

# **Agricultural Preservation Advisory Board**

Regular Meeting Minutes

June 9, 2020

7:00 p.m.

Attendance: Michael Jamison, John Fendrick, Bob Cissel, Nick DeLuca, Chuck Gingrich

Staff: Mike Scheffel and Kristin Fisher

Guest: Margaret Giblin

The meeting guest, Margaret Giblin, was introduced. Margaret was OAG's contact at DNR for the RLP. She recently left that position, and as a resident of Montgomery County, is interested in supporting agricultural preservation here as a private citizen.

The meeting was called to order at 7:05 p.m.

Fendrick made a motion to approve the May 13, 2020 meeting minutes as written; DeLuca seconded.

## **1. AEP Easement Program**

### **a. Butler MARBICO property update**

Tyler, Ben, and Hallie Butler applied to the MARBIDCO Next Generation Farmland Acquisition Program in November of last year. Their application was approved and they have since purchased the property. They will soon apply to the County's AEP program to sell an easement on the farm, the proceeds of which will go toward reimbursing MARBIDCO.

## **2. Maryland Agricultural Land Preservation Foundation**

### **a. Discussion on FY21 application to submit**

OAG has received information from only one applicant for MALPF this fiscal year. Scheffel did follow up with other farmers who had expressed interest. One had more acreage than could be paid for under MALPF this year; they continue to be interested but are not ready to move forward. The other person who had expressed interest has a good-sized farm for MALPF this year (~80 acres), but wanted to talk again later.

The applicant who is ready to move forward with the MALPF application this year is Ida Dayhoff, whose farm is adjacent to Bakers' farm. There are no residences and the property retains the full complement of allowed density development (4 lots). They want to keep one unrestricted lot right under the MALPF easement.

Fendrick made a motion to nominate the Dayhoff application to MALPF for FY 21; DeLuca seconded.

b. Potential request for potential agricultural subdivision

Lori Larson from Wyndham Oaks on Bucklodge Road is looking to expand her equestrian operation. Full Circle LLC is to the north of her farm and to the east and south are two MALPF/FRPP properties. She asked Scheffel and Criss about the possibility of an agricultural subdivision to obtain a portion of one or more of those properties. This will be a challenge for the federally funded properties because the 2018 Farm Bill retroactively applied new rules to all federally funded easement properties, but OAG has not yet been successful in obtaining information on those new rules. Without knowledge of those rules, OAG cannot determine whether an agricultural subdivision on those properties would be allowed. So Lori Larson is interested in the RLP property, which is funded by the State DNR but granted by the County, so the County would be the final approver of any agricultural subdivision. However, no selling price has been agreed upon, so this is just for the Board's information as a possible request that may come in the future.

c. Easement Inspections

MALPF has provided guidance to counties for inspecting easements during the pandemic. When Mike is back in the office, those inspections will resume.

### **3. RLP Easement Program**

a. Progress on FY20 grant agreements

OAG has received title reports back from Jim Demma at Miles & Stockbridge for the properties on both the east and west sides of the county; nothing major was found. OAG has the survey and property description back from the west side and sent it to Vickie Gaul. Now OAG is working with Vickie on RLP easement language. OAG is waiting on the survey from the east side properties. Scheffel has received no new information relating to budgetary constraints from RLP; we don't know if the money is on hold or not and will continue to move forward operating under the assumption that FY20 money is still available.

### **4. Legislative activities**

a. Farm Alcohol Producers – Montgomery County Phase I Reopening

On-farm wineries and breweries can now open for outside seating. It is encouraging to see that County Councilmembers are working to help find safe ways for agribusinesses to survive during the pandemic.

- b. Equestrian Activities - request to State and County to allow on farm events

Dr. Travis Gayles responded to Waredaca's inquiries about hosting equestrian events and said that they could hold these competitions.

- c. Solar ZTA

This ZTA would allow up to 1800 acres in the Agricultural Reserve to be used for solar installations. The APAB opposed this, but no revisions were made to the ZTA. The next hearings are July 9 and 16.

- d. Proposal to help food security

This proposal is for \$41 million, \$1 million of which will go toward supporting a local food initiative. Either HHS or the county's Food Banks will be given money to purchase food from Montgomery County farmers to distribute to residents in need. This program would expand upon what Manna Food does; they purchase foods at an agreed-upon price that is usually below the farmer's cost of production. This program would provide a payment to bridge that gap and bring the price received by the farmer up to cover production costs. An alternative is to have the County purchase excess food for distribution. Fendrick suggested that a program that prioritized minority farmers in some way would be something to consider for the future. It may be one way to help some members of the agricultural community tap into funding that may be coming along related to supporting minority groups.

## **5. Other business**

- a. Rustic Roads meeting update

Cissel, Jeremy Criss, and Scheffel met with the Rustic Roads committee on May 14. The committee heard the agricultural community's perspective on tree trimming and road safety, and they want better communication to get the roads in shape for all parties involved. Cissel felt that it was a sign of positive progress. Members of the agricultural community will meet with Rustic Roads representatives at various sites on roads in the county sometime after COVID-19 restrictions are relaxed.

Regarding the Schaeffer Road bridge replacement, if federal money is used, the bridge has to be upgraded to two lanes. Some people in the county want it to remain a single lane. However, this project is part of a 6-year CIP and won't be built until the end of that cycle.

b. Thrive 2050 Agricultural Document

This is the next General Plan Update, which identifies priorities in the County over the next 30 years. Park & Planning Staff provided a draft document to OAG; it is a down-county perspective looking to the Agricultural Reserve for ways to make things better for down-county population. This is good in terms of available markets for agricultural products, but doesn't seem to focus much on how to help agricultural as an industry. OAG is meeting with them tomorrow to offer details that we hope will be incorporated into their eventual Thrive 2050 document.

c. Annual Farm Tour is cancelled this year due to COVID-19

d. Farmers and County PHEG

The Public Health Emergency Grant allowed any small business to apply and receive up to \$10,000. Thirty-nine farms applied and 14 received grants totaling \$113,000. OAG wants to explore this in more detail with help from the County's Finance Department to identify what farms applied for, what wasn't available, and how we could fill/address that funding gap moving forward.

The meeting adjourned at 8:09 p.m.