

Agricultural Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes October 20, 2015

Attendees: Drew Stabler, David Weitzer, Doug Lechluder, Linda Lewis, Michele Cropp, Debbie Benson, Paula Linthicum, Jane Evans, Dennis Kamber, Peter Driscoll

Staff: Jeremy Criss, Josh Penn, Zac Trump

1. Introductions and the meeting came to order at 7:00 pm.

2. Approval of the AAC Minutes from September 15, 2015. (Evans/Lewis)

Jane Evans said she has some extra Montgomery County Farm Bureau Newsletters for anyone that has not seen it.

3. Follow up on the Pesticide Legislation Bill 52-14.

County Executive returned Bill 52-14 to the County Council without signing the Bill. Zac Trump read the Cover letter from the Executive outlining his concerns surrounding the legislation and why he did not sign it. The legislation passed 6 to 3 and therefore will become law even though the Executive did not sign it. Paula said she participated in a debriefing conference call and the Lawn Industry is thinking about their options. There were about 20 people on the conference call. Dennis Kamber asked if the Executive does not sign the Bill how does it become law? Zac said the legislation becomes law after a specific number of days. Paula said the bill does include a pesticide ban for private properties involved with Day Care facilities. Paula said that the Parks Department has specific deadlines for not using pesticides. Dennis asked if the DEP will actually enforce this bill and the answer is yes. Paula said she believed the bill demonstrates a lack of respect from the Council on the DEP Director and the DEP staff resources lacking to enforce the bill. David Weitzer said that Mike Riley, Director of Parks told the Council that he could not guarantee the alternatives to pesticides will work. David Weitzer asked if Zac had anything to add. Zac said the Roger is disappointed and he wished the amendments had been accepted. Jane Evans asked the following questions-will a back yard garden be restricted by the legislation? Will back yard gardens be restricted in both residential and agricultural areas? Michele Cropp asked if the legislation would restrict a flower garden? Jeremy and Zac will discuss these questions further to get the answers.

4. Update on the AAC Sub-committee-Micro-Alcohol Production Facilities and use standards for private events and changes to food safety regulations.

The subcommittee has learned that food trucks are not allowed on properties encumbered by Transferable Development Rights Easements. The subcommittee will recommend that this restriction needs to be removed so that food trucks can be one method for providing food and refreshments during events on farms. Jane Evans said she is concerned how this amendment to the Zoning regulations may lead to unintended consequences. Jane said she was a member of the Ad Hoc Agricultural Working Group that recommended the prohibition of non-agricultural uses on TDR easement properties. Jane said she did not realize that Food Trucks were restricted. Jeremy Criss said he did not realize that food trucks are incorporated into the definition of transitory uses that are prohibited. Jeremy said the definition of transitory uses could be amended as the uses apply to the Agricultural Reserve zone only so there would be no impact on down county uses. Jeremy said there were some other non-agricultural uses prohibited by the TDR easement that are being considered for amendments and they are as follows: Home Occupation and Home Health Practitioner. Jane Evans said these uses deserve a bigger discussion and conversation and Jeremy agreed. Michele Cropp also said that we must be careful as how much of the door should we

open on these uses? Should we give up large portions of agricultural land? Jeremy said the uses being considered are mainly inside of the primary residence to see clients and the farmland surrounding the residence would be used for farm animal therapy. Michele said she has been asked to participate with one of the groups considering this use change and she does not agree with them.

5. Follow up on the Reorganization of Economic Development and status of the Office of Agriculture.

The Bill 25-15 calls for the Office of Agriculture to become effective on October 6, 2015 which is ninety-one days following the July 7, 2015 signing by the County Executive. The ninety-one days is governed by the County Charter section 112 that is called for under the transition effective dates under lines 718-720 of the Bill 25-15.

