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Agricultural Advisory Board

FINAL Minutes

Agricultural Advisory Board

May 11, 2021 7:00 PM CCACC (Chatham County Agriculture Conference Center) & Zoom
remote video

Called to order, 7:05 pm

Present: 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), Susannah Goldston (CC Soil & Water Conservation District)

Absent: Bobby Tucker (Chair), Jim Crawford (BOC liaison)

1. Introduction of Guests

Cathy chaired the meeting as Bobby had tendered his immediate resignation by email on April 27th. Cathy noted how there were no guests to introduce because Caroline Siverson and Clyde Frazier from the Planning Board postponed their presentation.

2. Approval of Agenda

Susannah reminded the board the current terms of Sharon, Tenita and Chris will end on June 30th and that she needs to notify the BoC if they wished to be re-appointed for another term. Ben motioned to approve the agenda, Sharon seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

3. Planning Board Subdivision Well Subcommittee presentation

Sharon shared that the Subdivision Well Subcommittee has met regularly since fall of 2020 with many guest speakers such as lawyers, well drillers, county staff and state hydro-geologists. The subcommittee has been gathering lots of information and is now asking for input from various community stakeholders. Sharon mentioned how the lawyer expressed skepticism of establishing county regulations for wells and water due to established property rights. She also mentioned how little is actually known about ground water and how variable the county geology is and how that affects water quantities in wells. Caroline Siverson and Clyde Frazier are spearheading the subcommittee and want to meet with the Ag Board in June to present findings and ask for input as they are planning to present to the BoC in July.

Jeanette asked if the sub-committee was addressing PFAS and water quality issues? Sharon replied that the subcommittee was tasked with addressing water quantity, not quality. Sharon then suggested that subdivisions should perhaps be required to use community wells. Ben suggested the board set a June meeting to meet with Caroline and Clyde.

4. Planning Board Update

Emily shared that she will be resigning from the Planning Board as she has picked up greater responsibilities at work. She will no longer be the Planning Board Liaison to the Ag Board but will stay on until they find a suitable replacement. She urged the Ag Board to not give up on the well water issue because agriculture is central to Chatham County. Emily encouraged the board

members to remember our voice is important and to be proactive in developing county policy. Many board members thanked Emily for her service.

5. Review of Election of Officers

Cathy asked for a volunteer to take over as Chair as Bobby resigned in April and nobody volunteered. Sharon suggested a rotating Chair and then Susannah read the Ag Board by-laws regarding election of Chair. The chair must be elected at the first meeting of each year. Cathy again asked for a volunteer and Tenita said she would accept for the rest of the current term. Cathy motioned to elect Tenita as Chair, Sharon seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously. Susannah then asked if Tenita would like to Chair the next term starting July 1 and Tenita said yes.

6. Review of minutes from March 9th

Cathy asked for Ginger to share the minutes on the screen and the board reviewed the minutes. Nobody suggested any edits so Tenita motioned to approve the minutes and Chris seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

7. Voluntary Agricultural District update

Susannah shared how there was nothing to update as there were no pending approvals though there will likely be a larger dairy farm to approve at the next meeting. She said her staff was still working on a direct mail letter to folks participating in the county PUV program. Cathy asked why there were no applicants and Susannah responded there had been no recent publicity for VAD and she expects to share the letter for approval at the next meeting.

8. Ag Center RFP & Cost of Services Study Update

Ginger shared how the County is close to securing a consultant to administer the Ag Center Phase 2 feasibility study and will update the Ag Board at the next meeting. She said the consultants will be asking the Ag Board for feedback.

Ginger then shared how the county will be funding the new Cost of Services study, how they are now waiting for the professors to determine specifics and that she expects it will be moving ahead soon.

9. Cattle Proclamation update

Jeanette shared how the proclamation was out of her hands and had not heard back from Bobby and had no information on it. She mentioned how she wrote an article on cattle history for Grit magazine and how this is an important opportunity. Jeanette then asked how can we proactive and can we promote beef as the Ag Board? Cathy responded that we serve at the pleasure of the BoC and it may not be appropriate to promote just one part of the county ag sector. Ginger said the formal proclamation had not yet been passed on to the BoC and Tenita mentioned the Ag Board had held it back for revisions. Ginger reminded folks the board needs to approve it and then send it to the BoC. Sharon then asked if the proclamation was out of bounds for the Ag Board, to which Ginger responded that the appointed board members have the ability to speak for and advocate for agriculture.

Ben mentioned Bobby had requested revising the proclamation and to not approve it at the last meeting. Cathy then read section 8 of the March 9th minutes regarding the Cattle Proclamation. Sharon asked Jeanette if she had the latest copy to which Jeanette said yes. Chris asked if there was a deadline? Cathy suggested and Jeanette agreed to seek edits from the Ag Board members by email with a deadline of Friday, May 14th . Members were asked if replying to reply all and that not replying with edits was explicit approval and that Jeanette then was to send the final approved version to Jim Crawford and the BoC.

10. New Business

Susannah suggested there be an abbreviated meeting on June 8th to meet with the Planning Board Well Subcommittee members and to elect officers. She then asked Chris, Tenita and Sharon if they wanted to be re-appointed to new terms come July 1st? They all said yes.

Susannah then said the board should vote on these re-appointments in June and she will then send them to the BoC. Cathy motioned to approve the re-appointments now and Jeff Seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Susannah then mentioned that Bobby's resignation leaves a seat vacant and that the county will need to advertise the vacancy. She then asked if we should focus on finding a member from the northwest quadrant of the county, which Bobby represented, or the under-represented southeast quadrant? Sharon said there are no farms in the southeast quadrant and then asked when was Bobby's term over? Susannah replied 2023. Sharon and Chris asked if we could tap a former applicant? Folks replied they wanted to follow protocol and take new applications.

11. Next Meeting

Cathy suggested starting meetings at 7:30 because she and Ben attend the Fearington Farmer's Market which ends at 6pm and it is hard for them to show up on time. Tenita suggested meeting on a different day. It was agreed to keep meetings at 7pm on Tuesdays.

Ben motioned to meet Tuesday, June 8th at 7 pm, Cathy seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

The next meeting is June 8th at 7:00 pm.

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

Meeting adjourned at 8:03 pm.