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Agricultural Advisory Board

FINAL Minutes

Agricultural Advisory Board

May 12, 2020 7:00 PM by zoom meeting and CCACC (Chatham County Agriculture Conference Center)

Called to order, 7:09 pm

Present: Ben Shields (Chair), Cathy Jones (Vice Chair), Sharon Day, Tandy Jones, Tenita Solanto, Doug Burleson, Christopher Hart, Susannah Goldston (CSWCD Director), Ginger Cunningham (NCCES County Director) GUESTS: Emily Moose (Planning Board liaison)

Absent: Bobby Tucker (Secretary), Sarah Justice, Andy Wilkie (BOC liaison),

1. Review and Adoption of Electronic Meetings Rules of Procedure

Ben and Susannah summarized the “Chatham County Advisory Committee Rules of Procedure for Electronic Meetings During States of Emergency” that was adopted by the Chatham County Commissioners on April 20th. Sharon made a motion to adopt the Procedures for use by the Agricultural Advisory Committee. Doug seconded motion. Motion passed unanimously.

2. Agenda Review and Approval

Susannah suggested amending agenda to include item discussing upcoming Board Member terms. Item was added before New Business. No other changes to the agenda were motioned and the agenda was approved unanimously.

3. Review and Approval of Minutes

Ben reviewed the January 2020 the November minutes. No edits were suggested. Sharon made motion to approve. Doug seconded motion. The minutes were approved unanimously.

4. COVID-19 response and updates

Susannah discussed SWCD, NRCS and FSA agency response and how it affects day-to-day business. Customers must contact agencies ahead and not drop in for service, to reduce unnecessary close contact. Some state deadlines for permits and reporting have been postponed. Resources for animal operations with COVID related management needs are being provided. Ben discussed his farm's operation adjustments to more online ordering and paying, more safety measures, more labor intensive but business is doing very well at the markets. Sharon says her business has been steady, more safety measures in place to reduce close contact with customers. Tandy discussed his cow/calf operation. Sold calves earlier and at lower prices than last year in order to get product out in case of market disruption. Ginger discussed Extension Service. They are closed to public, volunteer programs paused, summer camps have been cancelled. Staff is working on online programming and field support for farmers. Local Cattle Alliance was able to sell calves to a South Carolina market. Extension has masks to distribute to the ag community if needed.

5. Report on Food Policy Joint Committee

Ben and Tandy had no updates to report. Committee inactive since COVID. Susannah confirmed county will be looking for budget savings next year, program expansions not likely. Ginger confirmed that future Article 46 sales tax revenues will likely be used to make up for revenue losses due to COVID and directed to school system.

6. VAD Updates

Susannah provided an update regarding Siler City ETJ VAD. Siler City had historically allowed VAD program within the ETJ and in November 2019, passed a resolution to update their 2002 resolution addressing the newly revised county VAD Ordinance. County Attorney had concerns that a resolution was not adequate to address potential conflicts within zoning restrictions, for example signage. In January, Susannah met with Jack Meadows, Planning Director of Siler City, to discuss potential conflict. Jack reassured us that there were no restrictions to agriculture in the Siler ETJ and no restrictions to the size and purpose (agriculture) of the VAD signs. DOT right-of-way restrictions to signage does apply, as with the rest of the county. After consulting with the Town of Siler City, Susannah recommended to the AAB that VAD applications for property within the Siler City ETJ continue to be included in the program.

Susannah presented a batch of VAD applicants, including eligible Siler City ETJ applications. This batch included 19 applications comprising 53 parcels with 1,553.6 eligible acres. Tandy made a motion to approve the batch of eligible application, including the Siler City ETJ applications. Sharon seconded the motion and the batch was approved unanimously. The VAD program now has 9,997.6 acres enrolled.

Discussion on next steps of VAD program outreach. Susannah mentioned that she could access mailing address of all PUV parcels however, that would be an expensive mailing and would need to be broken into smaller mailings. Tandy recommended that before doing that, we send out a second letter inviting previous participants that have not responded to the first letter. We will also write and disseminate a news article to highlight program and invite participants.

7. Upcoming Board Term Expirations and Vacancies

Four Board members' terms expire June 1st. Tandy Jones will complete a 4th term comprising 12 years of service on the Board. Tandy will not be re-appointed, leaving one vacancy. Bobby will be completing his second term, Cathy her third, and Tenita her 1st term – all of whom expressed interest in being being-reappointed. The board approved unanimously re-appointing Bobby and Cathy for another 3-year term and re-appointing Tenita for a special 1-year term to align terms to a 3 year cycle, appointing 3 members at a time. This will bring the term appointment schedule to follow the structure set up in the Ordinance.

Ben discussed officer positions and asked for volunteers for officers. Discussion was that Ben could fill the Secretary position, Bobby could move to Chair and Cathy continue as Vice Chair. Open to other volunteers or suggestions. No vote on next year's officers at this time.

8. New Business

No new business

The next meeting is scheduled for June 9th.

Meeting adjourned at 8:00 pm.