

Agricultural Advisory Committee

March 18, 2014

Attendees: Eddie Kuhlman, Patrick Brown, Jane Evans, Debbie Benson, Linda Lewis, David Weitzer, Charlotte McGehee, Ben Allnutt, Tim McGrath, Drew Stabler

Staff: Jeremy Criss, Jonathan Casey, Bob Cissal (Ag Preservation Board)

Soil Conservation: Robert Butz, Wade Butler (treasurer)

Guests: Josh Fael Staff from Council Member's Berliner's office, Councilmember Roger Berliner, Mark Hoffman (Beekeeper)

The meeting was called to order at 7:03PM

1. Introductions

With guests present, brief introductions were made.

2. Discussion with County Council Member Roger Berliner – Follow up from FAME – Increasing Technical Assistance to the Agricultural Community (Attachment A)

Council Member Roger Berliner thanked the group for their work in the community and their service on the Agricultural Advisory Committee. He understands the importance of farming in Montgomery County and wants to learn more about what the farming community needs.

Councilmember Berliner, Chair of the Transportation, Infrastructure, Energy and Environment (T&E) Committee noted his involvement with the environmental community and expressed a desire to streamline this groups efforts with that of the farming community because of the overlap in both groups goals and values. He then explained that he was interested in using his experience with the environmental group to help the farming community achieve some of their goals. The farming community continues to advocate for use of the Water Quality Protection charge in the agricultural areas of the county rather than down-county. The Montgomery Soil Conservation District (MSCD) has been working with the Montgomery County Department of Environmental Protection for the past two years on a funding proposal that would allow Water Quality Protection Charge (WQPC) funds collected in the rural areas of the County to be used to enhance conservation efforts on farms. The funds would also restore farmers' access to technical assistance from agricultural agencies. With the current emphasis on restoring the Chesapeake Bay and our local watersheds, the need for assistance for conservation projects and best management practice implementation has never been greater. If the WQPC can be used, it would give the farming community funding for a conservation planner position that was lost during the economic

down-turn. This money would also be used to provide technical assistance to farmers.

Councilmember Berliner seemed optimistic about reassigning the WQPC funds to the Soil Conservation District. He stressed that something would need to be submitted through MSCD. He suggested using examples of how the money will be used to mitigate negative impacts to the environment to build a strong case. Robert Butz, Vice-Chairman of the MSCD gave a quick overview of what Soil Conservation does and he explained the history behind the MSCD that was created after WWII in 1945. The group is increasingly involved in Chesapeake Bay restoration and mitigation. Their work load has changed and at the same time there have been reductions in both staff and money. The smaller staff is being asked to do more than before. Thus, Butz explained, we are not serving our customers effectively right now. Butz noted that focusing efforts on farms is a more effective way with improving the quality of our water. When a water quality practice is implemented on a farm, there is a magnifying result. Councilmember Berliner promised to take it up with DEP. His staff member Josh will arrange a follow-up meeting. Councilmember Berliner reiterated that the DEP is looking to maximize their dollars. The councilmember would need to convince DEP that this would be a good use of their money. He will also work to convince his fellow council members on the funding request from the MSCD.

The MSCD estimated that over \$300 K of the WQPC was collected from agriculturally assessed properties in the rural and agricultural areas of the County. This is the amount that the MSCD believes should be directed to farming community efforts. Mr. Criss outlined how the farming community would use these funds:

1. Increase technical assistance to farmers and prepare conservation plans to show how farmers are implementing best management practices to reduce run off. Currently, there is a 6 month to 1 year backlog for those who request assistance.

Council member Berliner asked for an updated funding proposal from the MSCD. Mr. Criss explained how the original proposal was drafted two years ago and there are several components of the proposal that need to be updated. Council member Berliner will look and see what future conversations we may need to have.

2. Our other agency partner is the UMD Extension. We need more boots on the ground from extension. The county has been trying to fill the Agronomy Educator Position. We have not gotten anywhere with the UM-Extension folks. There is a three way partnership with Extension-Federal, State, and County. Extension educators help farmers make business decisions. The funding for Extension is allocated through the DED appropriation. The funding for Extension needs to be restored to build lost capacity.

3. Ag Services used to have business development specialist-Kristin Fisher. Council President Craig Rice requested to change the position to the Ag Services Navigator. That position has been put on the reconciliation list.

Councilmember Berliner explained that he helped sponsor the small business navigator and is sympathetic to any resources needed to get through the maze. He questioned whether or not Ag funding should belong in the Department of Economic Development (DED). He wanted to make sure the agriculture “voice” was being heard strongly. Many responded that it is a good fit – agriculture is a business and it is important that it is included in a business oriented agency.

Councilmember Berliner closed by explaining the role he played in the Zoning Re-write. He advocated for the farming community throughout the process and will continue to do so. He recognizes the need for ag education and ag tourism. He identified the need to create a context in which the rest of the county sees the importance of farming in Montgomery County. Ms. Evans added that now would be a good time to brand agriculture to make it valuable to the entire community base. Mr. Cissel noted that without farmers, the Agricultural Reserve doesn't exist.

