



BERKS COUNTY *agricultural land* PRESERVATION BOARD

Berks County Agricultural Center
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www.berkspa.gov/departments/agriculture

County Commissioners:

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Michael S. Rivera
Dante Santoni, Jr.

Board Members:

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Louise A. Swartley

Ex Officio:

Robert C. Ziegenfus, Ph.D.

Solicitor:

Mark R. Sprow, Esq.

Berks County Agricultural Land Preservation Board of Directors Meeting February 28, 2024, 5:30 p.m. MINUTES

A regularly scheduled meeting of the Berks County Agricultural Land Preservation Board was held at the Berks County Agricultural Center on Wednesday, January 31, 2024, at 5:30 p.m.

Board members present: David Phillips, Jeremy Meck, Louise Swartley, Steve Mohn, and Clyde Myers.

Staff present: Emily Wangolo, Executive Director; Amanda Burkard-Sell, Agriculture Program Manager.

In attendance: Mark Sprow, Esq. Special Counsel for the Board.

David Phillips, Vice-Chair, called the meeting to order at 5:30 p.m.

I. PUBLIC COMMENTS ON AGENDA ITEMS – None.

II. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Motion: A motion was made to approve the minutes of the January 31, 2024, meeting, as drafted. (L. Swartley, J. Meck)

Discussion: None.

Vote: Motion approved.

III. STATUS OF RECOMMENDATION UPDATES

- A. Burkard-Sell reported the following changes since the status of recommendations had been submitted to the Board: Docket #2201 is scheduled for settlement on March 8. Docket #9417 is planned for submission at the April State Board meeting. The remaining farms are in process.

IV. OLD BUSINESS

- A. None.

V. NEW BUSINESS

A. Conveyance Report

- A. Burkard-Sell reported on the transfers of ownership:

- Section A: Transferred in Compliance – Settlements #704.0, 680.0, 525.0, 327.0, 658.0.FD, 755.0, 795.0, and 65.1.
- Section B: Transferred with Concerns Noted – Settlement #322.0, is involved in a larger potential violation situation and Attorney Sprow is working with the landowners. No action by the Board is required at this time.
- Section C: Outstanding Violations – None to report.
- Section D: Transfers Resolved – Settlement #32.3 with a corrective deed recorded.

A. 2024 Cap Review

- A. Burkard-Sell provided documentation to assist in the process of setting the Per Acre Cap in 2024 which is currently \$2,600.
 - The range of appraisal values in Berks County was \$2,570 to \$3,340 with and the average amount of \$2,911.
 - The average price per acre in the State is \$3,261.
 - The cap price per acreage over the past 10 years in Berks County has increased from \$2,500 per acre to \$2,600 per acre.
 - The Board discussed the pros and cons of raising the cap, as well as the current number of applicants in the program.

Motion: A motion was made to set the easement purchase cap at \$2,800 per acre for 2024 easement purchases. (J. Meck, S. Mohn).

Discussion: None.

Vote: Motion approved.

A. State Funding Report

- A. Burkard-Sell informed the Board at the February State Board meeting, the State Bureau had distributed the 2024 Allocation of Funds; Berks County’s certified approximately \$1.4 million which was matched by the State with approximately \$2.4 million for a total of \$3,494,978 in available funds.

VI. DEPARTMENTAL REPORT

A. Settlement #591.0 – Brubaker – Easement Modification

- A. Burkard-Sell presented a request to acknowledge “as-built” agriculture structures for Settlement #591.0 (Brubaker), 76.5-acre farm in Bethel Township.
 - Burkard-Sell noted the construction of 60 x 150’ trench silos, 50 x 152’ heifer barn with manure pit, and 40 x 84’ calf pens are permitted under the deed of easement and no further action is required by the Board.

B. Statement of Financial Interest

- A. Burkard-Sell reminded the Board the Statement of Financial Interest for Board members on the Board in 2023 are due to the County’s Chief Clerk, Carmen Torres, by May 2024. The forms may also be returned to Emily Wangolo who will forward them on your behalf.

C. Upcoming Events

- A. Burkhard-Sell informed the Board of upcoming events:
 - The department is partnering with the PA Friends and Agriculture Foundation and B.A.R.N to participate in Ag Literacy Week beginning March 11. Staff will read agricultural related books and partake in activities with elementary school classrooms around Berks County.
 - The department is sponsoring a historic Mill Tour and lecture in the Boyertown area on Tuesday, March 19. The event celebrates *National Ag Day* and ties into our participation in the upcoming *America 250PA* event.
 - The Department is partnering with the BCIU to host *Superintendents Day* on March 20. The day will include visits to Brown’s Feed Mill and Kurland Dairy Farm.

C. Berks County Ag Study Update

- A. Burkard-Sell informed the Board interviews with individuals, farmers, and agricultural businesses are currently in progress. The data information being collected has been released but does not have the updated information for Berks County as needed. Any Board member interested in participating in the study, please reach out to Emily Wangolo.

VII. CITIZEN COMMENT / BUSINESS FROM THE FLOOR – None.

- The Board discussed impervious surface coverage limits on farms.
- The Board discussed ways to increase awareness of the Land Preservation program. This may continue to be an ongoing topic of discussion which could be listed monthly on the Board Meeting Agenda.
- The Board was reminded the Board Member Workshops will be held after the Board Meetings beginning in March and will not proceed after 7:00 p.m. If the monthly Board Meeting runs long, the Workshop will be held at the next meeting.

Motion: A motion was made to adjourn the meeting at 6:47 PM. (C. Myers, J. Meck)

Discussion: None.

Vote: Motion approved.

Respectfully submitted,

Jennifer Leigh Smilko
Office Support