

APPROVED MINUTES
Kent County Agricultural Preservation Board
Thursday, January 21, 2010
Location: Kent/MSU Extension

Meeting called to order at 11:40 a.m. by Dennis Heffron

Members Present: Jerry Davis, Gabe Hudson, Dennis Heffron, Sr. Lucille Janowiak, Suzie Reinbold, Commissioner Tom Antor, Carlton Blough

Members Absent: none

Staff Present: Jay Hoekstra; Jen DeHaan; Kendra Wills; and GVMC Intern

Guests: Commissioner Bill Hirsch; Commissioner Stan Ponstein; Scott Mouthaan, Tyrone Township Trustee

PUBLIC COMMENT

Scott Mouthaan, a Township Trustee from Tyrone Township introduced himself. He noted that he gave testimony at the December 15 Board of Commissioners meeting supporting county funding for PDR. He is very interested in supporting the PDR program and feels it is very important to have a successful year in 2010. He is also interested in the temporary farmland preservation program that the Leelanau Land Conservancy is operating. He made some calls and has information on the program if Ag Board members are interested. He noted that he wants to make sure as many people as possible are engaged. Mr. Mouthaan is interested in creating a logo that can be sold to restaurants and food processors to place on menus and food products showing that they support the Kent County PDR Program. Funds from the logo could be used to support PDR. For example, he brought in a soup label that had the 'Weight Watchers' logo printed on it. He asked Ag Board members if they could think about what physical characteristic can be identified with Kent County or Grand Rapids for the logo. Some ideas were: the Grand River, the Calder, the weather ball and apple orchards. Both urban and rural residents need to identify with the logo. Commissioner Antor noted that he liked this idea. Heffron commented that he recently traveled to Seattle and they heavily promote their agricultural industry through marketing. Heffron noted that possibly Local First was working on a similar project and perhaps they should be contacted.

OFFICER ELECTIONS

Heffron stated that nominations from the floor will be accepted for Chairperson. Reinbold nominated Heffron for Chairperson with support from Davis. Heffron nominated Hudson for Chairperson with support from Antor. Davis moved the nominations be closed with support from Reinbold. During discussion Heffron noted that he felt it would be better for him not to serve as Chairperson this year and the position should be shared. A vote was taken. Heffron received zero votes. Hudson received six votes as Hudson abstained.

Hudson took over as Chairperson of the meeting and thanked the group for their support. He noted that he would try very hard to support the Ag Board and the PDR Program and would try and continue his 100% attendance record at Ag Board meetings.

Hudson stated that nominations from the floor will be accepted for Vice Chairperson. Antor nominated Heffron with support from Hudson. Davis moved that the nominations be closed with support from Reinbold. Heffron received six votes as Heffron abstained.

Hudson stated that nominations from the floor would be accepted for Secretary. Heffron nominated Davis with support from Janowiak. Blough moved the nominations be closed with support from Heffron. Davis received six votes as Davis abstained.

Congratulations to all office holders. Thank you for your service.

REPORT FROM THE BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

Antor reported that a new PDR Funding Sustainability Subcommittee was appointed by Chair Frost Parrish. Commissioner Talen will be chairing the subcommittee with Antor, Hirsch and Synk as members. Mary Swanson with the Administrator's office and Kendra Wills will serve as staff support to this Subcommittee. Meetings dates and time have not yet been set.

Antor explained that Scott Everett attended the PDR Subcommittee's first meeting and introduced the concept of Installment Purchase Agreements using zero-coupon bonds. This is a complex funding option that may allow the county to stretch its funding further over longer periods of time. More research must be done to see if this is a tool Kent County might be interested in.

Wills reminded the Preservation Board that at its November and December meetings, \$800 of the \$3,100 in GRCF PDR Endowment Fund grant payments was earmarked to bring in Pat O'Connell, a IPA expert to do an educational program in Grand Rapids in partnership with Ingham County's PDR Program (Stacy Sheridan Byers, Ingham PDR Program Coordinator). After some discussion, the Preservation Board requested that Wills contact Byers to see if we can hold off on the Grand Rapids educational program for now, but instead bring 10 or so key people from Kent County to Ingham County's educational program planned for March 2010 to learn more about IPAs and other financing tools.