3. Approval of the AAC Minutes from February 18, 2014 (See Attachment B)

The minutes were approved as corrected (*Evans/McGrath*)

4. Update on the Final Council Action March 4, 2014 Zoning Rewrite ZTA 13-04 (Attachment C)

An email correspondence between Council Member Nancy Floreen and Mr. Criss was included in the packet. In the correspondence, Mr. Criss asks for clarification regarding the action that was taken on ZTA 13-04. Council Member Floreen responded that no more language changes will be included in the Zoning Rewrite and that the only remaining issue is the mapping. The Committee discussed the language that allows Ag Education and Ag Tourism provided a new structure does not exceed 10% of total square footage of the all the structures on the farm. Jonathan Casey will ask Pam Dunn for clarification on this language.

5. Update on the March 11, 2014 Full Council Work Session on the Agricultural Preservation Capital Improvement Program (Attachment D)

Mr. Criss gave a brief update on the Full Council Work Session that took place on March 11th:

1. Jeremy's salary and fringe cost was shifted to the operating budget
2. An equivalent amount of funds were shifted from Planning, Design & Supervision (PD&S) to land. The amount shifted is approximately equal to the value of one BLT per year of additional funding for land acquisition.
3. Shifting the vacant

Business Development Specialist I Position to DED's operating budget and placed on the reconciliation list.

6. Update from the full council work session (Attachment E)

A brief update on the full council work session on the Farming at Metro's Edge Conference was given. The work session was attended by many Agricultural Advisory Committee members. The memo given to the Council summarizing FAME Conference outcomes was provided to the group as Attachment E.

7. Follow up discussion from Dec. 17 meeting with Rustic Roads Advisory Committee

The AAC reviewed a Feb. 9, 2009 letter addressed to the County Executive and copied to the Director of DOT. In the letter, the AAC, the Agricultural Preservation Advisory board (APAB) and the Rustic Roads Advisory Committee (RRAC) recommended a separate Capital Improvement Project (CIP) for Rustic Roads. The CIP proposed would create an annual process to approve funding for a more proactive and regular tree trimming and rehabilitation program on country and rustic roads in Montgomery County. The letter included a list of the roads that needed trees trimmed (Attachment F). Mr. Criss explained that tree trimming activities may not be completed to the same degree this year because of the significant cost of the winter including salt costs.

Mr. Criss will draft something up and come back to April Meeting. Chapter 49 article 8. Butler – The DOT reached out to Rustic Roads Advisory Committee for help on standards for trimming on rustic roads including suggesting ways for trees to be trimmed in rural roads. The current Executive Regulations for Rustic Roads were approved in 1996. Executive Regulations are to be periodically updated. The Executive Regulations approved in 1996 do not reflect what has been drafted in the proposed guidelines.

8. Follow up on the High Tunnel and Greenhouse Listening Session. A public workshop is proposed for April 29, 2014 from 12 to 6pm (Attachment G)

Anyone is invited to attend.

9. Update on Farmland Preservation Easement Purchase Period February – April 1, 2014.

Mr. Criss gave a brief update: The Base BLT price is \$222,000 and the Max BLT price is \$254,000. The County has enough money to buy 14 BLTs – roughly 3 million dollars. We will likely have more applications than money. One farmer has applied to sell 8 BLTs. The County has acquired 17 public BLTs and there have been sales of 9 private BLTs. We still need to map those 9 private BLTs that are mostly small lots with approved percolation tests. Landowners are prohibited from selling portions of BLTs. Farmers can only sell whole BLTs.

10. New Appointments to the AAC

Doug Lechliden and Michele Cropp have applied for farmer member positions. New Appointments to the Rustic Roads Advisory Committee – Jean Phillips and Audrey Patton have applied for new farmer members.

11. Agricultural Tourism Signing Program from the State Highway Administration (Attachment H)

Mr. Criss shared with the committee the Ag-Tourism Signing Program. The program is intended to notify drivers of Ag-Tourism destinations in Maryland. Ag-Tourism highway signs are special signs in the interest of travelers and are limited to rural conventional roads. Mr. Criss has a few concerns on how the program is designed. There is a cost to the farmer associated with the signage. The format of the signage is not yet ideal and suggestions to list websites instead of dates and times were made.

Jeremy will follow up with the SHA and continue to reach out to the Ag community to assess interest in the signage program.

12. Agricultural Tire Recycling Collection Program (Attachment I)

Farm bureau members are invited to drop off used tires of all sizes at no charge. This is part of the Maryland Farm Bureau's service-to-member effort coordinated with Montgomery County Farm Bureau – contact Lonnie Luther.

Mark Hoffman attended the meeting to present on the Bee Keeper Association. He wants to help Montgomery County become a "Pollinator Friendly County." He asked for suggestions on how to get the idea rolling. He wanted to come up with ways to encourage farmers and others to do more to promote pollinators. Examples he gave were planting pollinator friendly plants along state roads. Developers should also be encouraged to use these plants in their landscapes. It was suggested that Hoffman reach out to the Master Gardeners Organization. After additional discussion the following individuals were suggested to meet and discuss the Pollinator Friendly County initiative: Eddie Franceschi, Chuck Schuster and Steve Dubik.

13. Next ag advisory committee meeting is April 15th.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:03PM (*Kulhman, Weitzer*)