

Agricultural Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes

10/21/14

Attendees: Aliza Fishbein, Patrick Brown, Linda Lewis, Jane Evans, Michele Cropp, David Weitzer, Debbie Benson, Tim McGrath, Doug Lechliden, Paula Linthicum, Chuck Schuster, Charlotte McGehee

Staff: Jeremy Criss, Josh Penn

The meeting was called to order at 7:04PM. *(Weitzer)*

1. Introductions

With no guests present, introductions were not necessary

2. Approval of the AAC Minutes from September 16, 2014.

With minor changes, the minutes were approved. *(Lewis/Evans)*

3. Montgomery County Planning Board Chair Casey Anderson has asked for a tour of the working farms in the Agricultural Reserve sometime this fall.

Jeremy Criss asked the group to consider hosting Casey Anderson, Planning Board Chair on their farms. A tour of Montgomery County production agriculture farms would help showcase the importance of the industry to the new Chair. The tour is tentatively scheduled for November and anyone interested was asked to speak with Mr. Criss. Mr. Criss wanted to emphasize production farms who have next generation farmer participation.

4. MCA Agricultural Reserve Film Premiere was September 25, 2014.

<http://mocoalliance.org/2014/09/growing-legacy-premiere-wrap-up/>

“Growing Legacy,” a film produced by the Montgomery County Alliance premiered on September 25, 2014. It is a 30 minute film that promotes agriculture in the county. Mr. Criss who attended the premier reported that the film was well done and did a good job promoting the importance of farming in Montgomery County. Following the conclusion of the film, a 5 person panel was there to answer questions. Mr. Criss reported that overall, the film was well received and the only criticism was that it did not capture enough commodity/production farming. Mr. Criss was troubled by the fact that the film leads viewer to believe that the MOCO Alliance was responsible for the New Farmers Pilot Program when really that came from the County-DED. Mr. Criss encouraged everyone to watch the film.

5. Update-Deer Damage Survey-The results show more management tools are still needed to reduce the deer herds in the rural and agricultural areas of the County. Follow up from County Council Briefing-October 7, 2014-

http://montgomerycountymd.granicus.com/Viewer.php?view_id=6&clip_id=8024&meta_id=72343 Need to purchase a new Cold Box for the East side of the County.

Preliminary results of the Deer Damage Survey were handed out in the previous meeting. Survey results cover roughly 19,000 acres in Montgomery County which represent about half of the County's total acreage. The overall crop loss due to deer damage averaged 16%. Soybeans were the worst affected with a 44% of the acres reported showing a loss. The financial impact of these losses was believed to be about 4.4 million dollars. Losses do not include production costs spent on damaged crops which in Montgomery County is estimated to be roughly 2.2 million dollars. In Central Maryland, DNR estimates 4.5 million dollars of crop loss or damage. If the cost of producing agricultural products does not rise with demand, the current Farm bill will need to be re-evaluated. It was noted that the fields that were worst affected by deer damage were those adjacent to park land. The evidence suggests that there is a higher deer population on park property.

6. Update on the Positions approved for FY15 Operating and Capital Budgets as follows:

The vacant Business Development Specialist-BDS position (previously held by Kristin Fisher) job announcement closed on August 15, 2014, with a total of 85 applicants -- 32 meet minimum requirements and 2 are veterans with preferential hiring status. Initial interviews for those with preferential hiring status were scheduled for October 20, 2014. The interview panel included Mr. Chuck Schuster, Ms. Sarah Miller, Mr. John Zawitoski and Mr. Criss. Only one of the two veterans showed up for their interview. Results will be forwarded to the County-OHR Director to request permission to contact some of the 32 applicants. The next step is to begin the interview process with the 32 applicants that did not have preferential hiring status.

7. Part-time contractor Agronomy Educator for UM-Extension RFP was released and the deadline for proposals was September 30, 2014. One proposal was submitted.

One of the recommendations coming out of the Farming at Metros Edge conference was to increase the technical assistance provided by the County to the agriculture community. The part-time Agronomy Educator position will attempt to address that need. The position-contract has been released and Mr. Doug Tregoning has expressed interest in the position. The next step involves a review of the work plan schedule that will outline what will be done under the county and state contracts to minimize overlap of assignments.

8. New Resource Conservationist for MSCD (previously held by Brian Taylor) The OHR has approved the position to be reclassified to Business Development Specialist position. The recruitment ad will be advertised within the DED-MSCD as recommended by the MSCD Board of Supervisors.

The New Resource Conservationist position was never filled after Brian Taylor's retirement in 2011. The position under MSCD was limited to grade 23 which is why there was a push to have it reclassified as the Business Development Specialist. The reclassification gives the position the potential to increase above grade 23. The position may be advertised with the MSCD as requested by the MSCD Board of Supervisors. This request is still pending OHR approval.

