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Agricultural Advisory Board

DRAFT Minutes

Agricultural Advisory Board

May 9, 2023 | ZOOM Virtual Meeting

1. Amy Fulford called the meeting to order at 7:17 p.m.
2. **Roll Call**
 - a. Present: Amy Fulford, Diana May, Dr. John Dykers, Sharon Day, Dave Eskelund, Jeff Vaughn
 - b. Absent: Tenita Solanto, Cathy Jones, Christ Hart
 - c. Others Present: Ginger Cunningham (Cooperative Extension), Susannah Goldston (SWCD)
3. **Approval of Minutes**
 - a. Minutes from December 2022 and March 2023 are not available.
4. **Board Member Terms**
 - a. Susannah reported that terms end for 3 board members at end June. Members can be reappointed at end of term. Three people whose terms expire in June are Cathy, Jeff, and Amy. Susannah asked them to consider if they would like to be reappointed. We need to know so we can advertise vacancies. Amy and Jeff agreed to continue.
 - b. John Dykers motioned to reappoint Amy and Jeff. Sharon seconded. Motion passed unanimously. New 3-year terms for these members start on July 1.
5. **Farmland Preservation Updates**
 - a. Susannah gave updates on Farmland Preservation Plan. We have requested a farmland preservation coordinator in next year's budget. This request will go before the commissioners. Funding will be taken from earmarked farmland preservation fund. Ginger thanked SWCD for putting forward the request. Susannah is working on a job description. This position will be responsible for coordinating the Agricultural Advisory Board as well as other tasks identified in the Farmland Preservation Plan. The board will decide in May. If approved, the job should be posted July 1.
 - b. Susannah and Ginger have been working with the Mt. Olive University consultants to make progress on the Farmland Preservation Plan. Goal is to finish the plan by next December or January. Ginger reported that the consultants will want to speak to the Agricultural Advisory Board members at some point before the end of

summer. We are still collecting survey data. She asked for members to help distribute surveys with public. Susannah said members of the Board will get to talk to the consultants directly.

- c. The group discussed the role of the Agribusiness Council and recommended that a representative be invited to attend an upcoming meeting. Ginger volunteered to connect Tenita with Cindy (?), their secretary, to arrange a future meeting.
- d. Susannah reported that the SWCD and Extension Service want to launch a pilot program for the Agricultural Preservation Trust Fund. They have created a draft for the first-year pilot program to fund matching conservation easement purchases that would be held by an eligible land trust entity. This program would be in conjunction with the N.C. Department of Agriculture's Agricultural Development and Farmland Preservation grant program, or similar grant funding available through NRCS. Conservation easements would have to use the ADFP easement language to qualify for the state funds. The other program would be organizational support for these land conservation entities. This would encourage these organizations to focus work in Chatham County. Susannah recommends dedicating about \$600,000 toward the easement program and \$75,000 for organizational support. Susannah said we think we will get another \$500,000 for farmland preservation trust fund designated in the fall. We hope to do a couple of good farmland preservation projects this year. The Board will be responsible for reviewing the applications and rankings to recommend approved projects to the County Commissioners. Susannah asked members to contact her if they have any additional questions about the proposed program.

6. VAD Updates

- a. Susannah announced we have 4 applications encompassing 12 separate parcels and 318 acres of eligible farmland for consideration for the VAD program. The information was distributed prior to the meeting. All the recommended parcels met the eligibility criteria. Sharon moved to accept the applications for the VAD. Motion seconded by Dr. Dykers and approved unanimously.
- b. Susannah announced the GIS system can not currently show the VAD parcels due to a system upgrade. They will be included on the GIS system as soon as the upgrade is completed.

7. New Business

- a. Susannah announced the County Commissioners would like an Ag Advisory Board update at the county commission meeting of June 20th. The Board hasn't given an update for the County Commissioners since 2020. Staff can help you update a program for the board, but it needs to be submitted to the Board by Jun 5th. The chair would typically give the presentation although Tenita was not sure she would be able to attend the meeting. Ginger said the updates are typically given during the work session at 2 or 3 in the afternoon. Amy Fulford volunteered to give the presentation. Susannah said it could be more than one person. Tenita suggested we decide on the speaker once the date and time is confirmed. Amy asked to see the older presentation. Ginger said she would distribute it. Susannah agreed to check to see if the presentation could be rescheduled.

8. Next Meeting

- a. Next meeting is tentatively scheduled for Tuesday, August 8. Sharon suggested a June meeting if we are giving the presentation. Dr. Dykers suggested the presenters meet earlier to prepare for the Board meeting, but the board could meet as scheduled on August 8. By consensus, the Board agreed to meet on August 8 and prepare the presentation by email or an ad hoc meeting if necessary. Diana also agreed to help with the County Commission presentation.
- b. Sharon asked to add the discussion of the water surveys at the next meeting.

9. Adjournment

- a. Sharon made a motion to adjourn. Seconded by John and approved unanimously. Meeting adjourned at 8:29 pm.