

4/28/05 SADC Meeting Highlights

Funding News

The SADC approved an appropriations request of nearly \$141.7 million – including \$15 million specifically targeted for acquisitions in the Highlands. The Garden State Preservation Trust is expected to consider the funding request at its May 11th meeting.

USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service notified the SADC that it will receive \$4.2 million under the federal Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program. The funds will be targeted for use in the Highlands preservation region, for military installation buffers, environmentally sensitive areas and for preservation of farmland where impervious cover limits are compatible with other land uses in those areas.

Highlands Definition of a Farmer

The SADC reviewed a revised draft of a farmer definition and directed that it be published as a formal rule proposal. The farmer definition will be used to implement the alternate appraisal valuation under the Highlands Water Protection and Planning Act. The Act provides for an alternate appraisal valuation in specific circumstances, including in cases where landowners are farmers as defined by the SADC. The alternate appraisal valuation, which would use zoning, state environmental laws and DEP regulations in effect as of January 1, 2004, would apply to the preservation of farms statewide. Once published, the proposal will be subject to a 60-day public comment period before the SADC takes any final action on adoption.

Under the proposal, a farmer is defined as “an owner of land who, during the calendar year immediately preceding submittal of a farmland preservation application, realized gross sales of agricultural or horticultural products of at least \$2,500, exclusive of any income received for rental of lands.” Governmental units or nonprofit organizations that acquire easements from farmers also would be eligible for the alternate appraisal valuation under specified conditions.

Planning Incentive Grant 2005 Round

The SADC reviewed and granted preliminary approval to 10 new project areas encompassing 402 farms covering 22,643 acres in 10 municipalities and six counties.

SADC Appraiser Handbook

The SADC discussed proposed amendments to the 2004 Appraiser Handbook and directed that the proposed changes be distributed for comment to county agriculture development board administrators, planning incentive grant municipalities and nonprofit organizations. Comments are due by May 19. The SADC expects to adopt the handbook at its next meeting on May 26th.