

Agricultural Advisory Committee
April 21, 2015

Attendees: Michele Cropp, Linda Lewis, Doug Lechliger, Eddie Kuhlman, Tim McGrath, David Weitzer, Chuck Schuster, Ben Allnutt, Jane Evans, Debbie Benson, Paula Linthicum, Aliza Fishbein

Staff: Jeremy Criss

Guests: Patrick Jamison, Lonnie Luther, Robert Butz

1. Introductions

With guests present, brief introductions were made.

Patrick Jamison is in attendance today, and will be the replacement for Tim McGrath, as his term expired in December. Robert Butz is the Vice Chair of the Montgomery Soil Conservation District. Charlotte McGehee has moved to DC and Jim Frasier has been asked to apply to replace her. Aliza volunteered to take over as secretary for the Committee. Jeremy Criss thanked Aliza for helping him as the new secretary of the AAC.

2. Approval of the AAC Minutes from the March 17, 2015 meeting.

The minutes from the March 17, 2015 meeting were approved as written.

3. Pesticide Legislation Bill 52-14 (Leventhal, Floreen, Reimer, Navarro, and Elrich). T&E Committee Work Sessions were held on March 16 and 30, 2015. George Leventhal said that during his remaining 3 years on the Council agriculture will not be impacted by the Pesticide Prohibition and Marc Elrich responded that agriculture will be discussed next.

MDA has recently begun sending out letters to famers in the County reminding them there they must comply with the noxious weed control requirement. It was brought to the attention of the Committee that there is thistle growing in front of the very County owned building that the Committee meets in. The AAC agreed to go on record and remind the Executive and the Council of the County's need to follow its rules for noxious weed control on its property. Jeremy Criss and David Weitzer will work on this letter.

Some of the AAC members attended the March 16, 2015 T&E committee meeting at which George Leventhal expressly said that the agriculture community would not be affected by the pesticide restrictions during the next three years while he is in office. Marc Elrich then added that agriculture would be discussed next. Members of the AAC who were in attendance of that meeting described some of the testimony that was presented to bring the rest of the Committee members up to date.

The Council will adopt its budget on May 15, and most likely will bring the pesticide bill to the full Council for consideration in mid-July. There may not be more work sessions on the bill. Discussion followed about what more the AAC can do.

The official position of the AAC is that it wants the bill withdrawn completely, but should the bill pass there should be language amended to it that exempts agricultural activities from the restrictions in perpetuity. The AAC took a voice vote and agreed to prepare that language in a letter to make the official stance known. (*Linthicum/Cropp*). This position is consistent with the positions of the Farm Bureau, APAB, MAP, and other agricultural organizations in the County. Jeremy Criss added that he is concerned that sod production may be considered part of lawn care and some may want it to fall under the restrictions even though it is clearly categorized as an agricultural activity. *Please note that since the April 21, 2015 AAC meeting the Farm Bureau asked for the AAC to hold back on the letter until further notice.*

4. **New Resource Conservationist for MSCD (Brian Taylor). James Harne has accepted the position and he will migrate from MDA to the County-MSCD in May 2015. The MDA PIN for James Harne position will not be funded and will not be eliminated. The MSCD will need to propose alternative funds to fill this MDA position. The Position was recommended in the FAME report.**

The Farming At Metro's Edge report recommended several new positions be created. James Harne has accepted one of these positions that was actually formerly held by Brian Taylor, but has not existed since 2010. Mr. Harne will vacate his State-MDA position and will continue overseeing the cover crop program once they manage some administrative obstacles. This position would augment state resources with county resources. The State-MDA PIN will be held but not funded unless the District proposes an alternative source of funds.

5. **Ag Services Navigator-Solicitation for contractor will be released Thursday, April 9, 2015 and close April 23, 2015. The Position was recommended in the FAME report.**

Since the DED is being reorganized Jeremy and his office put out an RFP on April 9th for a part time contractor to do some of the things that Kristin Fisher did. We have a lot of maintenance requests, easement inspections, and other tasks that that person would do. They would work with John Zawitoski as Kristin did. They would also take over some of the New Farmer program responsibilities.

