

Meeting Minutes
Agricultural Advisory Committee Meeting
July 16, 2013

Attendees: David Weitzer, Eddie Kuhlman, Tim McGrath, Jane Evans, Patrick Brown, Ben Allnutt, Robert Beall, Gary Marx, Drew Stabler, Charlotte Ruppert

Guests: Jonathan Casey (MNCPPC)

The meeting was called to order at 7:06PM.

1. Introductions:

Brief introductions were given.

2. Approval of AAC Minutes from June 18, 2013:

With minor corrections, the minutes were approved as corrected (*Beall, Kuhlman*)

3. Follow up on the County Executive Recommendation to Coordinate with the Department of Environment Protection-Water Quality Protection Fund-WQPF that is used for Storm Water Management Activities:

The Ag Advisory Committee reviewed two follow up letters regarding the April 9, 2013 Annual Meeting with the County Executive on future funding for the DED Agricultural Services Division. As suggested by the County Executive, the Ag Advisory Committee invited Bob Hoyt, Director, Department of Environmental Protection, and Steve Shofar to attend the next Ag Advisory Committee Meeting on August 20th to discuss the future source of funding for the Agricultural Services Division, which includes the Montgomery County Soil Conservation District – MSCD.

Discussion ensued over finding funding for Ag Services. Mr. McGrath cautioned that relying too heavily on the Ag Transfer Tax for income could be problematic. Development will continue despite a tough economic environment. Developers have trouble finding cash to keep new projects afloat. New regulations regarding impervious surfaces and septic regulations (BAT requirements) will make development even more difficult. During the discussion, it was noted that impact fees and sprinkler systems are additional obstacles for developers. Mr. Criss responded that we should not rely solely on the Ag Transfer Tax. The limited collections might provide sufficient income to push our deficit out a year or two.

Though difficult, new development is still happening despite the hurdles mentioned above. Development of the Crown Farm, a former TDR receiving area, will result in Agricultural Services receiving 2 million dollars. One million has already been received while an additional million will be collected in September. As the economy begins to turn around, we can expect new development to increase.

The first draft of the Ag Services Capital budget won't be submitted until September 5th. The proposed plan for the FY15 budget will consist of a request from the DEP for a

portion of the Water Quality Protection Fund (WQPF) to be allocated to the MSCD. This request will involve a submission of a future fiscal impact to the Office of Management and Budget.

4. AAC response letter to the County Executive regarding the Comcast Cable Franchise Agreement.

The Ag Advisory Committee reviewed a letter submitted to the County Executive from Councilmember Roger Berliner regarding current negotiations with COMCAST to write a new cable franchise agreement. On behalf of the farming community, Councilmember Berliner expressed the need for better technology and better access to high-speed broadband services in agricultural areas of the county. The AAC wrote an additional letter to the County Executive expressing support of Councilmember Berliner's recommendation to incorporate the ag community in the negotiations of a new cable franchise agreement. In response to both Roger Berliner's letter and the letter from the AAC, County Executive Isiah Leggett offered support. A tentative meeting was scheduled with the COMCAST representatives and the County Cable Administrator in July to discuss the details of the cable agreement. Mr. Criss has been in contact with Mitsi Herrera, the County Cable Administrator for FIOS and X-Finity. Ms. Herrera is using the database of agriculturally assessed properties by zone to help identify the current need-potential demand for cable service. Of the assessed 4000 estimated accounts, 2500 have already been improved. The current agreement is for Verizon to provide services (FIOS and X-Finity) for 270 East while COMCAST is to provide services for 270 West.

5. AAC thank you letter to Jane Seigler for representing the agricultural community on the Zoning Advisory Panel – Zoning Ordinance Revisions

The AAC reviewed a letter that was sent to Jane Seigler thanking her for her involvement throughout the Zoning Rewrite process. As part of the Zoning Advisory Panel, she helped insure the interests of farmers were incorporated into the recommendations adopted by the Planning Staff and the Planning Board.

