



BERKS COUNTY *agricultural land* PRESERVATION BOARD

Berks County Agricultural Center
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County Commissioners:

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Dante Santoni, Jr.

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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 April 24, 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, April 24, 2024, at 5:30 p.m.

Board members present: Gregg Eshelman, James Coker, Jeremy Meck, David Phillips, Louise Swartley, Kim McGrath, and Steve Mohn.

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

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

Gregg Eshelman, Chair, called the meeting to order at 5:35 p.m.

I. PUBLIC COMMENTS ON AGENDA ITEMS – None.

II. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Motion: A motion was made to approve the minutes of the March 27, 2024, meeting, as drafted. (J. Coker, J. Meck)

Discussion: None.

Vote: Motion approved.

III. STATUS OF RECOMMENDATION UPDATES

- A. Burkard-Sell highlighted several items on the *Status of Recommendations*: Dockets #2205 and #2304 are scheduled for settlement in early May. Dockets #2402, #2404, #2405, #2406, #0815, #2407, #2411, #2412 are farms selected in 2024 are now in site visit and appraisal process.

IV. OLD BUSINESS

A. 2024 LESA Ranking – Update

- A. Burkard-Sell informed the Board that of the 13 farms that have been selected in the initial round, eight (8) landowners have responded and are in the process, one (1) has still not responded, and four (4) have withdrawn.
- A. Burkard-Sell reported that using the available funds, letters had now been sent to the landowners of farms #14 to #19.

V. NEW BUSINESS

A. Conveyance Report

- A. Burkard-Sell reported on the transfers of ownership:
 - Section A: Transferred in Compliance – Settlement #34.0.
 - 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.
 - Settlement #562.0.FD working with the attorney to record a corrective deed. No action by the Board is required at this time.
 - Section C: Outstanding Violations – None to report.
 - Section D: Transfers Resolved – None to report.

B. Landowner Requests

- K. Fies presented the following easement modification requests:
 - Settlement #456.0 (Peiffer), 100.10-acre farm in Jefferson Township, has submitted a request to construct a 30 x 63’ addition to the existing residence within the curtilage. This construction is within the curtilage and is permitted under the Deed of Easement.
 - K. Fies also noted that new addition will require the installation of a new septic system outside of the current curtilage. Once the sand mound is constructed, the curtilage will need to be expanded to cover this area.

Motion: A motion was made to approve the addition to a residential structure within the existing curtilage and to expand the curtilage once a septic system is installed for Settlement #456.0. (K. McGrath, S. Mohn)

Discussion: None.

Vote: Motion carried unanimously.

- Settlement #320.0 (Hetrick Acres, LLC), 115.90-acre farm in Tulpehocken Township, has submitted a request to construct a 45 x 400’ heifer barn to house animals and get off pasture.

VI. DEPARTMENTAL REPORT

A. Berks County Ag Study – Update

- E. Wangolo updated the Board on the progress of the Berks County Ag Study.
 - The consultants facilitated four focus groups last week: one for urban agriculture and three in the larger rural farming areas. A variety of farmers, ag professionals, and a diverse group of producers attended the sessions.
 - Next, they will integrate in their recommendations based off of the interviews conducted, focus groups held, and data compiled and present it to an Advisory Committee.
 - The project is projected to be completed in late summer.

B. Upcoming Events

- E. Wangolo informed the board of upcoming events.
 - The department partnered with the City of Reading, 18th Wonder Improvement Association, and the GoggleWorks to host a “Gardening in Small Spaces” workshop on Friday, May 17. This pilot program will assist Reading families with growing food within a bucket system.
 - The department will be hosting another Ag in the Classroom event in June. The 3-day tour of the agricultural industry in Berks County offers educators continuing education credits to incorporate ag education and careers into their classrooms.

C. Participation Letter – Update

- E. Wangolo updated the Board on targeting specific farms to participate in the ACE program.
 - County leadership advised, for the process to remain objective, packets of general information may be addressed to the current owner. Official Board letterhead may not be used in the mailings.
 - L. Swartley reported she has compiled lists of properties in that are currently not in the ACE program with acreages of 0-34, 35-50, and 50 and above.
 - S. Mohn reported he is working on a similar project with farms in Marion and Perry Townships
 - Staff will review all the data accrued to compile a mailing list of potential applicants with the goal of sending a mass mailing in late summer.

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

EXECUTIVE SESSION

Motion: A motion was made to enter Executive Session (J. Meck, L. Swartley)

Discussion: None.

Vote: Motion approved.

Motion: A motion was made to send a letter of concern to several entities about the Board's vested interest of the surface rights of the Kurtz Farm that are being compromised. (J. Coker, J. Meck)

Discussion: None.

Vote: Motion approved.

Motion: A motion was made to adjourn the meeting at 6:37 PM. (J. Coker, L. Swartley)

Discussion: None.

Vote: Motion approved.

Respectfully submitted,

Jennifer Leigh Smilko
Office Support