



BERKS COUNTY agricultural land PRESERVATION BOARD

Berks County Agricultural Center
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County Commissioners:

Christian Y. Leinbach, Chair
Michael S. Rivera
Dante Santoni, Jr.

Board Members:

Gregg Eshelman, Chair
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James R. Coker

Morgan A. Firestine
Kimberly J. McGrath
Jeremy R. Meck

Steven C. Mohn
Clyde A. B. Myers
Louise A. Swartley

Ex Officio:

Robert C. Ziegenfus, Ph.D.

Solicitor:

Mark R. Sprow, Esq.

Berks County Agricultural Land Preservation Board Meeting May 29, 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, May 29, 2024, at 5:30 p.m.

Board members present: Gregg Eshelman, James Coker, Morgan Firestine, Jeremy Meck, Kim McGrath, Steve Mohn and Clyde Myers.

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 5:32 p.m.

I. PUBLIC COMMENTS ON AGENDA ITEMS – None.

II. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Motion: A motion was made to approve the minutes of the April 24, 2024, meeting, as drafted. (S. Mohn, M. Firestine)

Discussion: None.

Vote: Motion approved.

III. STATUS OF RECOMMENDATION UPDATES

- A. Burkard-Sell highlighted several changes to items on the *Status of Recommendations*: Docket #0419 will now be prepared for the August 8, 2024, State Board meeting due to an issue raised by a neighboring landowner that has since been resolved, and Dockets #2301 and #9415 will be withdrawn, as per the landowners' requests.
- The Board discussed the \$500 appraisal deposit fee and whether an increase was necessary due to more landowners withdrawing during the process and the inability to recover the lost balance of the appraisal. Staff noted that a change to the deposit amount will require a change to the Program Guidelines, which will need to be approved by the State Board of Farmland Preservation; any change should be proposed

for the October or December State meetings to initiate the change for the 2025 selection. Staff will research other counties' deposit amounts and this topic will be revisited at the next Board member workshop.

IV. OLD BUSINESS

A. 2024 LESA Ranking – Update

- A. Burkard-Sell informed the Board that of the seven (7) additional farms that have been selected, all but one have responded.
- A. Burkard-Sell reported that using the available funds, letters had now been sent to the landowners of farms #20-26 and responses are still awaited.

V. NEW BUSINESS

A. Conveyance Report

- A. Burkard-Sell reported on the transfers of ownership:
 - Section A: Transferred in Compliance – Settlements #580, #512, #510, #33, #549, #631, #550, #483, and #201.
 - 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 is still 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 – Settlements #483 and #510 have been resolved with corrective deeds recorded.

B. Landowner Requests

- K. Fies presented the following easement modification requests:
 - Settlement #654.0 (HBND5)- 26.8-acre farm in Upper Bern Township, has submitted the following requests:
 - Addition to existing residence within the curtilage – covered porch and patio with pool
 - Personal use structures within the curtilage – four (4) car garage and truck garage
 - Ag structure – housing for beef animals and horses
 - The total square footage for these requests is 4,177 sq. ft. and all would be permitted under the deed of easement.
 - The Board discussed the specifics of the requests, which were within the terms of the easement.

Motion: A motion was made to recognize the plan as submitted noting that all required structures are within the curtilage (K. McGrath, J. Meck)

Discussion: The Board discussed the location of any stormwater requirements, which would be within the existing curtilage and the size of the curtilage, which is determined at settlement.

Vote: Motion carried unanimously.

- Settlement #124.1 (Zook), 124.0-acre farm in Oley Township, has submitted an amended request for the two-acre residential subdivision.
 - The landowner’s surveyor worked with the township planning office to develop a revised two (2) acre configuration that now includes the entire pond but would require the generator to either be moved or not included with the house.

Motion: A motion was made to approve the amended request for the residential subdivision (K. McGrath, J. Coker)

Discussion: None.

Vote: Motion carried unanimously.

- Settlement #47.0 (Hoover), 150.0-acre farm in Oley Township, has submitted a request to construct an 18 x 16’ addition to the existing residence along with a 26 x 28’ garage within the curtilage.
 - The Board and staff discussed the layout of the curtilage on this farm and the need for the landowner to sign their curtilage agreement.

Motion: A motion was made to approve the addition to the residential structure, once the curtilage agreement has been signed (K. McGrath, M. Firestine)

Discussion: None.

Vote: Motion carried unanimously

VI. DEPARTMENTAL REPORT

A. Berks County Ag Study – Update

- E. Wangolo updated the Board on the progress of the Berks County Ag Study.
 - The Ag Advisory Committee is being assembled and invitations will be sent out to approximately 20 potential members. The Committee will prioritize the recommendations from the study and create an action plan.
 - The study is projected to wrap up around the end of September, early October.
 - The Board and staff discussed the goal of the study, which is to determine the economic impact of agriculture on the area, specifically financially, and develop an action plan to engage the industry and pave the way for future projects.

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”

container gardening workshop on the evening of May 31st. This pilot program will assist Reading families with growing food within a bucket system.

- The department will be hosting the annual Ag in the Classroom event June 11th – 13th. Educators will receive Act 48 credits and eleven (11) participants are signed up this year.

C. Participation Letter – Update

- E. Wangolo provided an update for the Board on the proposed participation interest letter.
 - Wangolo reminded the Board that previous direction had been to send a general packet of information about the ACE Program to potential participants; however, County leadership had requested further review by the C.O.O. team.
 - The Board discussed the letter and who should receive it. A draft letter will be proposed and finalized at the workshop following the June Board meeting.

VII. CITIZEN COMMENT / BUSINESS FROM THE FLOOR

- M. Firestine informed the group that the PA Farm Show had hosted a Farm City Day for school students and that one of the school groups that attended was from 13th and Green Elementary in Reading.
- The Board discussed two recent articles from *Lancaster Farming*, one about a historic barn in Centre County that was scheduled to be demolished, which the Board had previously discussed; the other about a farm in New Jersey that had recently been preserved with an easement purchase price of \$47,000 per acre.

Motion: A motion was made to adjourn the meeting at 6:55 PM and enter into Executive Session. (K. McGrath, S. Mohn)

Discussion: None.

Vote: Motion approved.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

Respectfully submitted,

Amanda K. Burkard-Sell
Agriculture Program Manager