6. Update on the Zoning Ordinance Revisions – ZTA13-04 – Discussions from the June and July PHED Committee Work sessions

The farming community continues to advocate for a definition of farming that does not limit the agricultural industry's ability to function competitively. Specifically, the AAC would like to see the words, "in Montgomery and adjacent counties" deleted from the definition. Mr. Weitzer advocated for their deletion in a June 11th letter to Council President Nancy Navarro. He also attended the public hearing to give testimony on this subject.

In the current draft of the Zoning Code, smaller sized lots, Child Lots are incentivized. What is not clear in the current draft of the code, is that the Planning Board can approve larger sized lots if the property owner is working in good faith to reduce the size of the lot. Mr. Stabler cautioned that if you leave the approval to the discretion of the planning board, approval may be more difficult than if it was explicitly spelled out in the code.

As of now, the Planning Board has rejected the definition of Ag. Education and Ag tourism as part of the current draft of the code. Mr. Weitzer raised the issue again with the PHED Committee and garnered a lot of interest. Councilmember Nancy Floreen recommended to put this item on the “Maybe list” meaning it may be brought up again for discussion and inclusion or it may not. The AAC identified this as being a better outcome than a “no.” Additional work needs to be done surrounding the issue.

The current code allows for on-farm markets to sell the products produced on the farm but it says nothing about the activities and services farms offer. Mr. Allnutt reiterated that the Ag Community needs to make sure farming activities are protected in the code the same way equestrian facilities are. He advocated that the definition of farming needs to address the activities performed on the farm. Mr. Beall added that pumpkin festivals, hay rides and other farming activities help farmers be profitable year round and are vitally important to their subsistence. It was suggested that Mr. Wade Butler and/or Mr. Ben Allnutt place a phone call to Councilmember George Leventhal to try to gain his support on this issue.

7. 24th Annual Farm Tour and Harvest Sale July 27-28.

Brochures were handed out.

8. University of MD Extension Public Meeting July 18 –Strategic Plan for the Extension Organization Over the Next Five Years.

The Ag Community continues to be unhappy with the lack of financial support for Extension Services. When the University of Maryland was cutting its budget, it made 10% cuts in the FY13 funding for all departments. All departments were instructed that they could petition for the cuts to be restored based on certain competitive criteria. Unfortunately, Extension was not able to compete for restoring the 10% funding cuts. Mr. Marx argued that because Extension supports profit and revenue for the State and also creates jobs, Extension should be viewed differently than other departments. Currently, funding for the Agronomy Educator position has not been restored. Extension Services are facing further cuts. Both have negative impacts on the farming community. Mr. Stabler noted that the closest reference to agricultural education is regionally – at Virginia Tech or Penn State – not locally. Mr. Stabler, Mr. Kuhlman and others questioned if Extension incurs more cuts in funding the remaining services would be doing very little to help counties. In that case, Mr. Stabler advocated that the County should investigate cutting their part of the funding. If the counties receive little benefit from their funding, they shouldn't fund it. Mr. Beall wondered if a letter should be written to The Board of Regents since the situation seems only to be worsening. The Ag Community is not happy with the way Extension is being run. Ms. Evans suggested compiling a list of concerns coming from the AAC. Mr. Marx agreed to draft a letter.

9. Maryland MDA and SHA Ag-Tourism Signing Program

Mr. Criss spoke to the committee about a pilot program from the Maryland Department of Agriculture and the State Highway Administration that promotes Agricultural Tourism by providing signage from highways to places of agricultural interest. In Charles, Harford and Frederick Counties, the pilot counties, property owners can obtain this

signage to promote their own agricultural activities. If the program goes well in the pilot counties, it will be expanded. Mr. Criss will have individual conversations with those involved in Ag tourism.

10. County Council Proclamation for National Farmer's Market Week - Tuesday July 30, 2013.

Mr. Criss will participate in the County Council's Proclamation for National Farmer's Market Week. Councilmember Valerie Ervin will be presenting the proclamation. Mr. Criss invited all to join. The 22 farmer's markets masters in the county will be invited. It will be held in Rockville at 9:30 AM.

11. Next meeting of the AAC is Aug. 20 at 7:00PM.

With no further business, the meeting was adjourned. (*Kuhlman McGrath*)