

PUBLIC COMMENTS SUBMITTED AT HIGHLANDS  
COUNCIL MEETING ON DECEMBER 1, 2016

Comments to Highlands Council – Public comment period December 1, 2016

Deborah Post. I own an agritourist farm in Chester Township, a town with six agritourist farms that is a fall harvest agritourist destination.

My farm has a large Highlands Act property value loss and I have not been compensated. The allocation tool shows my property lost 18 buildable lots which your municipal averages value at \$250,000 a lot. I trust you can all do that multiplication. This number is so large because my property is 95% unconstrained being in the part of Chester not originally deemed Preservation Area until Mayor Spinelli lobbied to move the line to include most of Chester.

The Highlands RMP makes a huge big deal about how tourism - agritourism in particular - is to be the panacea for economic decline in the Highlands. We all know this is a laugh, but it is a highlighted foundation of your RMP. Chester Township has opted into your RMP. Chester's mayors Spinelli and Cogger have sat on this Council. Mayor Cogger was, you recall, the councilman who authorized the Chester police to drag Hal Danielson from this room, not once but twice.

One would think that conformance means the municipality has pledged to adopt, embrace and support the goals and missions of the RMP. But not Chester Township. Agritourist farms bring excessive traffic to town on fall weekends, disrupting the routines of local residents, and putting extreme pressure on woefully inadequate road infrastructure. Mayor Cogger responds to these pressures by refusing adequately to fund the police on harvest weekends and demanding that we farmers pay for the police. As a farmer, I am asked to forfeit many millions of dollars of net worth AND pay for municipal police services in a conforming town decidedly unfriendly to farms.

In a pro se legal action, I challenged Mayor Cogger's ordinance that demanded my farm pay for police services. I actually won with the ordinance declared null and void. In the course of my oral argument I showed the court page 357 of the RMP addressing sustainable economic development as evidence that conforming Chester had a duty to support agritourism. The judge rejected my argument unless I could point to specific language in the RMP that requires conforming municipalities to maintain and manage the road infrastructure in support of agritourism. I could find no such language in your RMP.

In its revision of the RMP I ask this Council to include specific and detailed direction regarding the duties of conforming municipalities to support and enhance the RMP economic goal of a vibrant agritourism industry. In addition to traffic management, the RMP must direct municipalities to abide by the Right to Farm Act and to avoid unnecessary, burdensome and downright harassing regulations on agriculture. You've taken our net worths, at least let us farm in peace.