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Agricultural Advisory Board

DRAFT Minutes

Agricultural Advisory Board

March 9, 2021 7:00 PM CCACC (Chatham County Agriculture Conference Center) & Zoom
remote video

Called to order, 7:04 pm

Present: Bobby Tucker (Chair), Cathy Jones (Vice Chair), Ginger Cunningham (NCCES County Director), Sharon Day, Chris Hart, Ben Shields (Secretary), Emily Moose (Planning Board liaison), Tenita Solanto, Jeanette Beranger, Jeff Vaughan, Brandy Oldham (CC Soil & Water Conservation District)

Absent: Susannah Goldston (CC Soil & Water Conservation District), Jim Crawford (BOC liaison)

1. Approval of Agenda

Sharon motioned to approve the agenda, Tenita seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

2. Review of Minutes from January meeting

In her January Planning Board Update, Emily said she did not use the word regolith, perhaps topsoil. Noted by Ben. Ben moved to approve the minutes, Cathy seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

3. Planning Board Update

Emily shared that there is an agricultural land adjacent development under the Planning Boards consideration with stream crossings, the maximum number of lots per area and 15 wells. Emily noted there is a lot of concern among the Planning Board and community about the developments environmental impact.

The Well Subcommittee's most recent meeting was given a presentation by Susannah Goldston on the work of the Water and Soil District. Would we like to be given the same presentation? The group gave a resounding yes so Bobby will ask Susannah to present to the Ag Board at a future meeting.

Bobby asked if the Land Use Plan (UDO?) is used by the Planning Board to guide decisions? Emily answered yes. Sharon asked what options do folks have if their plans are rejected by the Planning Board? Emily replied that Planning Board recommendations are just recommendations, but final approval is up to the Board of Commissioners. Jeff commented that he has been in situations where the Planning Board and BoC are in agreement, sometimes not.

4. Update on VAD applications

Brandy shared that there are a few applications up for approval. The first is a 61 acre poultry and cattle operation and the second is 41.5 acres with horses, timber and some poultry. Both applicant parcels are eligible to participate in VAD. Bobby asked if the Ag Board can get these updates in writing before future meetings? Bobby motioned to approve this, Sharon seconded the motion, it passed unanimously.

Brandy said there is a third application under review and that she expects it to be ready for approval at the next Ag Board meeting. Jeanette asked how are we promoting VAD? Brandy responded that it is on the county Soil & Water District website, that they are reaching out to former participants by mail and advertising in local papers one time a year. Ginger responded that the updated Ag Board by-laws were posted to the county website this past fall with a short promotional video, produced by the Extension Service but all this data was lost in the county's 2020 cyber-attack. Ginger continued that perhaps Soil & Water and Extension can put together a Spring publicity campaign with the county information officer who can help publicize the effort. She expects to use social media to reach unconventional land owners and that there is money in the current budget for mailing letters to past participants. Sharon asked what the enrollment rate is compared to the previous VAD program and Ginger responded the acreage is around 10,000 currently, about a third comparatively.

5. Review of draft letter to PUV landowners for VAD invitation

Brandy shared how Soil & Water District is working with the Planning Department to access the 2200 land owners currently enrolled in the PUV program and are eligible to be in the VAD program. They are starting by sending out 200 letters this week with VAD applications with the goal of keeping the work manageable.

Brandy then read the letter out loud to the committee. Sharon asked why the letter included a May 31st deadline? Brandy responded it is in place to try to manage the number of replies at a manageable level and not overwhelm staff. Cathy asked why have a deadline and not keep it open ended? Cathy then asked Brandy to read the end of the letter again to better understand the ability of the landowner to revoke their participation in VAD at anytime? Cathy suggested there be more specific language. Ginger asked could we use an online application? Brandy replied that it is up and running. Bobby asked Brandy to share the letter with the Ag Board and Brandy replied that she will share by email.

6. Update on Phase II development of the Ag Center

Ginger shared how the county is now taking Requests For Proposals (RFP) for a feasibility study on the Phase II Development at the Chatham County Ag Center. The RFP was issued in February and proposals are due March 25th to the Chatham County Finance Office. The county is looking for assistance with studying the feasibility of such a project. Phase II construction will be on the 100 acres northwest of the current building and may include an arena, outdoor covered space, concessions and trailer hookups. Ginger noted how this could help showcase agriculture in Chatham County and would be an asset to agencies in and around the area.

Bobby asked if the study will include any formal stakeholder input? Ginger replied it will be duty of the contractor conducting the feasibility study to include stakeholder input. She expects the Ag Board and other community members to have input. Jeanette noted she is excited that such an expansion will help the community by raising awareness of agriculture as land development pressure and sprawl put pressure of the future of farming.

7. Update on expansion budget request for Farmland Preservation Plan and Cost of Community Services Study

Ginger shared how she presented to the BoC at their annual budget retreat on why the FPP and CCS study is needed. Actionable steps included in the previous FPP were not brought to fruition for various reasons. 2 professors from Mount Olive College have been hired to help this effort though much of their work was lost to the 2020 cyber-attack but some was recovered and is being pieced back together. The basis of the study is to broaden and deepen the goals specific to Chatham County agricultural and the county is looking to address the urban rural divide. The old plan did not help with decisions and planning because the data and action items were not specific enough to Chatham County and the county wants to take a proactive focus on the new plan. Ginger noted how hopeful she is in that the professors are a big help and that the BoC members seem receptive to the need for and cost of the study. Ginger noted funds will hopefully be allocated during the end of the budgetary process in August.

Bobby shared how impressed he is with the scope of the new study and that the old FPP was weak and had no teeth. Ginger noted how the Cost of Community Services study is a study of county income and spending. Jeanette asked if the study will include agri-tourism, to which Ginger replied it will include all ag sector activities.

8. Review of Cattle Proclamation

Cathy noted how she enjoyed reading the cattle proclamation. Bobby thanked Jeanette for drafting the proclamation, Extension Agent Kristina Britt for statistics, and his wife Bronwyn for editing. Bobby then asked who might have the proclamation? Ginger said Lindsay Ray, the clerk to the BoC had it and that she will pass on any final edits. Bobby then asked why was it sent to Mr. Ray and the BoC when it is not finished? Ginger replied that it was sent along without knowledge of needed edits.

Jeanette commented how it will connect the community with farmers, thereby helping create new markets for direct meat sales. She thanked the Ag board for this opportunity and how exciting and unique Chatham County is.

Bobby suggested that the draft was shared with the BoC too soon without approval from the Ag Board. Jeanette commented on how the intent is to celebrate diversity in cattle. Cathy mentioned how Jim Crawford is a county commissioner and our BoC liaison. Bobby commented how it should not have been sent without approval. Ginger replied how she understands Bobby's concern and that the Extension staff regularly pass along draft documents to the BoC Clerk Mr. Ray weekly. Ginger continued that it was shared as a head up to the clerk Mr. Ray and BoC liaison Mr. Crawford, not as a final document. Jeanette commented she just wants folks to be excited about cattle. Bobby said he wanted to include web links in the proclamation and forward it to the BoC with Ag Board approval. Jeanette asked what is the next step? Bobby replied Ag Board members should send him their comments and he will then send it back out for review, then the Ag Board will vote on it and submit it to Mr. Ray for BoC approval.

9. New Business

Bobby shared how he will try to have the head of the Chatham County Livestock Association present on their activities at a future meeting.

10. Next Meeting

The next meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, May 11th at 7 pm.

Cathy motioned to adjourn; Sharon seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Meeting adjourned at 8:20 pm.