6. **Continued Discussion on amendments to the Zoning Regulations that would allow production of Beer, Hard-Cider, and Distilled Spirits and associated tasting rooms, private events like birthday parties, Bar Mitzvahs, and weddings on farms in the AR zone as limited use accessory to farming. The AAC agreed for a Subcommittee of the AAC to be formed with industry representatives – Jessica Butts, Phil Muth, Steven Fistere, Susan Butler, Washington White, Greg Glen, Jr., etc.**

At the last AAC meeting the Committee agreed to form a subcommittee to investigate the questions about winery, brewery, and cider rules. Right now Ag Processing doesn't have consistent definitions between these three operations and the AAC would presumably request an amendment to the Code based on the subcommittee's discussion. Jeremy sent out an email to various owners of these operations in the County about whether they would like to serve on the subcommittee and he has already received

some affirmative responses. They plan to meet soon and Jeremy will report back on their discussion at upcoming AAC meetings.

- 7. MAEF Mobile Science Lab (MAEF-Trailer) built for Montgomery County and rotated to County Schools. Meeting with County Council President Leventhal was held on March 24, 2015 and he recommended the program and budget be located in DED-Ag Services. The PHED Committee work session on the DED-Ag Services budget was held on April 17, 2015. The item is recommended for the reconciliation list.**

There are currently seven mobile labs in the state of Maryland (two of each of the three types, plus one showcase “Cadillac” mobile lab). The schools love them so they are in high demand and there just aren’t enough to go around. Montgomery County would like to their own so MAEF is building one that will be specific to the County – it will be STEM compliant and will be designed in conjunction with the UMD Extension and Maryland Department of Education. The lab will cost \$61,000, which is being put into DED to supply the funding to MAEF. The MAEF will own the lab and it will be housed in Montgomery County and rotate each week between Montgomery County public elementary schools. Jeremy met with Council President Leventhal, Tom Hartsock, Caroline Taylor, Chuck Schuster, Doug Tregoning, and staff representatives from MCPS yesterday and they aim for it to be approved and built in time for the Ag Fair in August and then ready to start making school rounds at the beginning of the academic year. The cost of the mobile lab will cover transportation, the hook up, and the teacher. The only thing the schools would be responsible for is the electricity and water supplied to it. James Song is the MCPS Director of Facilities and he will be coordinating this effort. Doug Tregoning is taking this under as the agronomist and heading the management of the project. George Mayo, Executive Director of MAEF proposed it.

- 8. Farmland Preservation Update – APAB Follow up from APAB Retreat April 7, 2015**

APAB recently had a retreat and it was announced that they won’t be buying any easements in FY16, which would be the first time in the history of the program. They are putting together a presentation for FY17 biannual CIP process for OMB, the County Executive and the County Council.

AAC members asked whether APAB can throw in a line in their presentation about the pesticide bill and how it can put farms that are currently under preservation in danger. The easements that they are preserved under are in perpetuity. Jeremy will bring that request to APAB.

- 9. Future of Department of Economic Development – Agricultural Services**

David read the letter about DED reorganization, written by Sarah Miller, which will be sent to Ike Leggett on behalf of the AAC. The letter says that the AAC wants Agricultural Services to stay in the public sector. Since so much of Ag Services is to stay in compliance with state and county laws. It’s still not clear how they are planning for DED to become a public/private partnership. The Committee conducted a voice vote in support of the letter. *(Lewis/Evans)*

Jeremy put a history of agriculture programs in the County on the website so people can see how the reorganization will impact Ag Services. Jeremy and David will send the letter and history to the Executive tomorrow.

10. Farm Directory Update – AAC members – farms that are not listed

The Directory is published online and can be updated easily. Please send Melissa Steed, who works with Jeremy, any information if you need it changed or new farms listed in the Directory.

11. Additional Business

Lonnie mentioned that UMD is getting a new Dean-College of Agriculture and the MD Farm Bureau is going to recommend a candidate. Paula noted that the FB Board of Directors did vote already on a recommendation for a candidate.

12. The meeting was adjourned at 8:25 pm. (*Kuhlman/Linthicum*)