

Agricultural Advisory Committee Meeting

3/17/15

Attendees: David Weitzer, Drew Stabler, Jane Evans, Linda Lewis, Eddie Kuhlman, Debbie Benson, Doug Lechliden, Ben Allnutt

Staff: Jeremy Criss, Josh Penn (Planner Coordinator)

Guests: Dennis Kamber, Jaffray Cox

The meeting was called to order at 7:10PM.

1. Introductions

With guests present, brief introductions were made.

2. Approval of Minutes

The minutes from the January 20, 2015 meeting were approved as written.

(Kuhlman/Stabler) Please note the February 17, 2015 meeting was cancelled because the County Government was closed due to snow storm.

3. The Pesticide Legislation Bill 52-14 is sponsored by (Leventhal, Floreen, Reimer, Navarro, and Elrich). Public hearings were January 15, 2015 and February 12, 2015. The AAC-Doug Tregoning, MCFB-Lonnie Luther and Eric Spates- MAP testified. T&E Committee Work Session scheduled for March 16 and 30, 2015 (See Attachment B.)

Criss reviewed the agricultural representatives that attended the first T&E Committee work session-Lonnie Luther, Bob Cissel, David Weitzer, Doug Tregoning, Chuck Schuster, and Jeremy Criss. George Leventhal commented to the agricultural representatives in the audience that agricultural use of pesticides will not be prohibited for the next 3 years while he is still a Council member. Marc Elrich responded that agriculture will be discussed next. David Weitzer commented that the Council packet was 290 pages long and the discussion lasted 3.5 hours as member of panels were asked to comment on the bill. The panelists reviewed the State and Federal regulatory history including the 40 violations from last year in Maryland that were investigated and properly addressed. Council member Rice commented that Pesticides can be of concern but there are many other factors that can cause health issues. Council member Rice asked how can the Council be so critical of the EPA on the Pesticide data and research when the EPA was so helpful to the Council a few months ago when the Housing enforcement bill passed and the Council relied heavily on the data and research EPA had done. Criss said the legislation is likely to pass and this contributed to the MCFB discussion to hire an environment lawyer and lobbyist for legal advice. David commented that the fiscal impact of Bill 52-14 over a six year period is \$12 million. Doug Lechliden said that the Council President is using some information incorrectly in regards to promoting organic alternatives. Doug said the organic materials cannot be applied unless the Nutrient Management Plan calls for it. Jane Evans said the MAP organization should also be involved in the dialog on this bill and Jeremy explained the status of MAP group on hiring a director.

4. Follow up from the February 10, 2015 Meeting for the County Executive the AAC and the APAB.

The County Executive met with the AAC and APAB on February 10, 2015. Bob Cissel presented on behalf of the APAB the status of farmland preservation funding where no easements will be purchased in FY16 since there is no available funding. The APAB will be conducting a retreat in April to propose alternative funding options. David Weitzer presented on behalf of the AAC and he asked the County Executive if he thought the County tax payers could afford the cost to implement the Pesticide Bill 52-14? David also informed the County Executive of the efforts to expand broad band high speed internet into the Agricultural Reserve east of Poolesville. The AAC annual report for 2014 was submitted to the CE.

5. Follow up from the Tour of farms with Planning Board Chair Casey Anderson on January 30, 2015.

The tour of farms on the east side of the County included Robert Stabler – Pleasant Valley Farm, Pam Saul – Rolling Acres Farm, and John Fendrick – Woodbourne Creamery. Four of the Planning Board members attended along with Council Member Hans Reimer. Josh Penn said he heard favorable comments regarding the tour of farms.

6. Update on the Farm Directory.

The Farm Directory has been updated and it will be an on line publication that can be updated very easily. Jeremy reviewed the list of AAC members on Attachment E that are already listed in the directory verses those members that are not yet listed.

