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Agricultural Advisory Board

FINAL Minutes

Agricultural Advisory Board

January 8, 2019 7:00 PM CCACC (Chatham County Agriculture Conference Center)

Called to order, 7:00 pm

Present: Tandy Jones (Chair), Cathy Jones (Vice-Chair), Bobby Tucker (Secretary), Esta Cohen, Susannah Goldston (Chatham Soil and Water), Sharon Day, Terrill Ellington, Dr. J. Dykers, Ginger Cunningham (NCCES Director),

Absent: Walter Petty (BOC liaison)

1. Introduction of Guests

Tandy introduced Susannah Goldston from Chatham Soil and Water Conservation District. He also mentioned that Tenita Solanto was approved by the BOC but will be joining us at the next meeting.

2. Agenda Approval

Tandy introduced the proposed meeting agenda and solicited input. No edits were suggested.

3. Discussion/Approval of Minutes

Tandy overviewed the edits he made to the minutes after receiving from Bobby. Esta also suggested that Emily should not be noted for being absent, as her presence is not expected. The minutes with suggested edits were approved unanimously.

4. Discussion of Staff Support

Tandy reminded the group that Henry Outz had formerly retired and will no longer be the Soil and Water liaison. Susannah mentioned that his vacancy with Soil and Water has yet to be posted. Susannah offered to

join the Ag Board as the new liaison with approval from the Soil and Water Conservation District Board. Tandy mentioned the need for County staff support to help update the program changes in the proposed Voluntary Agriculture District Ordinance, including getting all existing and new VAD participants to sign a Conservation Agreement. Ginger reemphasized the commitment of Extension to support implementation of the new VAD Ordinance.

5. Update on Board Vacancies

Two existing vacancies remain on the Ag Board following Tenita's recent acceptance. Bobby mentioned that he did not solicit additional info the other Ag Board candidates following the last meeting. The group discussed the sensitivity of requesting a Schedule F form as an addendum to the existing Ag Board application. The group agreed to just ask the candidates to further describe their current role in farming, forestry, or agri-business. Tandy mentioned the idea to change the VAD regions from four to three given that that representation from the Southeast Region has been difficult to fill.

6. Update on VAD Ordinance

Ginger, Henry, Jep Rose (County Attorney), Ann Hammack (paralegal), Lunday Riggsbee (Register of Deeds), and Tandy met in December to discuss the status of the VAD Ordinance. Jep reported on his research regarding the feasibility of grandfathering the existing VAD members by creating a unique Ordinance for Chatham (i.e., one not based on State rules). However, his superiors did not concur with this approach. Tandy said that another meeting is scheduled with Jep on January 30th, and indicated that a revised Ordinance should be ready for review before the next Ag Board meeting. Tandy also noted that most of the agreements with existing VAD members have already expired (10-year contract), and thus would have to sign a new conservation agreement anyway. Tandy also confirmed that the VAD contract is with the member, not the land.

As such, the Ag Board will need to send a letter to all existing VAD members notifying them of the expiration of the previous agreement once the Ordinance is finalized and approved. Susannah presented a list of all the VAD members currently recorded. The group discussed the most efficient way to sort out members still in ownership of their original properties included in the VAD program.

Bobby mentioned the 2019 audit by the County to assess farms in the Present-Use Value (PUV), which would create an efficient opportunity to inform qualified farm and forestry owners about the VAD program.

7. Report on Meeting w/ Commissioner Hales

Bobby and Esta reported on the meeting with Diana Hales to discuss the PUV rollback tax issue and the possibility of creating a Farmland Preservation program in Chatham County. Ms. Hales agreed to request information about how the rollback taxes are currently allocated within the County budget. Ms. Hales seemed very interested in reallocating funds and/or creating a County program to help preserve farms.

8. Hall of Fame Discussion

Discussion ensued about planning for the Agriculture Hall of Fame. Terrill mentioned that he had been lining up support for the Hall of Fame and identifying potential farmers or agri-business operators that need to be included in the next class for the Ag Hall of Fame. Terrill mentioned that he has found two important sponsors to help fund the dinner, placards, etc. for the awards banquet. Tandy expressed the need to establish a timeline and budget, at a minimum. Ginger mentioned that the banquet could be held at the Ag Center, but an approved caterer would need to be utilized (cheapest per head catering she has seen is about \$13). Cathy expressed the concern of not reinitiating an elaborate event that the Ag Board is not capable of continuing. In the past, Sam Groce did most of the coordination and cooking, which is no longer possible. The group discussed alternative ideas to recognize the Hall of Fame recipients. Cathy volunteered to look for a previous Hall of Fame application to use. Terrill is going to bring a list of potential Hall of Fame candidates. Dr. Dykers agreed to gauge Sam's interest in helping host a banquet presentation if the Ag Board pursues this.

9. New Business

The next meeting is scheduled for February 12th.

Meeting adjourned at 8:49 pm.