

Orange County Agricultural Preservation Board

Approved Meeting Summary: January 19th, 2022

****Virtual Meeting via Zoom****

6:30 p.m.

Members Present: McAdams, McKnight, Parker, Redding, Saiers, Sykes, Woods

Members Absent: Anderson, Finley, McPherson, Myers

Guests: None

Staff: Jessica Perrin, Resource Conservation Coordinator-Orange Soil and Water; Peter Sandbeck, Cultural Resources Coordinator; Mike Ortosky, Community and Rural Development Agent, NCSU.

1. **Call to order:** Vice Chair McKnight called the meeting to order at 6:34 p.m.
2. **Chair Comments/Introductions:** None
3. **Considerations of Additions to Agenda:** None
4. **Meeting Summary/Minutes (Attachments 1):** Saiers moved to approve minutes, seconded by Redding; motion carried.
5. **Items for Decision:**
 - a) **Final approval of proposed technical revisions to ordinance (Attachment 2):** Perrin walked members through the final draft revisions, showing how she incorporated APB comments and new information on what surrounding counties require. Members agreed on a minimum of 1 acre for agriculture or horticulture, to be contiguous. For woodland/timber, the Forest Service requires a minimum of 15 acres so she proposed that number. We are required to specify the minimum number of tracts. Members agreed on one tract as the minimum number, and for the proximity to be a maximum of one mile. Discussion followed. McAdams proposed increasing the requirement for woodland to 20 acres, but they don't need to be contiguous. This will be consistent with the current PUV requirements. Loggers have a hard time handling smaller tracts than 20 acres. Members agreed that this makes sense. McAdams moved to increase the minimum timber acreage to 20 acres, which must be under a forest management plan. Those don't have to be contiguous; seconded by Woods. Motion passed. Staff recommended a final motion to approve the entire revised document. Woods moved to approve the final ordinance revisions, seconded by McAdams; motion passed.
 - b) **Proposed New Hope VAD boundary adjustment (Attachment 3):** Staff reviewed this boundary issue as was discussed at the November meeting. In the New Hope district, several farm parcels were inadvertently drawn outside of the boundary. The green dotted line on the proposed map shows the parcels that we wish to include, zoned by the county as AR. Making this adjustment now will allow this to go to the BOCC for their approval along with the ordinance revision. McAdams moved to accept the boundary adjustment; seconded by Woods; motion passed.
6. **Discussion Items:**

- a) **Review of applications for APB membership (Attachment 4):** Staff reviewed the current applicant resumes from the county's online system. We want to identify new members who have some connections or background in farming. There are four vacancies, three of which are for at-large positions. The fourth position requires ownership of a farm currently enrolled in the VAD program within the Cedar Grove VAD district but at present, we don't have any qualified applicants. Woods nominated Elizabeth Hooten for an at-large position, seconded by McAdams; motion approved. McAdams nominated Anjail Taylor for an at-large position, seconded by Redding; motion approved. McAdams nominated Michael Hughes for the third at-large position, seconded by Redding; discussion followed; motion approved.
- b) **Proposed project to identify best practices and policies for land protection to support farmland preservation in Orange County (Attachment 5):** Saiers presented a PowerPoint overview to highlight the information covered in her handout, showing the extent of farmland loss and threats, based on data from the American Farmland Trust. NC is second only to Texas in the conversion of farmland to non-agricultural uses. This trend has accelerated since the onset of the pandemic, causing land prices to skyrocket. Here we have some measures in place to try to mitigate this, like the ag economic development grants, the PFAP and Breeze Farm incubator programs. We also have our own Farmland Protection Plan, last compiled and published in 2009. Yet we are seeing the ongoing loss of farmland here. She proposes a three phase project that could start in early 2022: Phase I is to conduct literature review and summary; Phase II will be to gather expert and other stakeholder feedback; and Phase III will be the summary report and recommendations. We need to look at what's been done/works in other places, then apply those lessons to Orange County. Ortosky noted that this could be an extraordinarily important thing, that he sees a great deal of loss in Orange due to fragmentation and low density development. Land conservation helps, but farming has to be viable as a way of making a living. Discussion followed. Members agreed that there should be a subcommittee. Several volunteered: Redding, maybe Chris Hirni, Portia can be a resource.
- c) **Ag Summit 2022:** Perrin provided an overview of the various programs being offered this year at the Ag Summit. It will be held virtually in the mornings, over three days, from Feb. 15th to 17th.

7. Informational Items/Future Agenda Items:

- a. **Ag Economic Development Update:** Ortosky provided a brief update and reminded members that he has moved from the Economic Development Office to the Extension Service, where he is a Community and Rural Development Agent. Grant funding has risen to \$100,000 per year. They're seeking some additional funding for startups as they are often in the most need. He will be working on trying to bring more money and programming to the Breeze Farm.

- 8. **Time for Information Sharing:** McKnight provided a brief update on the dairy effort. There was a significant grant program for KY, TN and NC. They are going to collaborate with a small farm to buy their milk and will potentially collaborate with a second farm. They have a second cheese vat coming along with a mozzarella machine. She's focusing on the value added components like cheese but is not ready to give up on fluid milk yet.

- 9. **Adjournment:** Meeting adjourned at 7:53 pm.

Meeting summary draft by Peter Sandbeck.