROJECT

ON-SITE IMPACTS

The proposed project will be constructed, in part, on land that is or has historically been used for agricultural purposes. The proposed project will be constructed on land currently occupied by a tenant and used as a horse farm. As a result of the project, the existing barns, paddocks, and outbuildings, would be removed, however, the main farmhouse on Lazy Lane could potentially remain for incorporation into the proposed development as an amenity building. In addition, the fields adjacent to Lazy Lane would be modified to accommodate new residential development (See Chapter 3.5, “Topography and Soils”).

The termination of the tenant-operated horse farm operation is not considered to represent a significant adverse impact on the County’s agricultural base. As reported in the 2004 *Orange County Agricultural Economic Strategy*, the livestock industry, including horse-related sectors, throughout Orange County has experienced significant declines over the past several decades, and the horse industry is noted to be stagnant or declining. According the 2004 *Economic Strategy* report, 135 horse farms exist in Orange County horse farm inventory. In addition, the Town of Hamptonburgh has an agricultural land base comprising of 5,391 acres. Therefore, the closure of this tenant-operated horse farm would not result in a significant adverse impact to the Town’s or the County’s agricultural base.

Four Seasons at Hamptonburgh

Although the proposed project would result in the permanent closure of one horse farm operation, the proposed project would avoid disturbance of open space and a majority of the site's open fields and meadows. Further, the extensive and scenic meadow and pasture areas comprising Parcel B, located immediately adjacent to NYS Route 416, will remain open and undeveloped. Pursuant to the terms of the proposed Special Use Permit (See Chapter 3.1, "Land Use, Zoning and Public Policy"), the development rights otherwise available on these open agricultural lands will be utilized in the determination of the number of housing units of the proposed project. The use of the acreage of the open lands in this determination renders the open lands development-restricted, and thereby will be protected from future development. The open land, including the protected farmland and the existing farmstead structures on Parcel B will be incorporated into the commonly-held open space. This open space will be retained in ownership by the homeowner's association of the proposed project.

In view of the proposed project's avoidance of a substantial portion of the site's existing agricultural lands, and despite the closure of one tenant-operated horse farm, the proposed project will have no significant adverse impact on the agricultural land base or agricultural economy.

OFF-SITE IMPACTS

As discussed above, several farms operate in the immediate vicinity of the project site.

To a large degree, these farms rely on the same road network that would serve the Four Seasons at Hamptonburgh residential development. Consequently, the possibility exists that traffic generated by the proposed project might conflict with the movement of slow moving farm vehicles and trucks serving the area farms. This is not expected to be a significant or adverse impact because farm traffic in the area is light and generally occurs outside of the normal peak hour traffic.

E. MITIGATION

Although a portion of the sites agricultural land will be permanently converted for residential uses, no significant adverse impacts to the area's agricultural base and economy are anticipated and therefore no mitigation will be required.