The head of the new Office of Agriculture will report to Fariba Kassiri, Chief Administrative Officer. There are concerns for Peter Bang, Chief Operating Officer for the DED being moved to the new Office of Agriculture to provide administrative, budget, personnel support and this decision is still under consideration by the Executive staff. Please note the Agricultural Services Navigator was abolished as part of the 2% Savings Plan Mandate with the understanding that Peter Bang would provide the administrative capacity for the Office of Agriculture and Jeremy Criss could then focus on the agricultural programs and services. A letter from the leaders of the agricultural community was sent to the County Executive requesting a meeting to discuss the Office of Agriculture. There is concern over who will be migrating to the new office and whether the Office will have the administrative support needed for success. Peter and Jeremy completed their position description forms and forwarded them to the Office of Human Resources.

6. Communication Improvements for the AHFP:

We are working with the County Cable Administrator and Comcast to explore replacing the phone system and T-1 lines at the AHFP. This will involve participation of all agricultural agencies-MSCD, MDA, NRCS, FSA, UM-Extension and Office of Ag. The plan will involve transferring all current funding for phones and T-1 lines to Comcast for Business Service for both phones and High Speed internet.

It looks like there will be monthly cost savings on the VOIP phones and a small cost increase per month for the new internet service that will actually work.

7. Update on the Pilot Project for High Speed Internet service east of the Town of Poolesville.

Dennis Kamber explained how the pilot project is progressing where Comcast will subsidize the cost of running the cable line with some cost sharing for residents in the area. This will involve providing the Comcast Business Service rates to farmers and residents. Dennis said this might work as long as we have a critical mass of customers. So far there are 92 residents in the area. The distance between residents is challenging. Paula Linthicum (East side of the AR) said she does not have broadband. Jane Evan lives less than one mile to the east of Paula and Jane has Verizon High Speed Fiber. Craig Ruppert who lives less than one mile to the north of Paula also has Verizon. Paula said that Verizon would not come across on the west side of Route 108. It appears that Comcast is working very close with the County and the community as compared to Verizon.

8. The Equine Resource Conservation Position was announced and the OHR has provided the MSCD the applicants that met the minimum qualifications and need to be interviewed.

The MSCD scheduled interviews for 5 of the candidates. The interview panel consisted of David Plummer, John Zawitoski, and Pam Saul. Filling this position will get the MSCD back to full capacity on the soil conservation side.

9. Close Encounters with Agriculture-CEWA

The CEWA started on October 12, 2015 and will run through the end of the month.

10. Follow up from the October 19, 2015 APAB briefing with the County Executive:

Jeremy said the Agriculture Preservation Advisory Board met with the County Executive to discuss the funding situation for the Farmland Preservation programs. The CE was very interested in the presentation and he asked many questions surrounding how the new Building Lot Termination program is working. The Agricultural Services will work with the Office of Management and Budget to develop the alternative funding options recommended by the APAB.

11. MD Agriculture Commission Legislative Tour:

Jeremy said the legislative tour today went well as the Commission and the legislators present visited the following farms: Eric Spates-Stoney Castle Farm, Craig Ruppert and Kelly Lewis-Ruppert Nurseries, Wade Butler-Butlers Orchard, and Gary Mangum-Bell Nursery.

12. Annual Farm Bureau Banquet-November 10, 2015:

Jeremy said the Montgomery County Farm Bureau Banquet would be held on Tuesday November 10, 2015 at the Montgomery County Agriculture Center Fair Grounds.

13. On-Farm Composting Forum-December 3, 2015:

Jeremy announced that Agricultural Services and the Montgomery County Food Council would cosponsor an On-farm Composting Forum on December 3, 2015 at the AHFP. Anyone that is involved with composting must attend and anyone interested in learning how to generate additional farm income from composting needs to attend. Please see Jeremy for additional details.

14. New Appointments to the Agricultural Advisory Committee-AAC:

Jeremy asked everyone to turn to the attachment in the packet showing the County Council confirmed the new members to the AAC. It took many months to find a new farmer member to the AAC and Jeremy thanked Peter Driscoll for applying. Jane Evans and Michele Cropp suggested that Henry Garson might be interested in the AAC as he has 180 acres in Dickerson. Michele said she would forward the contact information for Mr. Garson. Drew Stabler suggested that Jessica Butts Snyder might be interested in applying to the AAC.

15. Next Agricultural Advisory Committee Meeting will be November 17, 2015 at 7 pm.

Motion to adjourn passes. (Lewis/Cropps)