9. New farmer member appointments to the Rustic Roads Advisory Committee-RRAC- Todd Greenstone and Audrey Patton.

Todd Greenstone and Audrey Patton have been appointed to the Rustic Roads Advisory Committee. We will need to find a replacement for Angela Butler since she is not requesting a second term.

10. Follow up on Discussion Draft Legislation on Pesticides in Montgomery County and the AAC response letter to Council Vice President Leventhal.

The AAC continues to monitor and oppose progress of a bill that would impact pesticide use in Montgomery County. The bill, proposed by Council Vice President Leventhal is believed to have an unintended negative impact to the farming community.

Prior to the meeting, the Draft Legislation on Pesticides was revised. Members of the AAC were able to see the changes and continued to have serious concerns about the bill. Mr. Leventhal would like to have comments on the revision by the end of the day. Though the document has changed, the position of the AAC remains the same: they collectively oppose the bill.

According to several sources, Mr. Leventhal plans on introducing the bill on Tuesday, October 28th. He has asked for any input before Oct. 21. Once the bill has been introduced, a public hearing will be scheduled. The Bill will then be scheduled with the T&E committee and Councilmember Roger Berliner is the Chairman.

The committee continued to note problems with the bill in its current form. A list of these problems are outlined below:

- The document states: non-essential pesticides are not allowed. Then, in line 6C2, it restricts the use of pesticides. Most ag chemical use is restricted and requires pesticide license. Those two things are contradictory. It remains unclear whether ag is exempt on the basis of what is in the text. (Paula Linthicum)
- Under this bill, the County Executive is tasked with coming up with a list of the pesticides that will be allowed in the County. The County Council then has to approve the list. This will be a difficult task for anyone who does not understand the science behind each product nor is educated in the field of pesticide use. These people are not qualified to be making these types of decisions. Furthermore, the Maryland Department of Agriculture already regulates pesticides. There is no need to duplicate this regulation. (Linda Lewis)
- The definition of pesticide continues to be incomplete and incorrect.
- The bill in its current form does not address what happens to the lawn care industry. Are golf courses exempt? What about pre-emergent for crab grass? Will this be allowed? (Chuck Schuster)
- On Page 2, there is a description of "custom applicator" but there is no discussion of private applicator and farmers are private applicators. (Paula Linthicum)
- There is a requirement for those using pesticides to post signs after an application. For someone using a pesticide over 1000 acres, placing signs every x amount of feet just doesn't make common sense.

- Ms. Lewis pointed out that Mr. Leventhal, who has a history of supporting the Agricultural Reserve, may not understand the impact the bill will have on this zone. Each new regulation makes it harder for farmers to operate profitably. Restricting the use of pesticides will make it even more difficult for farmers. The fear is that Montgomery County is making it very hard for farmers and at some point, they will decide to farm elsewhere, and the Agricultural Reserve and the much-loved open space it provides the County, will be lost. (Linda Lewis)
- There is no clear delineation between herbicides, fungicides and pesticides in the bill. The lack of clarity could result in an unintended impact to herbicide and fungicide use. Also, the word “pest” is not defined. (Paula Linthicum)
- Ms. Lewis brought in a study done in 2011 on pesticides. In the study, the pesticides used on pressure treated wood are the most common. The Pesticide Bill does nothing to address these types of pesticides. If the goal of the bill is to reduce people’s exposure to pesticides, it will not be successful because it does not address the biggest pesticide uses.

Mr. Criss emphasized that more voices from the farming community need to be heard. He suggested having multiple farm groups write letters that express their views on the bill. Ms. Cropp said she would remind Lonnie Luther of the Farm Bureau to write a letter. Mr. Doug Lechliden suggested that MAP participate as well. Ms. Evans asked if anyone has spoken directly to Mr. Leventhal and the response was that Mr. Bob Cissel and Doug Tregoning met with him to discuss the draft legislation. It seems Council Vice President Leventhal is determined to see the Bill through. Ms. Linthicum suggested posting the bill in a public arena so that all could comment on it. Mr. Criss responded that tomorrow, the bill would be posted on the Ag Services Website. Ms. Paula Linthicum had the idea to develop key talking points that will grab the attention of decision makers. Mr. Criss and Mr. Schuster will help develop these. Ms. Cropp suggested including emotion in the key issues with the thought that they could be a persuasive argument. It was suggested that landscapers and their clients may want to weigh in on the discussion. It was decided that an email will be written to Council Vice President Leventhal and copy Councilmember Roger Berliner that says something to the effect of: After some of our members have had the opportunity to preliminarily review the latest draft of the proposed Pesticide Bill, we maintain our concern over many of its provisions. *Please note an email dated October 24, 2014 was sent to Council Vice President Leventhal on October 24, 2014 conveying the message recommended by the AAC above. (Fishbein, Cropp)*

11. Next Meeting of the AAC-November 18, 2014@ 7:00pm

Meeting adjourned: 8:33 **(Lewis, Cropp)**