

Otsego County board votes to join regional land bank

- By Greg Klein The Cooperstown Crier
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Greg Klein | The Cooperstown Crier Teagen Bolin of Edmeston performs a monologue from “Twelfth Night” for the Otsego County Board of Representatives on Wednesday in Cooperstown as part of a special 4-H presentation for the board.

COOPERSTOWN — Otsego County will join a regional land bank in an effort to address blighted homes and return them to local and county tax rolls.

The county Board of Representatives voted, 10-2, at its October meeting on Wednesday, to join the Greater Mohawk Valley Land Bank Corporation. As part of the same resolution, Otsego County Representatives Meg Kennedy (R-Hartwick, Mount Vision, Milford) and Craig Gelbsman (R-city of Oneonta) will become members of the land board.

There will be seven other members of the group, which serves Fulton, Herkimer, Oneida, Otsego, Montgomery and Schoharie counties as well as the cities of Johnstown, Rome and Utica. Herkimer County Legislators Ray Johnson and Kurt Ackerman, Montgomery County Executive Karl Gustafson, Schoharie

County Administrator Steven Wilson, Rome Chief Enforcement Office Mark Domenico and Utica officials Brian Thomas and Joseph Marino will also be on the board.

Jim Powers (R-Butternuts, Morris, Pittsfield) and Keith McCarty (R-Richfield, Springfield) voted against the measure. Peter Oberacker was not at the meeting.

Powers said he did not like the idea of approving members whom he has never met.

“Most of the people on the board, I have no idea who they are,” he said. “Once you give away control, it is hard to get it back.”

Based on the state’s Land Bank Act, the Mohawk Valley Land Bank will assume deeds for blighted properties that are county-owned because of tax foreclosures. The membership is for a three-year period, at which point the county can withdraw from the group.

“Obviously we have a blight problem here,” Gelbsman said.

As part of the agreement with the land bank, the Otsego board would have to vote to approve properties being transferred to the land bank.

In other actions Wednesday, the board voted unanimously as part of a consent decree to approve a resolution proclaiming this week as National 4-H Week. Patti Zellmer, the 4-H program leader at the Cornell Cooperative Extension for Schoharie and Otsego counties, told the board that six million young people nationwide are involved in 4-H activities.

Board members were given a sample pack of locally grown food and Zellmer introduced them to local students who are active in the organization. Teagen Bolin of Edmeston performed a monologue from William Shakespeare’s “Twelfth Night,” and Charlotte, Daniel and Grace Adelman of Otego and Josh Nelson of Maryland were recognized for their successful farming businesses.

Nelson, 8, has harvested and sold 200 mini-pumpkins this fall.

The consent decree also contained a resolution asking the state legislature to reform the 911 surcharge to include a per-line charge for non-contract phones, which are currently exempt from the charge.

The representatives also heard proposals from the New York State Association of Counties and from Enterprise Fleet Management.

Bill Backus, a representative from Enterprise, told the board that the car company has been successful reducing costs and expenses and increasing revenue from municipal car fleets.

Otsego County is a good candidate for a partnership with Enterprise because the county’s fleet is aging, Backus said. About 40 percent of the fleet of the county’s vehicles have more than 100,000 miles on them and 75 percent of the vehicles have more than 50,000 miles on them.

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