

Agricultural Advisory Committee Meeting
April 15, 2014

Attendees: Tim McGrath, Ben Allnut, Jane Evans, David Heisler, Linda Lewis, Debbie Benson, Charlotte McGehee, Drew Stabler, David Weitzer

Guests: Michelle Cropp, Randy Stabler

Staff: Jeremy Criss, Jonathan Casey

The meeting was called to order at 6:59PM

1. Introductions

With guests present, brief introductions were made.

2. Approval of the AAC Minutes from March 18th, 2014

The Minutes from the March 18th meeting were approved as written. (*Stabler, McGrath*)

3. Update on the Discussion with Roger Berliner during the March 18th, 2014 meeting. Follow up with Council staff.

The Montgomery Soil Conservation District (MSCD) has been working with the Montgomery County Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) for the past two years on a funding proposal that would allow Water Quality Protection Charge (WQPC) funds collected in the rural areas of the County to be used to enhance conservation efforts on farms. During last month's AAC meeting, Roger Berliner pledged his support and offered to help the farming community gain the attention of the administration on this issue. He has done that and now the farming community would like to thank him for his help. It was suggested a letter be written to the Councilmember thanking him for his support and asking how the farming community can help him in return. (*Lewis, Stabler*) Other farmers, including Linda Lewis, Ben Allnut and Debbie Benson offered to support him in the upcoming election by putting up campaign signs on their properties.

On April 22nd, the Planning, Housing and Economic Development (PHED) Committee will take up this issue and decide whether or not to allocate funds from the WQPC to MSCD. If T&E supports this, the PHED Committee budget recommendations will have to be adjusted. T&E will meet on April 29th, 2014.

4. Update from the Full Council Work Session March 11, 2014 – Farming at Metro's Edge Conference – FAME Final The Department of Economic Development (DED) drafted a letter to Council President Craig Rice summarizing what DED is doing for access to markets and increasing technical assistance to farmers. The part-time Agronomy Educator Position and vacant BDS position (once held by Kristin Fisher) may be filled in FY15. The DED is moving forward with an RFP to create a part-time Agronomy Educator Position.

5. Follow up Discussion from Dec. 17, 2013 meeting with the Rustic Roads Advisory Committee

This topic will be moved to next meeting's agenda after Jeremy Criss gets a full update on what has happened with the Rustic Roads and their guidelines. The farming community had real concerns with the RRAC writing guidelines that could be potentially misused as regulations. Thus, the topic of updating the current regulations was briefly addressed. From these updated regulations, a set of guidelines could be written. Randy Stabler warned against changing the current regulations (which were written in 1996) saying that guidelines are often used to address zoning issues and the current regulations were carefully written so they would not restrict land use. Changing the current regulations could result in further restricting land use. Without updating the regulations, guidelines should not be written because guidelines are required through executive regulations. The Rustic Roads program cannot be used as a hindrance to land use decisions

6. New Farmer Pilot Program – Beginning Farmer Training (*Additional agenda item*)

The New Farmer Pilot Program is in its 2nd year. 33 people signed up for the beginning farmer classes which conclude shortly. Sarah Miller is the director of the program. She had secured a small business grant of 150K that helped fund year one. In September of last year there was 36K left that had to either be spent or remitted. She made the decision to use the leftover money to buy 4 pieces of farm equipment that would become available to farmers through an Equipment Sharing Program. A survey was conducted by John Fendrick to determine what types of farming equipment would best suit the needs of the community. The Farm Bureau will partner with the County to help manage the program. In order to do so, the Farm Bureau has to meet all the insurance requirements under the contract. This program is similar to that of the Soil Conservation District and other Maryland Counties: For a nominal rental fee would be used to maintain the equipment, farmers can rent the equipment as needed. The program currently owns a 10' No-Till Drill, a walk behind tractor tiller, a manure spreader and a plastic mulch lifter.

7. Update on Farmland Preservation Easement Purchase Period Feb-April 1 2014. The Base BLT price is \$222,000 and the Max BLT price is \$254,000.

Jeremy Criss gave a brief update on the Farmland Preservation Easement Purchases. The County has enough funding to buy roughly 14 Building Lot Terminations (BLTs) (around 3 million dollars). Mr. Criss clarified that developers can make a partial payment for a BLT but the County cannot buy partial BLTs or TDRs. So far we've acquired 17 public BLTs and 11 from the private sector.

Questions were raised about the State Grant Agreement – Rural Legacy Program. The County is working on its 7th Grant Agreement between DNR and the County - \$400,000. The proposed funding could protect an 87 acre farm adjacent to the Town of Poolesville.

Anytime there is the opportunity to buy an easement on a farm adjacent to the town, it is a huge opportunity to prevent towns from getting larger. As of now, the transaction is pending. The 400k will be used to purchase the easement requiring the property to be used for agriculture and other development is prohibited. DNR provides the money. The DNR is a co-grantee of the easement. The property owner still owns the deed and title. The State and County share cost of easement.

8. SHA-Agricultural Tourism Signing Program –Questions were raised about this program at our March 18th meeting. Since the March meeting Jeremy Criss has spoken with Wade Butler and Ben Allnut to see how this program could benefit on-farm markets. Jeremy forwarded the questions to the SHA and he is still waiting for a response. More information will be collected and Mr. Criss will follow-up on getting answers to the questions raised by the AAC.

9. Follow up from the High Tunnel and Greenhouse Listening Session. A Public Workshop is proposed for April 29, 2012 from 12:00 to 6:00 pm.

A copy of agenda for the High Tunnel public work shop was provided. Jeremy Criss encouraged anyone who was interested to sign up with Cathy Yingling. Contact information will be sent out to those who showed interest including Debbie Benson, Linda Lewis and David Heisler.

10. May 7, 2014 7-9 The Montgomery Food Council will conduct a Meet Your Producer event at the Agricultural History Farm Park.

The Montgomery Food Council would like their upcoming program to include comments from table food producers. Jeremy Criss asked Ben Allnut, Linda Lewis and David Heisler to participate. He encouraged a good turnout from the AAC because the Food Council was very helpful to the farming community during the zoning rewrite. Jeremy will follow up with an email.

11. Amendments to Chapter 5 Animal control-equestrian Facilities

The Police Department Division of Animal Control periodically visits and inspects farms. The Animal Control authority is under Chapter 5 of the County Code. Most of their authority is with domestic animals but occasionally animal control will get involved in agricultural practices when something happens like cows get out of fence. In such an instance, the farmer must pay all the expenses needed to correct the situation. This past winter, an animal control officer came across a pond that was frozen and was worried that horses didn't have water. Chapter 59 of the County Code-Zoning includes horses as part of livestock and equestrian facilities. Chapter 5 of the County Code-Animal Control does not consider horses as part of agricultural uses. Animal Control licenses horse operations as a commercial stable facility. Jane Seigler looked into the County Code and suggested that we need to consider an amendment. Why is the county requiring a license that the state is already requiring? This will be costly. If you have horses that are being used for fees the Division of Animal Control requires a County license. There are 778

horse related properties according to the 1990-1991 survey. The AAC will discuss this issue further and Jane Seigler, President of Maryland Horse Council will help us.

12. The New Appointments to the AAC are still pending.

Doug Lechluder and Michele Cropp have applied as farmer members. The new appointments to the Rustic Roads Advisory committee include Jean Phillips and Audrey Patton.

13. The next meeting of the AAC will be May 20, 2014.

A motion was made to adjourn the meeting. (*Allnutt and McGrath*) The meeting was adjourned at 8:38PM.