

Approved Minutes
Kent County Agricultural Preservation Board
Wednesday, November 30, 2011
Location: Grand Valley Metro Council

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

Meeting called to order at 11:42 AM by Hudson.

Public Comment

None.

Adoption of November 9, 2011 Minutes

Motion by Janowiak with support from Reinbold to approve the minutes. Unanimous.

Review of 2012 Financial Information

Wills reported on the amount of available funding for 2012 as this will influence the next conversation about selecting farms to recommend to the BOC that an option agreement be offered. To date, \$150,000 of general funding support has been allocated by Kent County, the Wege Foundation has awarded a \$140,000 grant to support the preservation of the Hefferan Farm in Grattan Township, the Frey Foundation will reduce their grant award to \$36,550 for 2012 and the Grand Rapids Community Foundation will reduce their award to \$43,000 for 2012. In addition, the Kent County Agricultural Preservation Fund will carry forward a balance of approximately \$50,000 for 2012.

Wills noted that County and grant funds must cover the costs of the appraisals as well as approximately \$5,000 in closing costs for each of the farms to be preserved. Also noted was the fact that USDA gives higher priority to grant proposals requesting 39% of funding rather than the maximum amount of 50%.

Selection of Option Agreements

Wills distributed a handout to Preservation Board members listing the appraisal amount, location and acreage of each farm appraised in 2011. Wills met with eight of the nine property owners and has one final meeting scheduled this evening. All property owners have seen the appraised amount and most were given a draft copy of their option agreement. Some property owners were positive, some had mixed feelings and others were slightly negative about the appraisal results.

After much discussion and evaluation the following five properties were selected to recommend to the Board of Commissioners that an option agreement be offered for the 2012 USDA Farm and Ranchland Protection Program grant application.

However, it was noted that property owners will be asked to notify Kendra Wills by December 10 if they are not interested in accepting an option agreement for the stated conditions and appraised price. If a property owner listed below should decide to not continue, the Preservation Board will meet in January to select one or more replacements.

The Preservation Board also made note of the Bradford Dairy Farm's desire to purchase additional property to add to the road frontage for their top scoring 2011 farm. The Preservation Board determined it would be best not to offer an option agreement to the Bradford Dairy Farm in 2012 to allow this time to purchase this additional property/road frontage.

Properties selected for recommendation to the Board of Commissioners for Option Agreement by motion from Reinbold with support from Blough. Ayes: Antor, Blough, Husdon, Janowiak, Reinbold. Abstain: Heffron due to conflict of interest with the Lovins property as he currently rents this property for farming use.

1. Hefferan Farm
230 acres in Grattan Township
Dev. Rights Cost = \$298,000 or \$1,301 per acre
2. G & L Orchards
35 acres in Sparta Township
Dev. Rights Cost = \$56,000 or \$1,755 per acre
3. Lovins Farm
75 acres in Grattan Township
Dev. Rights Cost = \$108,000 or \$1,403 per acre
4. Patterson Farm
75 acres in Courtland Township
Dev. Rights Cost = \$84,000 or \$1,105 per acre
5. Younquist Farm
80 acres in Sparta Township
Dev. Rights Cost = \$107,000 or \$1,326 per acre

2012 PDR Application Cycle

Motion by Heffron with support from Janowiak to recommend to the Board of Commissioners that an application cycle for the Kent County Purchase of Development Rights Program be held from March 1, 2012 through April 30, 2012. Unanimous.

2012 Scoring Criteria

A few changes were made to the 2012 Scoring Criteria. A motion by Heffron with support from Reinbold was made to make the following changes to the scoring criteria: 1) four points will be added to award properties in the PA 116 program as the Preservation Board believes properties that are temporarily preserved should receive greater priority than those that have not made this commitment; 2) typos will be corrected under several examples that gave the incorrect maximum number of points from the redesigned scoring system from 2010; 3) Wills will check with Cannon or Oakfield Township to determine if they now have qualifying master plans for state funding as there may be a state PDR grant cycle offered in 2012; 4) the maximum number of points awarded for township matching funds will be reduced from 7 down to 5 points; 5) the unique characteristics points from 4 down to 3 maximum points; and 6) the points for enrollment in a public access program will be reduced from 4 to 3 points. The total maximum number of points allowed will stay at 100 points.

Also, it was noted that a question should be added to the township portion of the PDR Application asking if the property in question can be developed under current zoning. Hopefully this will eliminate the possibility of another farm being appraised that cannot be developed.

2011 Closings

The USDA has caused major delays with all four closings due to the lack of approval of the easement by the Washington D.C. office. An easement template was submitted in July and we have no explanation for the delay. Wills contacted Mary Judnich in Senator Stabenow's office for assistance. We are hopeful all four farms will close by December 21.

Staffing Changes

Wills reported that MSU Extension has informed Kent County that MSU Extension can no longer provide administrative support to operate a county program. Wills will continue to be employed by MSU Extension; however, she will not be staffing the PDR Program. Wills has been asked to write a manual of operating procedures for the PDR Program and all files will be transferred to Kent County. Jen DeHaan with the Administrator's Office is developing a memo outlining the possible staffing options to present to the Board of Commissioners.

Jay Hoekstra stated that he is working to reduce his hours to half time in 2012 and still plans on assisting with PDR in 2012. He is also working to find someone with Kent County that can take over his mapping duties once he fully retires.

Hudson stated that he would like to invite Mary Swanson to a future Preservation Board meeting to discuss these staffing issues.

After some discussion, the Preservation Board came to a consensus that they also would like to invite Commissioner Parrish to a future Preservation Board meeting to discuss future funding and operations of the PDR Program.

Public Comment

Commissioner Hirsh joined the meeting near the close. He stated that committee appointments are expected to be made at the first Board meeting in January and there is a candidate to replace Jerry Davis as township representative. Hirsch noted that the adoption of the county budget in 2012 was unanimous.

Commissioner Hirsch also wanted to thank Denny Heffron for his service on the Preservation Board as he has been serving since the Board was created in 2003. He believes Heffron will provide some stability to the Preservation Board in light of upcoming staffing changes at the end of 2012.

Other

Reinbold requested that Wills email PDR sales figures from closings in 2010.

Hudson requested copies of forms for his PDR monitoring appointments.

Hudson reported that he will be attending the next Board of Commissioners meeting to thank the Board for their funding support of the PDR program and to communicate that farmland preservation supports local food and jobs in our community.

Hudson reminded the group to go to the Department of Labor web site and comment on the proposed youth farm labor policy. He believes it is so important that youth have the opportunity to work on a farm.

Adjournment

Meeting was adjourned 1:55 PM.

Written by Kendra Wills