

**Approved Minutes**  
**Kent County Agricultural Preservation Board**  
**Wednesday, April 13<sup>th</sup>, 2011**  
**Location: Kent/MSU Extension**

Members Present: Tom Antor, Carl Blough, Dennis Heffron, Gabe Hudson, Sr. Lucille Janowiak, Suzie Reinbold  
Members Absent: Jerry Davis  
Staff Present: Kendra Wills, Jay Hoekstra, and Intern Chris Jacobs

**Meeting called to order at 11:29 AM by Hudson.**

**Public Comment**

None.

**Adoption of March 9, 2011 Minutes**

Motion by Reinbold with support from Antor to approve the minutes with no corrections.  
Unanimous.

**Kent County Agricultural Preservation Endowment Fund Investments**

A conference call was held with Lynn Black, Vice President of Finance for Grand Rapids Community Foundation (GRCF) to discuss investing the Endowment Fund monies in the stock market. Currently, the funds are being held in a Money Market account. They were placed there in early 2009 after the stock market crash of 2008, which caused a loss of \$4,000 or 8% of the Endowment.

Black gave an overview of the Grand Rapids Community Foundation's investment strategies and several handouts were distributed to Preservation Board members. Black reported that the pool of GRCF funds earned a rate of return of 25.5% in 2009 and 12.8% in 2010. Black stated that the Ag Preservation Endowment Fund may be one of only two endowment funds not to be invested in the pool with all other GRCF funds. Black also stated that she was not sure if only a portion of the Endowment Fund could be invested. All other funds invest all their monies. Black also stated that funds could be moved at any time into the investment pool and the Preservation Board can specify a date if they wish.

Heffron commented that he was very impressed with the diversification of GRCF's investments as well as the oversight by a committee of community members that review investment performance on a quarterly basis.

Antor is concerned that the stock market is currently overvalued and buying in at such a high value may be a bad idea and perhaps we should wait until the market goes down a bit.

Janowiak asked how the Endowment Funds should be used. Wills responded that the current purpose of the fund is to assist with appraisal and closing costs as both of these cannot be paid for with federal funds.

After a discussion over the details in economic trends and speculation, Reinbold moved to transfer the funds as soon as possible to the investment pool with the Grand Rapids Community Foundation. Janowiak supported the motion. The motion passed in a 4-2 vote with Janowiak, Reinbold, Heffron, and Blough supporting the measure and Antor and Hudson opposed.

#### **Approval of Bradford Trust Farm for USDA grant proposal**

Wills reported that the USDA FRPP possibly has left-over funds that they would like to re-grant. Wills reported that the only farm that is almost ready for submittal is the James A. Bradford Family Trust farm in Sparta Township. She also reported that the property has an existing line of credit with Greenstone and the owner is working to get agreement for subordination in writing. Reinbold moved the James A. Bradford Family Trust parcels be approved for submission to the USDA FRPP program as soon as possible. Supported by Janowiak. It passed 5-0 with Antor abstaining as a precaution for possible conflict of interest as he is their Commissioner and friend of the family.

#### **Reports on Township Board Meetings**

Hudson reported on his visit to Byron Township. They are still not interested in participating in the PDR Program.

Heffron visited Grand Rapids Township and Plainfield Township. Both townships do not participate in the PDR Program as they have very few active farms. Plainfield was very supportive of keeping agriculture in Kent County as they have a very successful farmers market. Heffron also visited Oakfield Township where Supervisor Dean expressed his objection with county funds being used to support PDR. Heffron reported that Oakfield is struggling with a run-down farm that the owner will not invest in and Heffron related this to the need for the creation of a long-term business environment for agriculture. Heffron also reported that Grattan Township has a line item in their budget to support PDR and currently \$15,000 is in that line item.

Reinbold reported that Vergennes Township will be adding a line item in the township budget to support PDR and will consider adding \$500 for that line item.

Blough reported that Lowell Township will be adding a line item for PDR. Blough also visited Cascade Township and they contributed \$1,500 toward the Cox farm, their first PDR applicant from last year. (Wills stated that Cox did re-apply for the 2011 cycle.) Blough also visited Ada Township and they have a line item for PDR through their open space millage funds.

Janowiak reported that she followed up with Mr. Davies, Cannon Township Board member about the possibility of the Rockford Area Community Foundation (RACE) to support PDR in their community. Mr. Davis said RACE would consider supporting individual farmers in Cannon and Algoma with funding. Janowiak believes farmers must request funds directly.

#### **May 7<sup>th</sup> Parnell Corridor Celebration**

Wills distributed a draft event invitation for review. The time of the event was changed to accommodate the Koning family. The new time is 10 AM – 11 AM. Janowiak, Reinbold and Hudson all said they were planning on attending the event. Wills reported that Chair Parrish would be out of town and a new presenter would need to be arranged. Antor volunteered to

connect with Scott Everett to see if we could secure a speaker from Michigan Department of Agriculture or MDNR. Bert Bleke was also a possibility. Wills reminder the group that the larger celebration with more officials would be help on the Kingbury/Bettes farm during the end of June.

Preservation Board members requested Township officials from Vergennes, Lowell, Cascade, Bowne and Grattan be mailed invitations to the event.

### **Public Education**

Hudson, Janowiak and Reinbold will be staffing a booth at the Zoo on Saturday for “Party for the Planet.” Janowiak will be staffing the booth at the April 20 “Earth and Sky Day” at the GR Public Museum Thanks for volunteering!

Wills presented the idea to mail Christmas cards with a reminder about the opportunity to contribute to the Farmland Preservation Endowment Fund. After some discussion the Board decided the card should be a Thanksgiving Card. Wills will purchase a card with a farm illustration from an online vendor.

The group discussed the possibility of another trip to Lancaster, PA coordinated by Scott Everett to learn from their PDR Program. Several Board members feel township officials should receive priority. Possible participants include: Tim Wittenbach from Vergennes, Chuck Porter from Courtland, Rob VerHeulen from Walker, Carl Blough from Lowell, Alex Arends from Alpine and possibly Suzie Reinbold and Annie Oersch from Kent County Farm Bureau.

Hoekstra reported that GVMC would be applying for Sustainable Communities funding and farmland preservation would likely be part of the regional planning process if federal grant funding was secured for the effort.

### **Adjournment**

Meeting was adjourned 1:21 PM.

Next Meeting is May 11, 2011 at 11:30 at Kent/MSUE

Written by Chris Jacobs, Kent/MSUE Intern and Kendra Wills