7. Update on New Resource Conservationist in the MSCD.

The hiring freeze exemption for the new MSCD Resource Conservationist was approved by the OMB and the CAO and the interviews were scheduled on March 13, 2015. Jeremy said the Farming at Metro's Edge report recommended that three positions were needed to increase technical assistance to the agricultural community. Last fall, the Agronomy Educator position was filled by a contractor Doug Tregoning and the Ag Services Navigator Position-Kristin Fisher's vacant position, will also be filled with a contractor in light of the reorganization of the DED.

8. Update on the New Zoning Code and the continued need for new Uses in the AR Zone. There are requests from farmers to establish new uses on farms including: farm breweries on farm hard cider production and distillery's along with the associated tasting rooms. Jeremy recommends that amendments are needed to provide clarity in the zoning code regarding these new uses. The zoning code already has a winery listed with the limited use standards and Jeremy believes the code should have greater clarity on these new uses as well. Jeremy recommends a sub-committee of the AAC be formed with industry representatives to help draft

the amendments. The AAC agreed to allow the sub-committee to study the uses and report back to the AAC.

- 9. Update on the Supplemental Appropriation for Crown Farm Annexation Funding.** Jeremy said the County Council approved the FY15 Supplemental Appropriation totaling \$1.0 million for purchasing agricultural land preservation easements. The Crown Farm Annexation funding will be used to purchase easements on a 279 acre farm adjacent to the Town of Poolesville on the east side. This purchase will be the last easement purchase until alternative sources of funds can be identified.
- 10. High Speed Broad band in the rural and ag areas.** David Weitzer reported on the outcome from the March 4, 2015 meeting at the Poolesville Town Hall where Verizon and Comcast representatives discussed options for expanding broad band high speed internet to the area east of Poolesville. About 40 residents attended and they all lived along the following roads: Sugarland Rd. Partnership Rd. River Rd. Montevideo Rd. and MD route 107. A survey of the area is being done to study the costs of expanding the infrastructure including the cost that customers will pay. Dennis Kamber is leading the effort on behalf of the community as many home businesses and residents do not have access to internet in the Agricultural Reserve. This model will be expanded to other areas of the Agricultural Reserve. Many parents complained that they must drive their children to McDonalds in Poolesville so they can do their homework. Jaffray Cox said the providers are going to need to be viewed as public utility providers. Doug Lechliden said the internet access along route 650 is another example where more internet infrastructure is needed.
- 11. MAEF Mobile Science Labs.** The MCFB and the MCA have proposed a mobile science lab be built by the MAEF for use only in Montgomery County Schools. The proposal will be discussed by Council President Leventhal on March 24, 2015 to see how to fund it. The total costs are projected to be \$61,000 annually and the mobile lab will rotated to each elementary school each week for the 30 week school year.
- 12. Nutrient Trading Outreach Meeting for farmers-March 20, 2015.** The MSCD will cosponsor a nutrient trading outreach meeting with the World Resources Institute-WRI on Friday March 20, 2015. Everyone is invited to learn more about the MS-4 permit requirements on the County in the urban areas and how nutrient trading is proposed as a way for famers to potentially benefit from trading nutrient credits with polluters down county.
- 13. Farmland Preservation Update.** Jeremy asked everyone to turn to Attachment I which outlined the recent status of the farmland preservation programs. There will be no agricultural easements purchased in FY16 since there is no money available. The APAB will be conducting and retreat to identify alternative sources of funds.
- 14. The Future of the Department of Economic Development-DED-Agricultural Services.** Jeremy said the County Executive was quoted in a February issue of the Washington Business Journal where we first learned the Executive is considering replacing the DED with a private economic

development authority similar to those that exist in many neighboring jurisdictions. Jeremy said the reorganization of the DED is more about the urban economic development staff and programs and not about the Agricultural Services although we need to better understand how this will impact the programs and services the farmers receive from Agricultural Services. Jeremy said he is working to schedule a meeting of the leaders of the agricultural community to discuss the reorganization of the DED and recommend a course of action.

15. The meeting was adjourned at 8:56 pm.