Antor also noted that he is concerned that some Commissioners are reading Grand Rapids Press reports that state \$3-\$4 million will be raised and spent on PDR in 2010. He is concerned that the PDR program will be considered unsuccessful if it does not meet this funding goal. Antor suggests communication should be made with all Commissioners to clarify that \$3-\$4 million in funding support is the goal over the next three years. Hudson volunteered to give public testimony at the January 28, 2010 Board of Commissioners meeting to try and clarify this.

2010 USDA FRPP Proposal

Wills reported that the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service moved the grant proposal deadline from May 1, 2010 to February 17, 2010 just before Christmas. Dave Yankee, our appraiser, has been hard at work and delivered two appraisals this morning for your review. In order for Kent County to meet the FRPP grant deadline line, the Preservation Board must make a decision today, which farms it wants to apply for federal funding for as approval for option agreements and the submission of a federal grant must be given by the Finance Committee and the full Board of Commissioners. The deadline for action requests for the 1/28/10 Finance Committee meeting is 1/25/10.

The Preserve Board then reviewed the comparable sales and values from the Rittersdorf and Kingsbury/Bettes appraisals. No major concerns were noted.

After much discussion and deliberation, the following farms and funding sources were selected for inclusion in the FRPP proposal. It was noted that the Grand Rapids Community Foundation Board will be making a decision on the PDR grant request on February 8.

- Kingsbury/Bettes, 138 acres in Sparta Twp (top scoring farm)
Dev Rights value = \$276,000 (\$2,000 per acre)
Local funds secured = \$29,000 contribution from property owner, \$90,500 from Kent County
- Rittersdorf, 228 acres in Vergennes Twp
Dev Rights value = \$319,000 (\$1,400 per acre)
Local funds secured = \$159,500 from Kent County
- Nauta, 74.5 acres in Vergennes Twp (hold over from last year's federal grant)
2008 Dev Rights value = \$134,000 (\$1,800 per acre)
Local funds secured = \$56,167 from Wege Foundation, \$10,833 will be requested from landowner, \$28,140 of Grand Rapids Community Foundation grant
- Wilcox, 60 acres in Vergennes Twp (hold over from last year's federal grant)
2008 Dev Rights value = \$126,000 (\$2,100 per acre)
Local funds secured = \$52,167 from Wege Foundation, \$10,833 will be requested from landowner, \$13,860 from Grand Rapids Community Foundation grant
- Cole, 116 acres in Courtland Township
Appraisal not back yet. Estimated dev rights value = \$2,000 per acre or \$232,000
Local funds = \$25,000 from Kent County, \$73,650 contribution from property owner as stated in PDR application, \$17,350 from Grand Rapids Community Foundation
- Merriman, 15 acres (remaining of original 80 acre farm) in Lowell Township

Appraisal not back yet. Estimated dev rights value = \$3,000 per acre or \$45,000
Local funds = \$27,450 from Grand Rapids Community Foundation

Preservation Board members felt Bradford and Kruihoff would be too big and too expensive for the 2010 FRPP grant proposal. The Phil and Mary Lou Heffron property should be pursued next if a farm drops out. Wills will work to set meeting with all property owners with an appraisal to review the appraisal results. Hudson and Heffron volunteered to attend meetings with property owners. Wills will email Preservation Board members when appraisals will be completed. If approved by the Board of Commissioners, option agreements will be granted in early February. Signed option agreements must be included in the federal grant proposal.

MONTHLY MEETING SCHEDULE

After some discussion, it was determined that monthly Ag Preserve Board meetings will take place on the second Wednesday of each month at 11:30 AM at Kent/MSU Extension, unless otherwise noted. Wills stated that she believes the large meeting room was booked for February. Jay Hoekstra volunteered to host some meetings at Grand Valley Metro Council.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Mr. Mouthaan encouraged the Preserve Board to write another letter to Senators Stabenow and Levin to encourage USDA NRCS Farm and Ranchland Protection Program to set a regular, annual deadline for grant applications. This would help alleviate the time crunch and wasted appraisal update costs. Perhaps area State Representatives and Senators could sign the letter as well.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 1:50 p.m.

The next meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, February 10, 2010 at 11:30 a.m. at Grand Valley Metro Council.

Approved by Davis and written by Kendra Wills.